

Breakthrough Generation Initiative

Mixed-Methods Final Evaluation Report

July 2023

Tostan
Dignity for All



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ABBREVIATIONS

AL - Adopted learner

BG - Breakthrough Generation (Initiative)

BL - Baseline

BS - Baseline Survey

CEP - Community Empowerment Program

CMC - Community Management Committee

CP - Class participant

EL - Endline

ES - Endline survey

FGC - Female Genital Cutting

GESEE - Governance, Education, Health (*Santé* in French), Economic Empowerment, and Environment

MERL - Monitoring, Evaluation, Research, and Learning

OCM - Other community member (OCM)

TIBE Survey - The Tostan Individual Baseline-Endline Survey

RSCM - Randomly selected community members

SAS-CMCs - Situational Analysis Survey of Community Management Committees

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With the Breakthrough Generation (BG) Initiative, Tostan implemented its Community Empowerment Program (CEP), simultaneously in 150 resource-poor, mostly rural communities in Mali, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, and Gambia between 2017 and 2020.

The final evaluation served to assess and examine the changes in well-being achieved by the partner communities by the end of the program. The findings and learnings, developed with partner communities, are already serving to further improve the program and the measurement of its results. The report is the most comprehensive document to date that demonstrates the impact of Tostan's CEP in reinforcing the capacity of communities to make systemic, sustainable changes and improve their individual and collective well-being. It will enable Tostan to share the findings and lessons with development partners engaged in supporting communities' efforts to improve their well-being.

The introductory sections of the report provide the background information on the Breakthrough Initiative and on the CEP, and outline the methodology used. Tostan applied a mixed-methods design that entailed the collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data. It was found effective for generating and analyzing data on the situation at baseline and endline and the corresponding changes that took place. Importantly, it also provided increased understanding of how the changes in well-being took place.

The results chapter presents the major findings. These provide extensive evidence that the objectives of the BG Initiative were achieved: communities re-examined their behaviors, social practices, roles and relationships, and carried out activities that resulted in improved individual and community well-being. The evidence indicates that the improvements in well-being were community-wide, going well beyond the Tostan classes. The chapter is divided into four sections that reflect the concepts and themes that emerged from the analysis of the coded data and reflect community well-being priorities as follows:

- Section 1 presents the results pertaining to the communities' social cohesion and capacity for collective action. More peaceful and constructive interactions within communities, and with local authorities and service providers, were reported by all categories of stakeholders who participated in the evaluation. The improved relations, with corresponding decreases in violence and more effective collective action for improved well-being appeared to be among the changes most valued by community members.
- Section 2, on women's voice, influence, agency, and leadership, presents evidence that points to changes in social norms that relate to gender roles and to increases in gender equity. These went hand-in-hand with women's increased knowledge, confidence, competency and self-efficacy. Women's increased capabilities and contribution to

household and community well-being also contributed to support among men for new, more equitable gender roles.

- Section 3 presents evidence on the notable improvements in the areas of governance (including birth registration), health (including hygiene and sanitation), education and economic activities.
- Section 4 pertains to behaviors that are internationally referred to as harmful practices, including female genital cutting, child marriage and the use of corporal punishment to discipline children. The dramatic changes recorded indicate that communities either strengthened or established social norms that made these practices unacceptable.

The discussion chapter provides a summary analysis of the results. It notes that the qualitative findings are aligned with the quantitative findings and provide a comprehensive picture of the process that has enabled communities to bring about sustainable social change. It delineates the evidence-based common pathway of how the communities were able to bring about improvements in their well-being.

The common pathway to improved well-being consists of eight major components that are directly connected to the scaffolded curriculum of the CEP, the experiential nature of the learning, the deliberations on deeply-held values and African traditions, the role of the Community Management Committees (CMCs), and the strategy of organized diffusion.

The section on methodology outlines ways in which lessons from the evaluation will inform the revision of the Tostan monitoring and evaluation systems.

The report concludes by recalling the major lessons from the evaluation. It also summarizes next steps that Tostan is taking that are informed by the findings and aligned with Phase 1 of its new 2023–2030 strategy, “In Partnership for Community Well-being.”

2. PURPOSE OF THE EVALUATION

The main purpose of this internal evaluation was to assess whether the objectives of the BG Initiative had been met at the end of the CEP implementation. In addition, the evaluation aimed to:

- i) assess and better understand changes in well-being dimensions related to governance, education, health, and economic development;
- ii) assess and better understand changes (if any) in knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors relating to the harmful practices of female genital cutting (FGC), child marriage, and corporal punishment;
- iii) provide a space for community members to reflect on their experience with the CEP and the impact it had on their community well-being;

- iv) draw new insights into the processes of change that took place during the three years;
and
- v) draw lessons to inform further refinements of the CEP, as well as to improve the Monitoring, Evaluation, Research, and Learning (MERL) framework, tools, and activities.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 An Introduction to Tostan

Since 1991, Tostan's mission has been to reach millions of women and girls and their communities in Africa with empowering education that enables them to define and realize their visions of well-being, to decrease inequalities, and to lead their own development. Tostan pursues its mission in three ways:

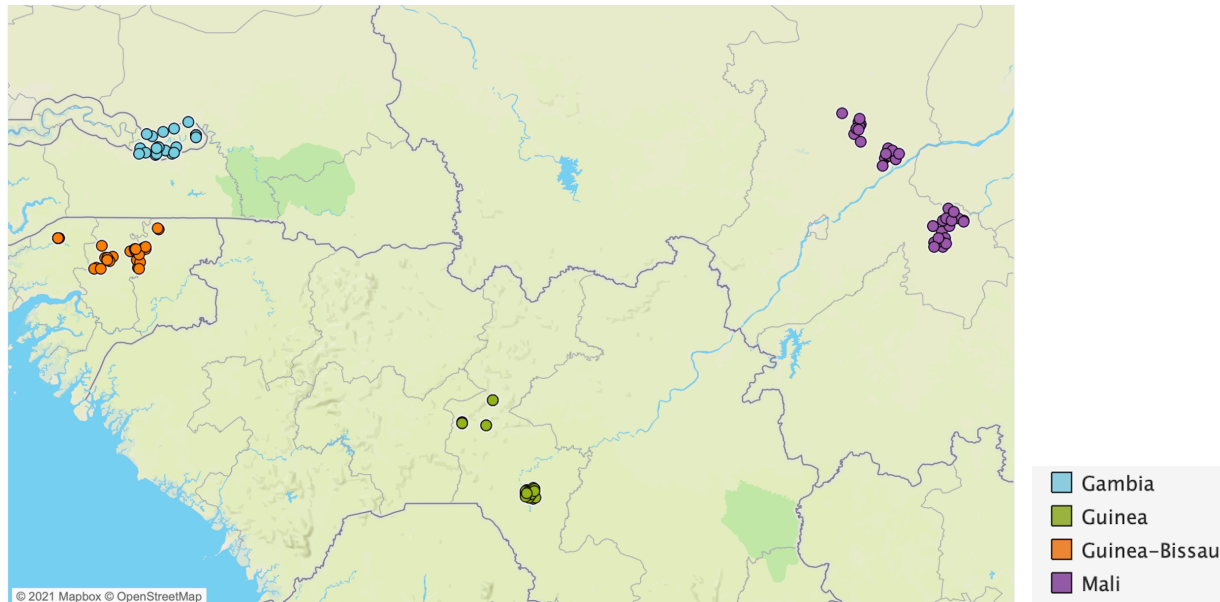
1. Through its Community Empowerment Program (CEP), it accompanies clusters of communities on a journey of empowering education that reinforces their capacities and enables them to improve their well-being.
2. It shares the fundamental principles and key aspects of its program model with civil society organizations, religious leaders, government representatives, and other development partners in seminars held at the Tostan Training Center in Thiès, Senegal and, increasingly, in development partners' countries of origin.
3. It engages in international forums, exchanging experience and evidence on community-led development.

3.2 The Breakthrough Generation Initiative

The Breakthrough Generation (BG) Initiative took place from October 2017 to September 2020, with the support of multiple partners.¹ Through the BG, Tostan implemented the CEP simultaneously across 150 communities in four West African countries: 30 in Gambia, 40 in Guinea, 40 in Guinea-Bissau, and 40 in Mali.

¹The BG Initiative had 18 institutional partners (bilateral government development agencies, foundations, philanthropic organizations, UN agencies) and 103 individual contributors.

Map 1 - Participating villages



The initiative aimed to support rural, resource-poor communities with little or no formal schooling to foster positive social change, improve their well-being, and end harmful practices such as child marriage, FGC, and corporal punishment. Specifically, the objectives of the BG Initiative were as follows:

1. participants re-examine their current social practices, roles, and relationships within the community and gain the skills and knowledge necessary to improve the well-being of their communities;
2. participants share new knowledge and attitudes developed in the Tostan classes through outreach to the rest of their community and to additional communities, fostering the adoption of new social norms; and
3. community members implement activities that advance the realization of human rights and well-being, with a focus on improving governance, education, health, the environment, and economic empowerment.

3.3 Brief Introduction to Tostan's Community Empowerment Program

Tostan's Community Empowerment Program (CEP) is a 30-month participant-centered, human rights-based, non-formal education program. The resource-poor rural communities who participate in the program have low levels of literacy, especially among women, in their native and national languages. A majority of the adults has never received any type of formal education in their own mother tongue (with the exception of religious schooling).

Two classes, one with adults and one with youth, introduce new information through a structured process of shared inquiry and discussion. Class sessions take place three times a week, for two hours each, in local African languages. They are facilitated by trained and knowledgeable Tostan staff who share the same cultural background (ethnicity and language) and live in the community while implementing the curriculum. The Tostan facilitators draw on and honor existing, positive cultural practices and local knowledge—such as songs, dance, plays, and poetry—to engage participants and to reinforce and contextualize new information.

At the outset of the program, each community establishes a Community Management Committee (CMC) with at least 50% female membership, which is subsequently trained by Tostan. Typically, some CMC members are also class participants. The CMCs facilitate community-led outreach strategies that engage members of their own and of neighboring communities, lead collective actions to improve community well-being, and ensure the sustainability of the development activities.

During the first six months of the program, Tostan facilitators provide information and encourage dialogue about democracy, good governance, human rights and responsibilities, and collective problem-solving. Participants enjoy a safe space and are encouraged by the highly participatory methodology to define and discuss their vision for the future of their community and to align it with the fundamental values reflected in their religion and with their newly gained appreciation of human rights. Through role play, they rehearse new behaviors and roles previously considered unacceptable, such as women speaking in public and taking on leadership roles. The rest of the program covers topics that are important to people’s lives, including health, hygiene and sanitation, literacy, numeracy, and management skills. Tostan provides a small grant (between 300 and 1,000 USD) to CMCs to help fund community development projects, as well as to establish CMC-run microcredit funds. Communities progressively apply their new knowledge and agency to take actions aimed at improving their well-being. They also discuss existing social practices, including harmful practices,² and explore ways to align their behaviors with their common vision and values.

The CEP applies the strategy of “organized diffusion.”³ Class participants “adopt” at least one other learner in their community (referred to as “adopted learners”) and share their classroom experiences. Social mobilization outreach activities are also part of the organized diffusion. They are organized by the CMCs within the community and in additional communities and are reinforced through inter-village meetings. In addition, Tostan organizes community radio broadcasts that reflect the content of the classes and provide opportunities for listeners to call in.

² The term is used in conformity with international references including, for example, various UN General Assembly Resolutions. It refers in particular to the practices of female genital cutting, child marriage and corporal punishment to discipline children.

³ Cislighi, B. et al. (2019). *Changing social norms: The importance of “organized diffusion” for scaling up community health promotion and women empowerment interventions*. *Prevention Science*, 20(6), 936-946. doi:10.1007/s11121-019-00998-3

Thus, transformational change takes place from within the communities, involves additional communities (referred to as “sensitized communities”), and is sustained by these communities themselves.

While implementing the BG Initiative, Tostan began to pilot an innovation to the CEP referred to as Strengthening Democracy and Citizen Engagement that provides dedicated training to officials of local governments and reinforces their capacity to interact with communities they represent and to use resources toward improving their well-being. The pilot yielded very encouraging results and, following refinements, the innovation is now integrated into all new CEPs. However, it was not part of the program during the BG initiative.

3.4 Social Norms and their Measurement — A Brief Overview

Tostan has found strong correspondence between what it has learned through its experience in the field and the teachings of social norms theory.⁴ Accordingly, social norms theory informs Tostan’s work in the field and, vice versa, what happens in the field informs its application. Social norms theory also informed the collection and analysis of data for this evaluation.

Social norms are implicit rules of behavior regarding what behaviors are acceptable or expected. They are upheld by beliefs shared by most members in a community and often backed by some form of sanction. Because the beliefs are reciprocal — I expect you and others to behave according to the rules, and you expect me and others to as well — changes in social norms are necessarily collective in nature. Tostan’s CEP embodies this central concept.

The program provides safe spaces and culturally adapted new knowledge that generates exploration of existing practices, within the classes and beyond. Class participants and CMC members have the opportunity to reinforce positive behaviors and values, to question other behaviors (for example, the use of violence, FGC, child marriage, and open defecation), and to explore and identify alternatives that are more conducive to their common vision of well-being. Over time, as agreed positive behaviors become accepted and expected, new social norms are established that uphold and sustain the positive behaviors.

The strategy of organized diffusion is essential for extending these discussions beyond the classes and making the process truly collective. Importantly, Tostan does not engage with communities to create changes in specific social norms. Rather, it catalyzes a process that enables the communities to generate and drive collective change from within, as new understanding and collective capacity are developed.

Whether a specific behavior is upheld by a social norm in a specific context can be determined by measuring social expectations for the behavior. Similarly, changes in the strength of a social norm can be determined by measuring changes in social expectations. These principles are embedded

⁴Gerry, M., et al. (2016) *What are Social Norms? How are they Measured*. New York: UNICEF

in the methodology of this evaluation, with the aim of documenting when changes occurred, not only in attitudes and knowledge but also in behaviors and the social dynamics that uphold or dissuade them.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Overview of Methodology

The evaluation of the Breakthrough Generation (BG) Initiative was conducted internally by Tostan staff. Tostan applied a mixed-methods design, using quantitative and qualitative approaches, and did not use control villages or counterfactuals.⁵ Literature on impact evaluation supports the use of mixed methods to increase the reliability of data and the validity of the evaluation conclusions, and to deepen the understanding of the processes that result in program impacts.⁶⁷

Tostan’s Monitoring, Evaluation, Research, and Learning (MERL) staff worked with a team of external experts to design and implement the evaluation. Most of the data was collected by Tostan staff, although a small segment of community-level data was collected by the Community Management Committees (CMCs). Data collection was undertaken in the local languages, which differed across the countries and regions where the Community Empowerment Program (CEP) was implemented.

The evaluation sought to cover a range of well-being dimensions that Tostan refers to as “GESEE” (governance, education, health [*santé* in French], economic empowerment, and the environment), harmful practices, and women’s empowerment. Aligned with Tostan’s 2016 Theory of Change (see Annex A.2), questions sought to capture attitudes, knowledge, and practices.

Data were collected from different actors in the communities that were part of the BG. It is therefore important from a methodological perspective to note the differences between these actors and how they are referred to in this report.

- “Class participants” (CPs) are community members who participated in the Tostan CEP classes.

⁵While conducting the analysis of the BG data, Tostan also undertook an Evaluability Assessment of the CEP (2021) with IDinsight. The study concluded that a quasi-experimental design, using counterfactuals, might be feasible under some conditions but that these required introducing substantial changes to the program, and also that it would be at odds with some of the program’s key principles and strategies. (<https://tostan.org/resources/evaluations-research/>)

⁶Bamberger, M. (2012). *Introduction to Mixed Methods in Impact Evaluation*. Impact Evaluation Notes, 3, 9, 21–24. <https://www.interaction.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Mixed-Methods-in-Impact-Evaluation-English.pdf>

⁷Vaessen, et al. (2020). *Evaluation of International Development Interventions: An Overview of Approaches and Methods*. Independent Evaluation Group. Washington, DC: World Bank.

- “Adopted learners” (ALs) are community members who did not attend the classes but were engaged in an intentional and systematic learning process as part of Tostan’s “organized diffusion” described in section 2.3.1.
- “Other community members,” (OCMs), include everyone other than CMC members, adopted learners, and class participants in communities where the CEP classes were implemented.
- “Sensitized villages” are villages where the CMCs conducted social mobilization activities as part of the organized diffusion.
- At baseline the respondents represent “All” community members since classes have not yet begun and CMCs do not yet exist.

Verbal consent was gathered from all participants, after they were told their rights in relation to their participation in the evaluation. All of the participants were at least 18 years old.

4.2 Quantitative Component

Quantitative data collection tools

Two data collection tools were used for the quantitative component:

- *The Tostan Individual Baseline-Endline Survey* (TIBE Survey) includes a set of indicators based on the contents of the CEP and informed by social norms theory. It covers a range of GESEE well-being elements and includes a section on harmful practices.
- *The Situational Analysis Survey of Community Management Committees* (SAS-CMCs), adapted from The Population Council’s situational analysis study,⁸ is designed to provide information about the number and types of activities undertaken by CMCs to improve governance, education, health, the environment, and economic conditions in their communities. The data consists of self-reported information from the communities on the activities they conducted.

Quantitative data collection

The two quantitative data collection instruments were implemented using different strategies.

- Trained Monitoring, Evaluation, Research, and Learning (MERL) staff administered the TIBE survey before the program was implemented (baseline) and at its completion (endline) to a representative sample (20%) of villages in each country. They recorded the responses electronically using the CommCare application. At baseline (BS), a total of 1,523 randomly selected community members (RSCMs) were surveyed. At endline (ES), a total of 2,743 people were surveyed: 635 class participants, 580 adopted learners, and 1,528 OCMs

⁸Robert, M., et al. (1997). *The Situation Analysis Approach to Assessing Family Planning and Reproductive Health Services: A Handbook*. New York: Population Council

who did not partake in the Tostan classes. The demographic characteristics can be found in Annex A.3.

- All of the CMCs (148 in total, covering the 150 communities) collected data with the SAS-CMC tool and shared it with the Tostan implementation team.

Quantitative data analysis

The quantitative data analysis was conducted as follows:

- For the TIBE Survey, a descriptive analysis of the data was conducted using SPSS, comparing the indicators documented in the BS with those in the ES among class participants, adoptive learners, and OCMs.
- For the SAS-CMCs, all 148 CMCs were monitored using the SAS-CMC tool, with results analyzed at program completion. A synthesis of the data was conducted to present a summary of activities.

4.3 Qualitative Component

Qualitative data collection tools

The Tostan team developed three semi-structured question guides for focus groups with OCMs, CMCs, and individuals (e.g., community leaders and officials). Each set of guides was designed to contextualize and triangulate the results of the quantitative survey by capturing the lived experiences of people affected by the CEP and, especially, any changes they witnessed or experienced in their own or others' well-being.

- For the individual interviews, questions were framed to align with the quantitative survey (e.g., "What changes have you seen in the community?").
- For the focus groups, in addition to open-ended questions about their experiences with Tostan (e.g., "What was your understanding of the program?"), three vignettes regarding FGC, child marriage, and corporal punishment were used to spark discussion about these practices. Questions about the vignettes were formulated in light of social norms theory, as they were intended to capture attitudes about these practices, and beliefs regarding the presence of the practices in the community and in the social networks.
- For the CMCs, open-ended questions allowed focus group participants to explore changes that they had witnessed. Participants were also asked about their engagement with community leaders and any resistance to abandoning harmful practices.

Qualitative data collection

Tostan supervisors, trained in interview techniques, conducted 66 focus groups - 23 with CMC members and 43 with OCMs - and 39 in-depth individual interviews in 25 different communities in the 4 countries. The Tostan supervisors were identified as Tostan staff but were generally unfamiliar to community members. To assess the effects on the entire community, focus groups

were held only with OCMs and CMCs and supplemented by interviews with community leaders, local officials and service providers. Separate focus groups for men and women were organized for OCMs. CMC groups were mixed, as they worked together throughout the program.

Qualitative data analysis

Three qualitative researchers analyzed the data using grounded theory, with social norms theory as a sensitizing concept to guide the coding of the empirical instances encountered in the data. For example, descriptions of sharing new information about a harmful practice with a neighboring family would be coded as diffusion of information; in contrast, fear of reprisals for sharing would be noted as a barrier to diffusion.

The research team coded all interview and focus group transcripts. The only exception was for the Mali data, when information saturation was reached before all interviews were coded (they were read, and no new information was found). Coders paid special attention to misinformation about topics covered in the CEP and to whether focus group members countered such misinformation or expressed alternative beliefs.

From the coded data, the researchers generated broad concepts to guide the analysis. The sections within the results chapter of this document derive from the concepts that emerged. The researchers further subdivided the concepts into themes that guided the analysis of the country data and the drafting of the individual country reports.⁹ Depending on the country, six to eight themes emerged; they are listed in Annex A.4. The research team also consolidated the country analyzes into a single overview report that provides the findings across all four countries.

Space limitations in the present document curtailed the presentation of qualitative descriptions. Readers who desire more information and wish to read more testimonies by community members, service providers, Imam and others - in their own words - of what changes took place and how they were achieved are encouraged to consult the country reports.

4.4 Limitations

While the evaluation faced inevitable limitations, Tostan identified and implemented strategies to overcome them when possible. For the quantitative section, the same respondents could not be surveyed at baseline and at endline. Nonetheless, a descriptive analysis was conducted with the quantitative data. For qualitative data collection, translation posed challenges. Variability in the questions asked led to some outliers in the descriptions and to some deficits in answers needed

⁹ The country reports and the overview report of qualitative findings can be found in <https://tostan.org/resources/evaluations-research/> (in the 2021 section devoted to the Breakthrough Generation Initiative). A synthesis of country report themes from the qualitative segment of the evaluation can be found in Annex A.4

for cross-country comparison. In one country, insufficient number of interviews and focus groups were conducted.

Additionally, as this was an internal evaluation, the data collection was conducted by Tostan staff with the obvious risk of positive social bias. The training of the data collectors included strategies for mitigating bias. Finally, in view of resource constraints, Tostan was unable to collect data in sensitized villages, limiting the capacity to assess the results of the CEP beyond the villages where the classes were held. Some evidence on the sensitized villages was obtained from the statements of CMC members regarding their outreach activities.

5. RESULTS

This chapter outlines the results of the Breakthrough Generation (BG) Initiative. The evidence indicates that the Community Empowerment Program (CEP) acted as a catalyst and enabled participating communities to re-examine their social practices and undertake initiatives to improve their quality of life. The findings indicate that the community management committee (CMC) members provided leadership and that they and the CEP class participants successfully shared their acquired knowledge and skills with others. Their efforts, and the engagement of other community members (OCMs) resulted in the adoption of new social norms, including important changes relating to gender and violence, and improvements in community well-being in regard to governance, health, education, economic development, environment, and social cohesion. The evidence focuses on the changes in villages where the CEP was implemented, although the qualitative data also provide some evidence that sensitized villages were impacted by Tostan's program and the CMCs' outreach activities.

The four sections below correspond to the themes that emerged from the data analysis. Each section synthesizes the quantitative and qualitative findings. Due to the vast scope of subjects covered by the CEP, not all results are reported. Nonetheless, results are reported for all topics that received significant coverage by the program. The quotations exemplify the findings and demonstrate the direct witnessing of new behaviors and/or common reasons for changing behavior. They are selected from various communities in different countries, with attention to ensuring that they are typical and that their content is recurring.

The changes concerned entire communities, as shown by evidence that OCMs — who did not take part in Tostan classes and were neither adopted learners nor CMC members — reported impacts in various areas of well-being in their community, their home, and themselves. Overall, major changes had taken place among class participants by the end of the program, with marginally lower results among adopted learners and somewhat lower yet still impressive changes among OCMs. For harmful practices, in addition to evidence of abandonment, there was evidence of resistance to change and of continuing support of the practices by some community members.

5.1 Social Cohesion and Collective Action

Key findings

Evidence indicates that enhanced social cohesion was a major outcome of the CEP across all four countries. More peaceful and constructive interactions within communities and with local authorities and service providers were reported by all categories of stakeholders who participated in the evaluation. Respondents stated that the Tostan program led to increased mutual respect among community members and improved interpersonal relationships among men, women, youth, and adults. Evidence also indicates that the discussions on deeply held values and human rights principles contributed to this result.

CMC members as well as OCMs reported that they had used newly acquired knowledge and communication skills at the household and community levels to resolve conflicts, to seek consensus on values, and to organize and carry out activities to promote development. Respondents associated the increase in respectful dialogue with more collective decision-making and decreased violence between spouses at the household level and with the settling of disputes at the community level. The improved relations and corresponding decrease in violence appeared to be one of the changes most valued by community members.

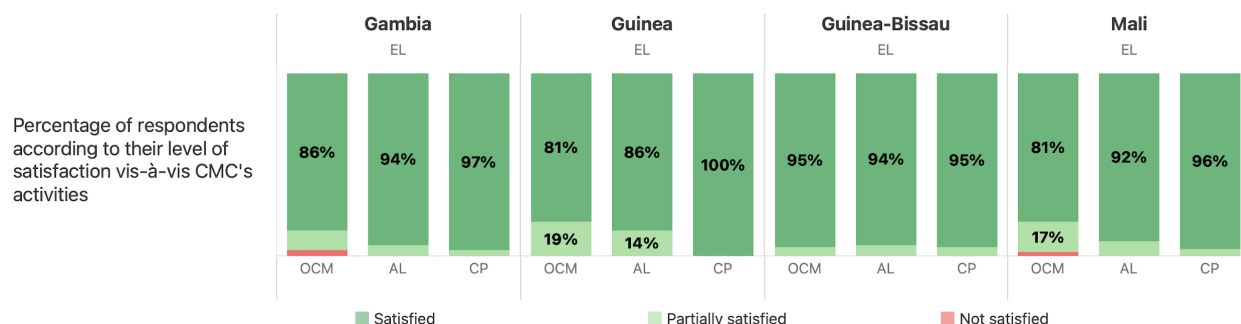
Evidence also points to the increased capacity by communities to engage with key actors in their political, social and cultural contexts in their efforts to improve their well-being across a wide range of areas. Key actors include local authorities, religious and traditional leaders, and public service providers such as healthcare workers and educators.

Quantitative findings

CMC and community members reported an increased awareness and understanding of human rights and noted that this made a difference in their lives and in their behavior. The most frequently mentioned reported change connected to human rights understanding was an improvement in social relations, with respectful discussions that led to understanding and agreement with others and increased social cohesion. Respondents also reported increased participation in community development and more active participation in community and household decision-making processes. Many respondents also reported changes in the realms of health, hygiene and sanitation, children's education, and the abandonment of harmful practices.

The evidence also indicated that, with little or no difference between women and men, community members were overwhelmingly satisfied with the activities carried out by the CMCs. The high degree of satisfaction by OCMs and their participation in activities is testament to the community-wide support for the contribution to community well-being made by the CMCs.

Chart 1: Communities widely appreciate the role played by their Community Management Committee in improving community well-being



Monitoring data recorded by the CMCs during the implementation of the BG provides examples of the activities undertaken by communities to improve their well-being. It is important to note that the collection of data by the CMCs was neither systematic nor consistent. The table below, which lists activities by GESEE topic, does not accurately reflect the number of activities, nor does it provide the necessary context to interpret them (e.g., information on how many births took place in order to calculate the percentage that were registered). It is nonetheless of interest, both because it provides examples of the breadth of activities undertaken by communities and because it is a testament to the CMCs' efforts to begin tracking their progress toward improved community well-being.

Table 1: Activities to improve well-being led and tracked by the CMCs

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

Qualitative Findings

Responses from various categories of respondents indicate that communities were more cohesive and peaceful as a result of the Tostan program. They further indicate that this is a highly valued outcome and that it contributed to making possible collective action to improve community well-being. Evidence also indicates that CMCs and class participants effectively carried out organized diffusion and that this was appreciated by OCMs. CMCs actively engaged with their communities as agents and facilitators of positive change for improved well-being. CMC members described their approaches as inclusive and respectful and reported a range of methods that they and the class participants used to share information and mobilize their communities. In addition, with CMC leadership and support, communities worked closely with local leaders, such as mayors and village chiefs, and engaged with health workers and teachers to improve the use of and access to social services.

Examples of new initiatives reported by community members aligned with those recorded by the CMCs and additionally included purchasing school uniforms for children, encouraging women to attend their prenatal visits, establishing community banks, and building new infrastructure (health centers, schools, and sanitary facilities). OCMs and interviewees linked the activities to the strengthened collaboration among community members. Some pointed to better financial management and transparency.

The focus group format, with an outsider as facilitator and notetaker, was a novel public setting for participants. Free-flowing discussions in which people asserted opinions that were sometimes at odds with one another, were evidence of an ability to engage with each other on issues of importance to the community in an inclusive and respectful way. The exchanges were especially impressive in the women's OCM focus groups.

"Peace is strengthened in the families and in the homes." - Guinea, male, OCM focus group

"This is the first time that I have seen people joining hands to make a community garden, thanks to Tostan. Social cohesion is strengthened within the village. The sanitation of public places (mosque, health post, school, well, market) is done regularly. Everyone now participates in social affairs in the village." - Guinea, female, OCM focus group

"When [class] participants come back to us, they explain the course and the topics to the uninitiated. They organize awareness campaigns, cleanliness campaigns, and meetings as well." - Guinea-Bissau, female, OCM focus group

“We hold an internal meeting and then we inform the village authorities that we want to do an awareness activity on the importance of a healthy environment and on certain human rights ... on such and such a day, so they authorize us. At that point, we spread the information throughout the whole village... After we meet among ourselves, we go door to door to inform the population of the meeting.” Guinea, CMC focus group

“The changes are visible, since in the past we members of the village received funding on behalf of the community that evaporated in the hands of a few people. Today, money is only disbursed for an investment that is known in advance, like buying commercial products for resale: cloth, chickens, etc. And it is money to be paid back after the sale operations, of course.” - Gambia, male, OCM focus group

5.2 Women’s Voice, Influence, Agency, and Leadership

Key findings: Increases in women’s voice, influence, agency, and leadership in household and community matters were remarkable across all countries. This suggests that changes in constrictive gender roles and norms took place, going well beyond decreases in harmful practices that particularly affect girls and women. The findings indicate that women gained knowledge, competency, and self-efficacy. The evidence also suggests that the literacy, numeracy, and problem-solving skills gained by women, as well as their knowledge of human rights, birth registration, health, economic activities, and other priority topics, increased their confidence and their capacity to improve well-being for themselves, their households, and their communities. Importantly, their increased capabilities and contribution to household and community well-being also contributed to support by men for the new, more equitable gender roles.

Quantitative Findings

The findings indicate dramatic changes in women’s voice, influence, agency, and leadership in both the community and the household spheres. The changes were reinforced by the acquisition of new skills that increased their confidence and self-efficacy. Among class participants and CMC members, the increased agency and leadership by women went hand-in-hand with their new ability to write. The improvements in literacy are illustrated in the following visual which also indicates that this is a skill that is not easily transferred through organized diffusion. Improvements in literacy were particularly dramatic among class participants who received direct support from Tostan facilitators.

Chart 2: Women Participants of the Tostan Classes Acquire Writing Skills

	Gambia				Guinea				Guinea-Bissau				Mali			
	BL ALL	OCM	EL AL	CP	BL ALL	OCM	EL AL	CP	BL ALL	OCM	EL AL	CP	BL ALL	OCM	EL AL	CP
Percentage of women respondents who are able to write their own name	21%	27%	37%	69%	12%	19%	30%	92%	21%	33%	33%	72%	21%	26%	46%	74%
Percentage of women respondents who are able to write the name of their village	13%	22%	39%	49%	11%	16%	25%	88%	18%	26%	28%	62%	18%	24%	35%	71%

Gender equity improved within households and in community settings. Women’s voice within the community increased dramatically. It is manifested in their active participation in public meetings and in their ability to voice their opinions. Their influence in their households also increased dramatically. It is manifested by whether critical decisions are made jointly by husbands and wives. As shown in the visual below, the changes were across all categories of respondents indicating that the improvements in gender equity spanned across entire communities and suggesting that the new roles and behaviors were upheld by new, more equitable social norms.

Chart 3: Women’s voice and influence increase dramatically even on sensitive issues

	Gambia				Guinea				Guinea-Bissau				Mali			
	BL ALL	OCM	EL AL	CP	BL ALL	OCM	EL AL	CP	BL ALL	OCM	EL AL	CP	BL ALL	OCM	EL AL	CP
Percentage of female respondents who report expressing their ideas at community meetings	43%	78%	81%	91%	39%	80%	82%	91%	34%	78%	90%	93%	55%	83%	84%	88%
Percentage of respondents who report that the decision to practice birth spacing was made jointly (by both husband and wife)	11%	31%	61%	67%	27%	94%	97%	100%	13%	79%	91%	90%	21%	59%	69%	68%
Percentage of respondents who report that the decision to send their children to school was made jointly (by both husband and wife)	19%	46%	67%	78%	25%	94%	98%	100%	6%	78%	88%	91%	2%	33%	44%	53%

Qualitative findings

Across all four countries, women commented on their newfound confidence and agency and attributed it to Tostan’s presence. Both men and women reported significant changes in the active participation of women in community meetings. Men, without exception, said that the women’s contributions had a positive effect in the community, and indicated their satisfaction with the changed roles of women. Women CMC members reported that their participation in CMCs and in Tostan classes provided them with opportunities to learn new communication skills and abilities that they used to negotiate conflict, speak in public, and bargain economically. Learning to write

their names and to use phones, and about health, project management, and other topics related to well-being, gave them new confidence, and earned the respect of men. Women from the CMCs also reported conducting awareness-raising activities and working visibly as leaders to advance well-being in the community. The statements about women's changed roles are particularly striking because no direct questions were asked on the topic. Participants in the evaluation raised the topic on their own.

"Tostan has educated us [so that we understand] that men and women both have a right to express their views in a meeting... Many [women] said that they didn't know women had the right to speak before the Tostan classes started." - Gambia, CMC focus group

"It's the respect of both genders: women are free to speak in front of men, and their opinion is taken into account. Women couldn't do that before." - Mali, CMC focus group

"Women are participating in community meetings now... women freely choose their candidate during the legislative and presidential elections without constraint. Moreover, today, some women are in the office of the rural commune as councilors thanks to their leadership." - Guinea, CMC focus group

"What has changed here is remarkable because, in the past, only men were allowed to attend meetings. Women were not allowed to attend. However, since the teachings of Tostan have become widespread, women participate in the meetings and decision-making bodies of the community. I used to be afraid to express my opinion in public, but now I do it in a mixed audience without any stage fright." - Guinea-Bissau, female, OCM focus group

"Before, we women were shy and afraid to go in front of a group of men. With the arrival of Tostan, even though I am not one of the learners, I realized that if you learn, you understand quickly. But if you haven't learned, it is difficult to understand certain things. So those who attend the classes give us little initiations." - Guinea-Bissau, female, OCM focus group

"What is significant is that an adult woman, who was previously illiterate and uneducated, is now able to read, write, and discuss previously unknown topics in front of the astonished young students." - Guinea-Bissau, male, OCM focus group

"I can say that the changes are not just about the business side. In my house, my wives who have made a profit have done so only for themselves. The same is true for the young people and myself... The women sold their peanut harvest and collected the money with which they bought clothes and shoes, which constitutes a significant added value. Now both of us have become as we should be in relation to each other." - Guinea-Bissau, male, OCM focus group

Some OCM focus group members provided examples of women's increased influence in household-level decision-making. The data from Guinea-Bissau were particularly rich with examples. Women said that because of Tostan's presence in their communities, they were better able to advocate with their husbands to keep their children in school, allocate income to healthcare expenses, and reduce violence.

"What has changed here is not to be underestimated. In the past, when the wife was ill and wanted to go to the doctor, she was told curtly that there was no money. The pregnant woman was kept in her room until she gave birth." - Guinea-Bissau, female, OCM focus group

"I used to accompany my husband to pick mahogany nuts, up to twenty bags. And he would sell them without saying a word to me... But now he is obliged to tell me: 'I had to collect a sum... so much money is left over.' Before, this mentality did not exist, but since Tostan has been with us, people have changed and adopted new ways of doing things." - Guinea-Bissau, female, OCM focus group

5.3 Changes in Governance, Education, Health, Economic Empowerment, and Environment

Key findings

Across all four countries, communities participating in the BG Initiative experienced notable improvements in the areas of education, health, economic management, environment, and in local governance systems. Communities developed and used new capabilities to organize activities that improved community well-being in these areas. The findings indicate that CMCs, established at the outset of the CEP and trained by Tostan, provided important leadership for these changes. CMC members and class participants embraced and successfully promoted the adoption of new behaviors and lifestyle changes based on new knowledge acquired from Tostan.

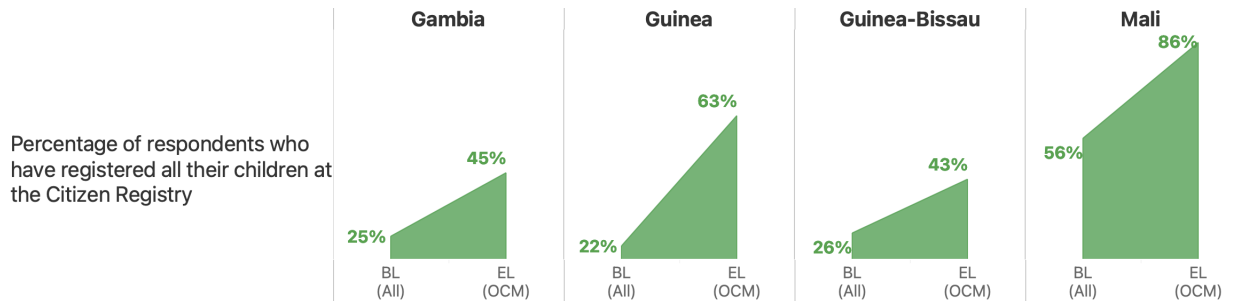
Governance

Quantitative findings

An increased sense of civic engagement can be observed across BG Initiative communities as shown by evidence in increase in voting and in participation in community meetings, especially by women. At the beginning of the CEP, many children in these communities did not have birth certificates, recognized as a basic right of every child and linked to future civic engagement, access to education and other social services, and voting. A dramatic increase in birth registration is evident in the comparison of the baseline and endline data for OCMs in the visual below,

indicating that it was wide-spread in the communities. The increase was somewhat higher among class participants and adopted learners.

Chart 4: Major increase in birth registration



Qualitative findings

The findings indicate strengthened participation of community members, and especially of women, in local governance. Men and women alike described the benefits of women expressing their concerns and taking part in decision-making in meetings. The educational experience from participation in the Tostan classes, as well as from exposure through organized diffusion, was reported to provide women with more legitimacy and to stimulate their civic engagement. There were also reports of women running and being elected for public office. The findings also provide greater insights into how communities increased birth registration.

“I approached the members [of the CMC] who went from door to door to raise awareness. Some parents said that they did not know that the birth certificate was important, and two days later I had 80 birth certificates.” (Mali, school official)

“Before, we did not get the birth certificates of the children. But when Tostan arrived in our community, we understood the importance of this document. So today, as soon as there is a birth, the person in charge of the [CMC] civil status sub-committee, in collaboration with the community liaison officer or the community agent, sets out to accelerate the process.” (Guinea, CMC focus group)

Health

Quantitative findings

The findings indicate increased knowledge and changes in practice related to priority health topics. Changes in knowledge were dramatic, especially among class participants and adopted learners, and were also major among OCM.

Chart 5: Communities have essential knowledge for health and hygiene

	Gambia				Guinea				Guinea-Bissau				Mali			
	BL ALL	OCM	EL AL	CP	BL ALL	OCM	EL AL	CP	BL ALL	OCM	EL AL	CP	BL ALL	OCM	EL AL	CP
Percentage of respondents who cited at least 2 ways of germ transmission	15%	48%	68%	88%	7%	61%	84%	97%	39%	78%	90%	97%	19%	57%	63%	80%
Percentage of respondents who could identify at least two key moments for hand-washing	53%	77%	92%	96%	47%	93%	93%	98%	73%	96%	97%	100%	62%	82%	85%	95%
Percentage of respondents who cited at least two advantages of exclusive breastfeeding	19%	37%	48%	92%	43%	86%	94%	97%	45%	78%	84%	95%	28%	49%	68%	83%
Percentage of respondents who cited at least two risks associated with close pregnancies	12%	32%	39%	80%	26%	76%	87%	97%	23%	70%	70%	85%	23%	48%	66%	79%

The evidence also indicated that community members strengthened their support for health-conducive behaviors. For example, the opinion that mothers should exclusively breastfeed their newborn up to six months, which already existed at the onset of the CEP, increased among all categories of respondents. All categories of community members increased curative and preventive behaviors, as illustrated in the table below in and in birth spacing. While the increase in the appropriate management of child diarrhea is dramatic among all categories of community members, it is noteworthy to see that change that also took place in the sensitive area of birth spacing.

Chart 6: New or reinforced behaviors for better health

	Gambia				Guinea				Guinea-Bissau				Mali			
	BL ALL	OCM	EL AL	CP	BL ALL	OCM	EL AL	CP	BL ALL	OCM	EL AL	CP	BL ALL	OCM	EL AL	CP
Percentage of respondents who report using ORS to treat a child's diarrhea	33%	57%	71%	94%	59%	98%	96%	95%	13%	50%	68%	83%	25%	68%	65%	84%
Percentage of respondents who report using birth spacing	13%	24%	23%	39%	18%	62%	54%	81%	31%	53%	53%	59%	26%	33%	36%	46%

Qualitative findings

Behavior changes related to personal hygiene and the use of health services were reported as outcomes across all four countries. Testimonials link changes in hygiene practices, such as use of soap, frequent handwashing, and use of latrines, to positive health outcomes like reduction and prevention of diseases and diarrhea, demonstrating increased and correct understanding of health issues. A change in the population seeking healthcare services when ill, and an increase in pre- and postnatal visits by expecting mothers, were results across countries. Importantly, these changes were reported by members of the communities as well as by health providers. One community in Gambia spoke of being able to successfully advocate to have a new healthcare center built.

There was some variation in the specific health changes reported in the countries. Births in health facilities were reported to have increased in some communities in Mali and Guinea-Bissau. Behavior changes regarding the spacing of births were discussed in all countries except Gambia. Similarly, increased vaccination of children and the benefits of new stoves were articulated in all countries except Gambia.

“The activities carried out by the CMC that I liked [involved] the mobilization of the population to participate in the vaccination campaigns for pregnant women and children. Otherwise, when the agents were supposed to come and do the vaccination, some women made their children flee to the bush to avoid participating in the campaign... But now, this behavior has changed dramatically in the community. This has helped to improve health.” - Guinea, CMC focus group

“When we want to do the vaccination campaign against polio... we inform the members of the CMC to pass the information in the village so that the population participates in vaccination campaigns... I thank Tostan today [because] the program has helped change the behavior and attitudes of the population.”- Guinea, health worker

“In our villages, women go for prenatal consultations regularly now... The sensitization has allowed this change in behavior. Many pregnant women regularly attend the health center. A good monitoring of the pregnancy prevents the woman from having problems during the pregnancy and the delivery.” - Mali, CMC focus group

“Our kitchens, for the most part, were blackened with smoke and filth; now consciences have been shaken to the core, and that's why these old habits have been abandoned.” - Guinea-Bissau, female, OCM focus group

Although interviews and focus groups were not carried out with community members from sensitized communities, CMC members in Mali and Gambia reported that these additional communities also embraced behavior change:

“In all of our [sensitized] villages, the people especially liked the cleanliness because they did not know that dirt could make you sick. I told them about the health consequences.” - Mali, CMC focus group

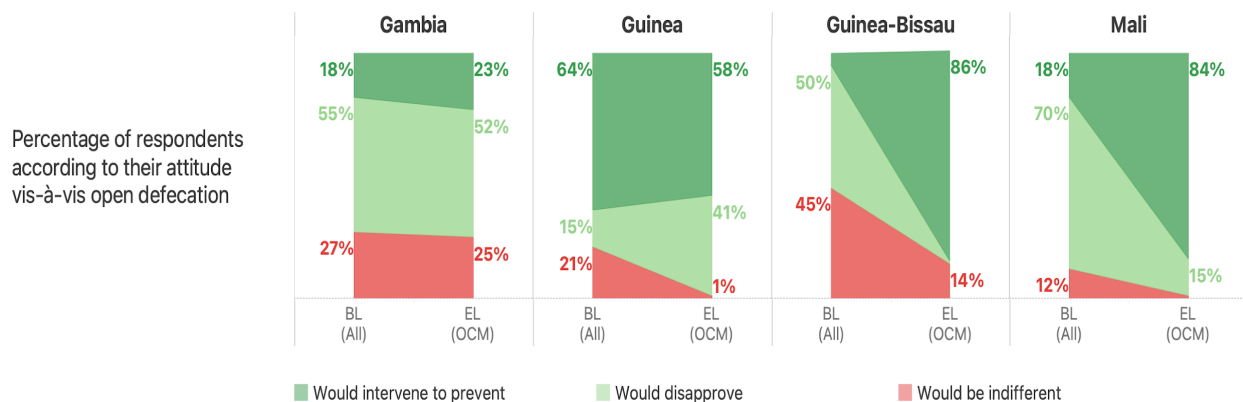
“These are important changes because, when we went to talk to [our sensitized community] about cleanliness and the disadvantages of open defecation [by] children, they adopted this behavior. When we left, everything was clean; the children were not defecating in the open.” - Mali, CMC focus group

Environment

Quantitative findings

Village cleanups were regularly carried out as a result of the CEP program and were among the activities most reported by the CMC. In all countries, the findings indicate changes in the practice of open defecation which in some countries went hand-in-hand with the construction or outfitting of sanitary facilities. While there was little approval for the practice even at baseline, by the end of the CEP there was a further decrease in approval and an increase in community members stating that they would intervene to prevent it, which was dramatic in Guinea-Bissau and Mali. The increase in willingness to intervene to stop the practice and in its disapproval indicate that the social norm against open defecation was stronger at the end of the program. As shown in the visual below¹⁰, these changes took place community-wide, as reflected by the responses of OCMs. The change was greater among class participants, including in Gambia where 56% reported that they would intervene to prevent or stop the practice.

Chart 7: Greater disapproval and intention to intervene to end open defecation indicate a strengthened positive social norm



¹⁰ For a guide on reading this and similar charts in the document see Annex A.1

Qualitative

Emphasis by community members on village cleanliness and on personal hygiene, as a result of the Tostan program, was evident in BG community interviews and focus groups. CMC members, OCMs and community leaders spoke frequently and emphatically of the importance of village-cleaning activities. The cleaning of the village and other activities related to health and cleanliness were generally the first changes that OCMs observed in their communities as a result of the program. Decreases in the practice of open defecation were observed by OCMs in all countries except Guinea-Bissau while new or improved sanitary facilities were reported in all countries except Gambia.

“The sanitation of the village and the construction of sanitary facilities for all families contributed to the improvement of the health of the population. The abandonment of open defecation has reduced contamination.” - Guinea, CMC focus group

“We have observed that our village has become clean. There are cesspools for wastewater, toilets, and we have improved homes.” - Mali, female, OCM focus group

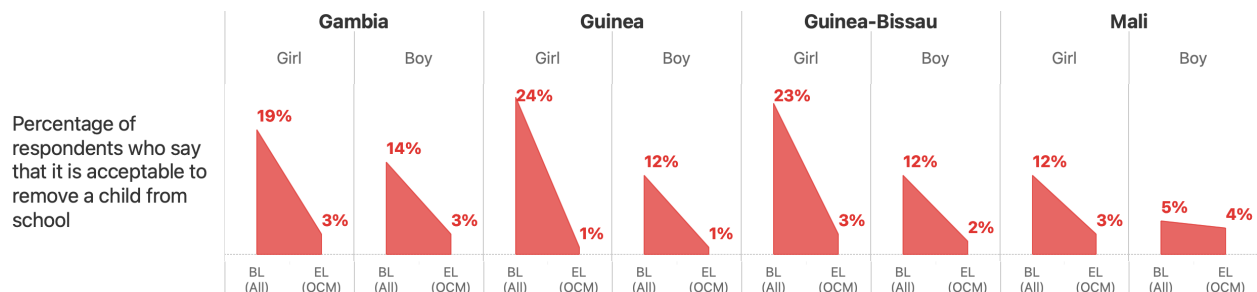
“In the past, our alleys were often littered with garbage to the point that people felt disgusted to go out at night.” - Guinea-Bissau, male, OCM focus group

Education

Quantitative findings

The declared importance of sending and keeping children in school increased during the implementation of the CEP for both boys and girls. Importantly, at the outset of the CEP the commitment to keeping children in school in all countries was stronger for boys, manifesting inequity. By the end of the three years, the commitment of keeping girls in school had risen proportionately more than for boys and the situation reflected full equity of boys and girls in all the countries. The commitment to keep children in school was community-wide, with virtually no difference between class participants and other community members.

Chart 8: Gender disparities disappear as value of education increases for all children



Qualitative findings

The perceived importance of education increased among the communities across all four countries. The importance of education for girls recurred throughout focus groups, including among OCMs, indicating that the change was across entire communities. Respondents focused on the negative impacts of depriving children — especially girls — of an education, not only for the child but also for the household and the community. They also described the health and economic benefits of keeping children in school. The evidence indicates that this was accompanied by changes in behavior: a decrease in school dropouts was mentioned consistently in Mali, Guinea, and Guinea-Bissau, although not in Gambia, and all the school officials interviewed attested to improved school attendance.

“After completing her schooling, she can benefit herself and her family too. She can be a professional. We know all these good things through Tostan participants, who come to our community for sensitization.” - Gambia, male, OCM focus group

“We didn’t value our daughters’ education... But today, the parent must enroll his daughter in school so that she can succeed in her field. This is why many girls fail and leave school because of their parents’ attitude. Even if you have to pay for your daughter to go to school, you have to do it.” - Guinea-Bissau, female, OCM focus group

“Among the significant changes is the fact that previously men refused to allow their daughters to attend school; only boys were favored.” - Guinea-Bissau, female, OCM focus group

“The important change in the last three years that I have seen in the community is [that] girls and boys go to school equally. Before, girls were not enrolled in school as they are today. The schooling of girls is more important because an educated girl is like an educated family, like an educated village and like an educated country.” - Mali, male, OCM focus group

The topic of girls’ schooling was often intertwined with the topics of marriage and early motherhood. In Guinea and Guinea-Bissau, some of the OCM, both men and women, voiced the opinion that marriage was an acceptable alternative for girls who did not want to finish their studies, indicating that while education was more valued as a result of the Tostan program, its value did not reach the same level among all community members.

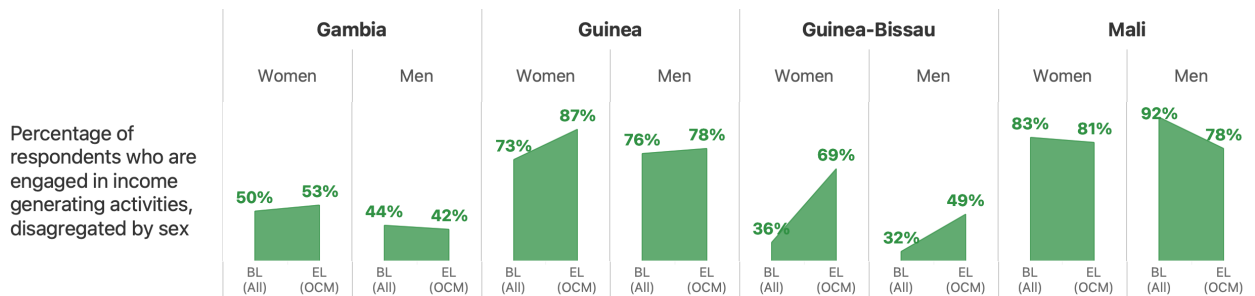
“But if the girl doesn’t want to study, then, instead of staying in school, it is better to give her in marriage so that she doesn’t live a life of vices, which will tarnish the family’s image.” - Guinea, male, OCM focus group

Economic development

Quantitative findings

Engagement in income-generating activities did not change dramatically by the end of the CEP, although there was an increase, among both women and men, in most countries. As indicated by the visual below on income-generating activities, the situation for women improved more than that of men. The improvement was also somewhat stronger among class participants and adopted learners than for the other members of the community. This could possibly be related to the greater knowledge and involvement of the first two categories in the CMC-supported activities, including the management of the community development funds.

Chart 9: Improvement in income generating activities is greater for women



Qualitative findings

Across all four countries, communities either established or improved community banks, which were managed by the CMCs. 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 persons in the community, especially women, with startup capital for new income-generating activities. The loans were described as successful in small-scale, local economic development. The most common income-generating activities mentioned were for the production of soap and agriculture-related commodities. The banks were also used to address problems in the communities (e.g., to rehabilitate public infrastructure such as mosques, schools, or healthcare facilities). Respondents also referred to the increase in transparency and management capacities.

“The creation of women's groups that make [a microcredit group] is used every month; we take out loans. We have done the trade of soap and many other things. We didn't know that this was possible.” - Mali, CMC focus group

“And the villages that declined the [micro-credit] have bitterly regretted their refusal since they have seen our achievements: specifically, cordial understanding acquired within these communities and the enterprises set up... agricultural projects whose harvests generate profits that are then deposited in the community banks... and repayable loans

granted to needy people to make their activities bear fruit without any constraint. All these achievements come from Tostan.” - Guinea-Bissau, male, OCM focus group

“And some among us, before, would also tell us to contribute and put the money in the bank, but we [did] not know anything about the money. Now, where we are, if you ask anyone among us how much we contributed and how much we have in the bank, the person can tell you straight away. For us, the change we have [made] from [participating in] Tostan cannot be over-emphasized because now no one will come to our village and start writing... without us knowing what they are writing or signing a document without [us] knowing for what purpose.”- Gambia, CMC focus group

5.4 Decrease in Harmful Practices

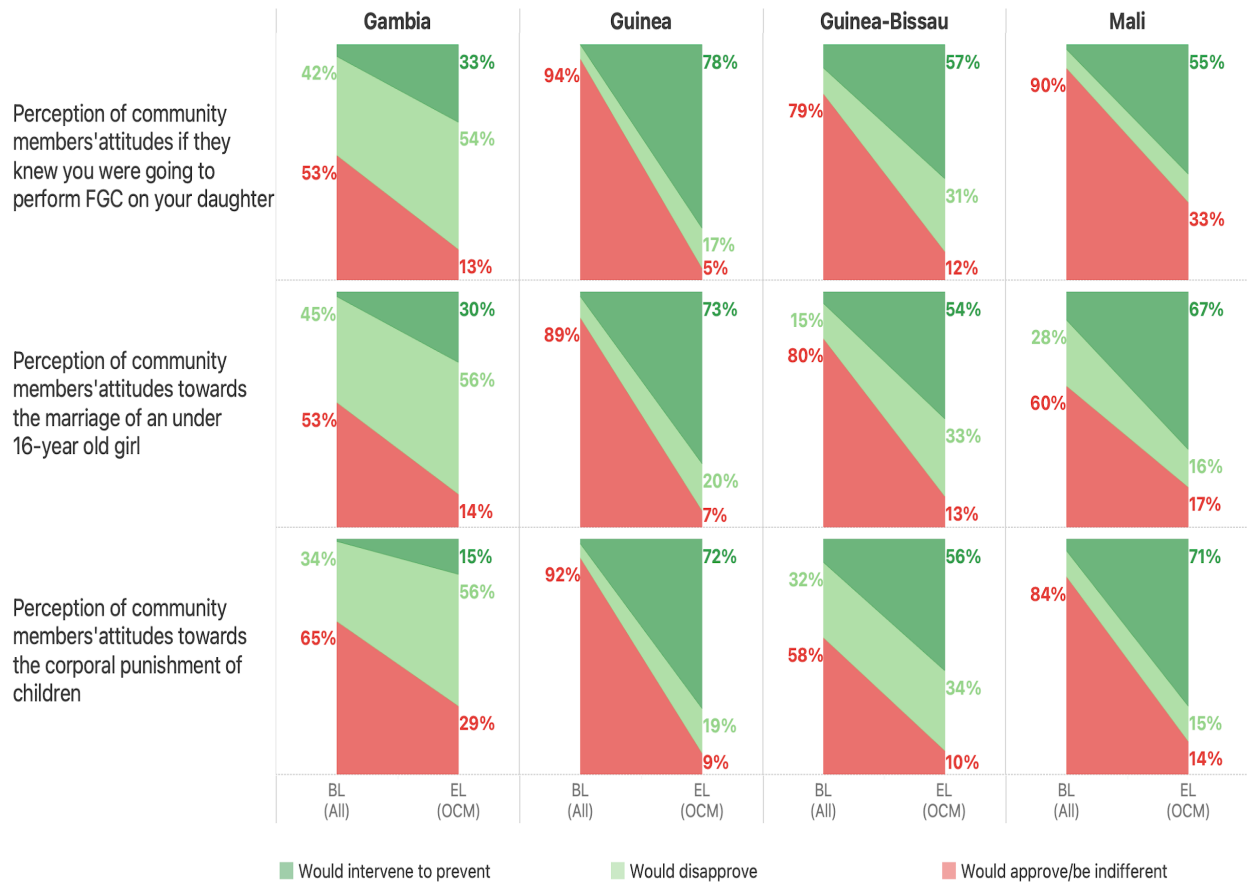
Key findings

The evidence indicates that at the end of the three-year program, the occurrence of FGC and child marriage, and the use of corporal punishment to discipline children and to settle intra-marital or community disputes had diminished dramatically in all the communities. However, they had not totally disappeared, and there was still some resistance to their abandonment. The evidence also indicates that even when participants reported supporting a harmful practice, the circumstances surrounding its practice had changed. For example, most of the OCMs said that members of the community who still practiced FGC did so in secret. Importantly, survey data indicate that communities almost fully reversed their beliefs and perspectives regarding the harmful practices. Whereas at the start of the program these practices were common and broadly accepted, by the end there was active opposition to them among community members, indicating that new social norms making the practices unacceptable were in place or being established.

Quantitative findings

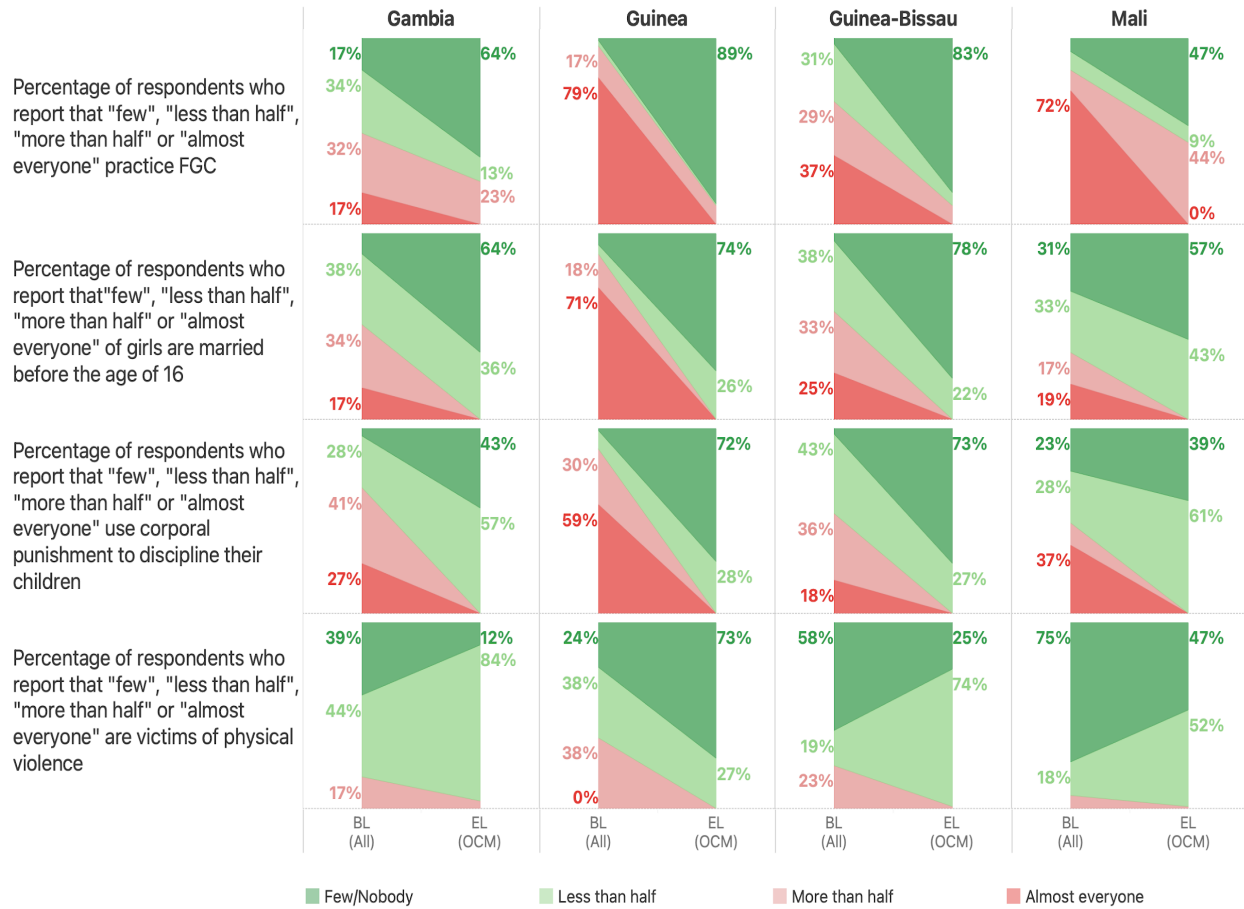
Evidence indicates that at the end of the program, attitudes and opinions, as well as social expectations regarding FGC, child marriage, and the use of corporal punishment to discipline children and in intra-marital or community disputes had dramatically changed. At the start of the program, these practices were widely accepted and, in some cases, expected. By the end of the CEP, there was no longer wide-spread acceptance, and a high proportion of respondents indicated that they would intervene to prevent or stop them. The change was community-wide, as shown in the visual below that presents the situation at the end of the program with respect to other community members. This indicates that social norms had changed and that the abandonment of the practices is sustainable even if it is not complete. The change among class participants was even more dramatic, with the willingness to intervene never below 55 percent and typically between 75 and 92 percent for all of the practices and across all four countries.

Chart 10: Communities move from engaging in harmful practices to preventing them



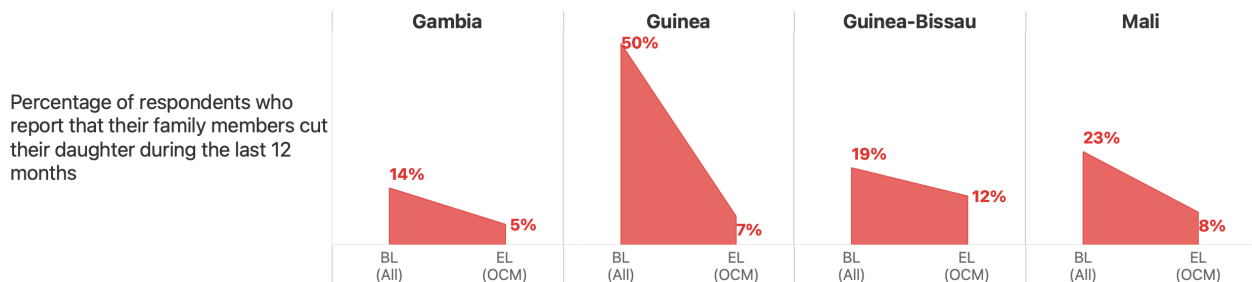
These results fully align with evidence indicating that FGC, child marriage and corporal punishment of children decreased substantially across all countries. All community members report major decreases in these practices in their communities as shown by the next visual which illustrates the responses by other community members. The data regarding the presence of physical violence needs to be interpreted in the light of the qualitative data that indicates that the program generated a greater awareness of the presence of violence along with the commitment and actions to decrease it.

Chart 11: Harmful practices decrease dramatically but have not disappeared



Data on the incidence of FGC also indicates a major decline in the practice. As noted above, the results are community-wide, indicated by the visual below illustrating the responses by community members that were neither class participants nor adopted learners. The results are also consistent with data showing respondents' increased knowledge of the consequences of the practices.

Chart 12: Major reduction in girls who undergo FGC



Qualitative findings

CMCs and OCMs reported that their communities had either substantially decreased or abandoned FGC, violence against children through corporal punishment, and child marriage. Most OCMs cited evidence-based information about the negative consequences of these practices as the reason for their decrease or abandonment. In line with the quantitative data, focus group responses indicate that community members went beyond willingness to intervene and took actions to prevent or stop others from performing the harmful practices. All CMC members and most of the OCMs expressed satisfaction with the abandonment or decrease of harmful practices in their communities. CMC members also expressed determination to continue to support the abandonment process where it was not yet complete.

Child marriage

"If my daughter was married too young, I fear that she would lose her life and her baby during the delivery." - Guinea-Bissau, community leader

"If, after all the advice given to the father, he still does not manage to obey, we will bring a complaint against him before the authorities." - Guinea, female, OCM focus group

"Thanks to Tostan's sensitizations and talks, people have started to understand the importance of girls' schooling, and this has contributed to the reduction of early marriage and the exodus of girls from school." - Mali, school official

Female genital cutting (FGC)

"What we like the most is the abandonment of FGC in this village. ... Since Tostan came, we [will] fight child marriage until we have abandoned that too." - Gambia, CMC focus group

"[FGC] can lead to the death of either the girl or her baby... In the past, women suffered a lot during childbirth; we were told that they had been excised, so today the whole village is aware of the consequences, and we have abandoned it." - Guinea, male, OCM focus group

"We cannot force the mother to abandon FGC, but we must sensitize her in such a way that she understands the disadvantages and she will become aware and stop FGC on her own." - Mali, male, OCM focus group

Corporal punishment

“If the child is subjected to corporal punishment, then his mind may be destabilized afterwards. The child will eventually develop a fear in front of his mother or there will be a lack of closeness between him and his mother.” - Guinea-Bissau, male, OCM focus group

“Sensitization has enabled parents to ban corporal punishment for both children and women. They have been told a lot about the harmful effects, and this has borne fruit.” - Mali, health official

“No one hits his wife or children because people have understood the consequences thanks to Tostan. We have understood that the abandonment of these behaviors contributes to the establishment of love in our homes.” - Guinea, CMC focus group

Resistance

CMC members reported that they had encountered initial resistance to ending FGC, child marriage, and corporal punishment at the start of their outreach activities. There appeared to be less resistance to ending corporal punishment than to ending FGC or child marriage. The CMC members reported that they had successfully overcome this resistance by using different communication strategies that they and class participants had learned in the classes. They recounted using Tostan’s human rights images, personal experience, and skits or theater. Focus groups composed of OCMs recalled experiencing these methods as well.

The data indicate that the discussion regarding harmful practices was still ongoing within communities at the time of the evaluation. Recurring arguments for continuing FGC invoked cultural customs and religion. In Mali and Guinea, participants mentioned either wanting to abide by religious requirements or feeling that others expected them to. In Guinea-Bissau, a participant claimed that FGC was not against Islamic teachings. In Mali, additional reasons included the intent to reduce sexual desire or activity and to ensure a girl’s marriageability. In one country, child marriage was reported to be a coping strategy to avoid economic hardship for poor families. A few of the OCMs reported that corporal punishment was a reasonable method of educating children. Several CMC members stated their commitment to continue their efforts to bring an end to these practices.

“When Tostan came and we participated in the class, we [came to] understand that child marriage and FGC are harmful practices, and when we have information that these practices are about to happen, we go sensitize those people, and they will agree with us. We, however, see some resistance... but that is very limited because the village chief supports us in all our activities; he became a strong pillar for us.” Gambia, CMC focus group

“People in the village will say that [the father who wants to marry his daughter at an early age] does not have enough to feed his household and that is why he gives his daughter to a man to marry. Others will say that early marriage is a better asset. However, marriage at this age is not a good thing.” - Guinea-Bissau, female, OCM focus group

“People in the community will be divided. Some will say that [the mother in the vignette] did the right thing by not hitting her daughter and others will say she should have hit her. Those who say she should have hit her will outnumber those who say she should have educated her.” - Mali, male, OCM focus group

“I can say that it was said not to hit the children. At the beginning, there were difficulties, but during sensitization... in the village and in the school, people understood that one can educate a child without corporal punishment.”- Mali, school official

6. DISCUSSION

6.1 Overall Progress in Reaching the Breakthrough Generation Initiative Objectives

The evaluation found that, overall, the objectives of the Breakthrough Generation (BG) Initiative were reached. The previous section provides ample evidence that the communities in all four countries gained new capacities and applied them to improve their well-being. The data indicate that community members attributed the well-being improvements to the presence of Tostan and that these went well beyond the class and reached communities at large.

The quantitative findings provide clear evidence that communities made substantial advances in the areas of governance, education, health, and the environment. The advances in economic empowerment were reflected especially in terms of strengthened systems of community management of funds and in increases in income-generating activities were found in only two of the four countries. The evidence also indicates dramatic decreases in harmful practices and other forms of violence, and increases in the voice, influence, and leadership of women. Importantly, the findings indicate that these improvements in well-being were the fruit of social changes and that social norms conducive to well-being were strengthened or newly established by communities as a result of their partnership with Tostan.

There were major increases in the registration of children at birth, in hygiene practices that prevent transmission of diseases (such as avoiding open defecation), and in the use of ORS for management of diarrhea. Communities also increased the utilization of health services, especially for children (e.g., vaccination) and for women (e.g., antenatal care), and the use of education services, especially for girls. Beyond this, they engaged with service providers (e.g., nurses and teachers) to improve the services. The data also indicate that social norms regarding female

genital cutting (FGC), child marriage, and the use of corporal punishment to discipline children have been replaced by social norms that uphold the abandonment of the practices. While support for these practices still lingers in some communities, possibly because they were more entrenched, the evidence also indicates that the conversation about them continues in these communities, with the Community Management Committees (CMC) committed to promoting their abandonment through continued actions to increase understanding and adherence.

The qualitative findings are aligned with the quantitative findings. In addition, they provide a comprehensive picture of the process that has enabled communities to bring about sustainable social change, delineating how the communities were able to bring about improvements in their well-being.

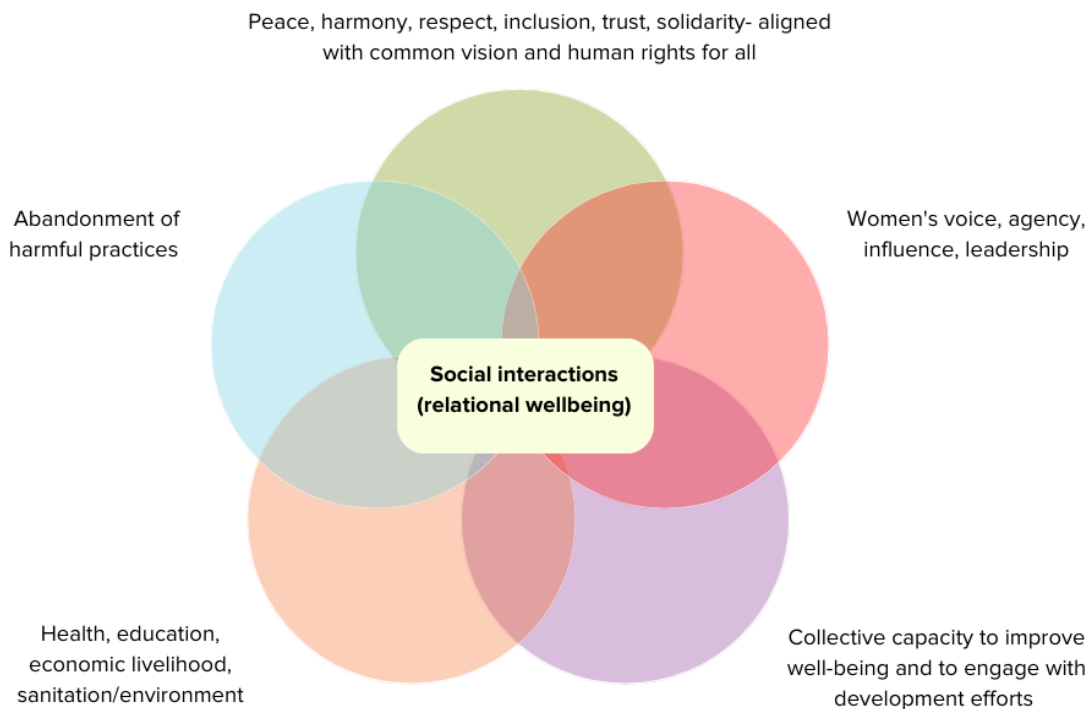
6.2 More Peaceful and Equitable Social Interactions

The analysis of the qualitative data provides evidence that respect, dignity, peace (including decreases in violence and in conflict), solidarity, social cohesion, trust, and confidence increased as a result of the CEP. Community members engaged with each other more, and in more peaceful and respectful ways. The improved relations and changed roles — including gender roles — are highly valued by community members and are considered by them to be among the most important advancements in their well-being.¹¹ For women, the increased confidence, the ability to take on new roles, and the greater respect and support from each other and from men are particularly important.

The analysis also indicates that the changes in how community members interact with one another, with leaders, and with service providers are at the heart of the process that has enabled communities to effect other improvements in well-being related to governance, health, hygiene and sanitation, economic empowerment, and the abandonment of harmful practices. As community members interact more peacefully and collaboratively, and with greater inclusion and leadership of women, they become able to bring about improvements in their community that were not previously possible.

¹¹This finding aligns with the conclusions of the study by IDinsight in 2020, which found that communities referred to social and interpersonal changes as among the most important changes related to their well-being, characterized by discussion and broad participation and by an increase in respect or harmony—between men and women and in general. (*The Current State of Tostan's Community Empowerment Program (CEP) and Diffusion Communities - 2020*. See <https://tostan.org/resources/evaluations-research/>)

Diagram 1: Improved social interactions are key for improvements in well-being



Taken together, the survey responses and the communities' portrayals of experiences with the Tostan program indicate a systemic shift. At the end of the CEP, communities have a new mental model for a flourishing community that is at the heart of their improved capacity to improve their well-being.

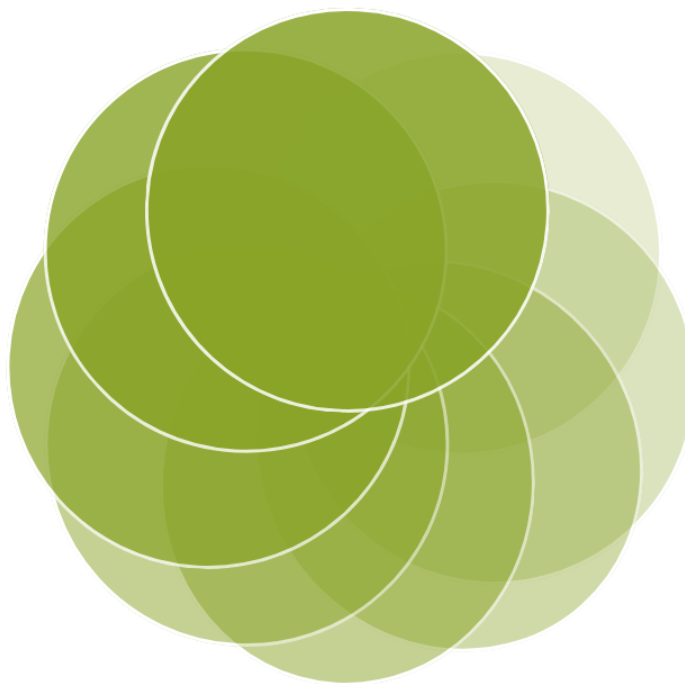
The BG results are consistent with those from the evaluation of Tostan's previous multi-country CEP implementation, referred to as "Generational Change in Three Years" and carried out during 2013–16 in 150 communities in Guinea-Bissau, Guinea, Mali, and Mauritania, as well as with the evaluations of numerous other CEPs carried out in Senegal. The BG results also align with research studies carried out with specialized external partners in the past decade.¹² The consistency of the results across BG countries and with previous CEPs suggests a causal relationship between the CEP and the results observed.

¹²Tostan's Evaluations & Research: <https://tostan.org/resources/evaluations-research/>

6.3 How the Communities Made Progress - A Common Pathway

The content of interviews and discussions with BG community members and other actors in their ecosystem are consistent with the structure and content of the Community Empowerment Program (CEP), which is designed to reinforce community capacity, build on existing strengths and values, and support community effort to generate improvements in well-being from within. The scaffolded curriculum in the classes, the experiential nature of the learning, the values deliberation, the training of the Community Management Committees (CMCs), and the organized diffusion provided a step-by-step process of reinforcing capacities.

Diagram 2: Components of common pathway are sequential, interlinked, and interdependent



Across communities and countries, analysis of the evidence pointed to a common pathway. It thus increased understanding on how the communities reached improvements in well-being and on the role of the CMCs in the process. It is essential to note that, although the components follow a sequential logic, one component does not cease to exist when the next begins and there are multiple feedback loops. The diagram on the left attempts to illustrate this concept in a simple way. In addition, the pathway includes the establishment of observable new roles and behaviors with publicly visible consequences that function within a holistic system. One component cannot be extracted from the system without affecting the results of the program. The eight major components identified are outlined below.

A. Visibility of Early Actions and their Results Stimulated Engagement - Early in the program's presence, the CMCs, in partnership with participants in the Tostan classes, assessed their physical environments and organized cleaning activities throughout their communities. This activity was part of realizing their vision to create a healthier community. Their highly visible actions (e.g., sweeping, garbage disposal) demonstrated to fellow community members that program participants cared about the well-being of the entire community and were widely praised. Several focus group participants across the countries described some initial resistance to the Tostan program in their communities, but all said that the resistance was overcome, in part, by seeing class participants and the CMC members as they worked to make the surroundings (e.g., roads, houses, mosques) cleaner and more sanitary.

B. Enhanced Relationships and Social Cohesion - As class participants and CMC members were visibly taking public actions in the communities, they were also improving their understanding of human rights principles and skills in communicating in ways that would increase understanding within and between families and with neighbors. Throughout their descriptions about how they interacted with others, the word "respect" occurred frequently in the context of recalibrating existing relationships. The reported effects of the new knowledge skills included deepened relationships between husbands and wives, among extended family members, and with neighbors ("feelings of brotherhood," "neighborliness," "community solidarity"). Relationships were frequently described with the word "peaceful." There was also evidence of decreased violence and greater social cohesion. Many reported a decrease in fighting (observed yelling and hitting) that had characterized daily interactions before the program. In contrast, at the end of the three years husbands and wives, families and neighbors prioritized dialogue at home, during public meetings, and in conflict resolution. Participants also reported that the more peaceful interactions helped them to more effectively organize activities to improve community well-being.

C. Inclusive, Transparent, and Democratic Practices Increased Participation - Community meetings and events were inclusive, and CMC members encouraged everyone to attend: young and old, women and men. The inclusive nature of the meetings served to increase engagement and to make visible the changes to improve well-being being proposed or already made. All could witness female and male members of the CMCs leading the meetings together. Many of the focus groups with other community members (OCMs) and leaders or officials could describe the CMCs' processes because the steps they took had been made public.

D. Increased Agency and Voice Transformed Women's Lives - The greater visibility of women, both in the classes and as CMC members, their public actions (e.g., cleaning, attending meetings, speaking at meetings), and their new communication skills led others to perceive them differently. This reinforced their own, new perception of themselves. The

violence against women lessened or disappeared as they won the respect of the men in their villages and as their influence in decisions taken in the home increased.

E. Continued Public Actions Increased Community Pride and Furthered Trust and Confidence - The visible, positive changes in the communities created pride, trust, and a sense of joyfulness among the class participants and the CMC members, and even among those who were not directly involved in the program. The successful completion of activities that visibly improved well-being paved the way for additional ones as class members learned more during their classes and shared the learning with others: women attended pre- and postnatal care visits; people increased the use of sanitary facilities and handwashing stations; women brought their children to be registered and vaccinated; and parents monitored children's school attendance. As class members and the CMC effectively carried out these observable activities, the new behaviors became increasingly normal. Moreover, they gained confidence in their abilities and courage to take on more difficult dialogues and challenges.

F. Engaging Leaders and Officials Heightened Community Awareness of Activities and Participation - CMCs engaged local leaders in their activities, and OCMs witnessed the leaders' support of the CMCs' activities. Their presence contributed to heightening the visibility of the CMCs' activities and increased the trustworthiness of those directly participating in the program. As the OCMs observed the positive outcomes and came to recognize why they were important to authorities that they trusted and respected, they increasingly supported the actions of the CMCs.

G. Accumulated Community Trust and Solidarity Led to Openness to Abandoning Harmful Practices - By the time the entrenched practices of corporal punishment, FGC, and child marriage arose in the curriculum, CMC members and class participants trusted the information provided by Tostan about the harm of those practices. They connected ending the practices to their vision of well-being and to human rights and made unwavering commitments to advocate for their abandonment in public and private forums. Because they knew that the community had witnessed and praised their activism in creating positive change, including their peaceful means of communication, they were more willing to risk being persistent, even courageous, in the face of sometimes strong resistance. The more that OCM had been informed ("sensitized"), had been included in dialogues, and had a chance to witness and understand community improvements, the more likely they were to join the CMCs' efforts to encourage the abandonment of the harmful practices.

H. Participants Disseminated Evidence-based Information Widely and Accurately - The accuracy of the reasoning by the participants and OCMs regarding the changes they had made or were making in their communities were noteworthy. They correctly recounted the information learned in Tostan classes and its application in practice. This included reasoning about initiatives related to the importance of sanitation (e.g., handwashing, use of sanitary facilities), school attendance (e.g., keeping girls in school), and gender equality (e.g., women

leading initiatives, speaking publicly, obtaining and paying back loans, and voting for the candidates of their choice). There were instances of misinformation in OCM focus groups about the harmful practices of corporal punishment, child marriage, and FGC (e.g., that FGC is a religious obligation). In all but one of them, however, another member of the focus group shared accurate information that balanced, if not corrected, the misinformed comments (e.g., that FGC is not a religious obligation). Knowledge acquired from the classes had been diffused into the community and outward among OCMs.

6.4 Reflections on Methodology

The BG evaluation provided an opportunity to apply methodological insights derived from carrying out previous evaluations of the CEP. It built on the 2017 internal evaluation of the Generational Change in Three Years Initiative, for which Tostan revised and used quantitative and qualitative data collection instruments (surveys and interview or focus group protocols) to identify the process of change within partner communities and to assess the effectiveness of CMC. This evaluation completes the final round of assessments using this version of the instruments. Future evaluations will apply a revised and improved methodology of data collection and analysis.

Future evaluations will reflect lessons learned during the BG evaluation. For example, Tostan will investigate how to increase sample sizes and apply more advanced statistical analysis to assess changes between baseline and endline data. Additionally, Tostan will provide further technical guidance to field teams collecting qualitative data and to those transcribing the interviews and focus groups. Moreover, it will further strengthen and streamline data collection and analysis, including through an improved use of digital software in order to increase automation and decrease the probability of human errors. The BG initiative evaluation also provided insights on ways to strengthen community-led monitoring and evaluation, and Tostan is committed to further work with communities to support their efforts.

The mixed-method approach has proven to be very valuable for measuring results, including changes in social norms. In particular, quantitative data concerning perspectives on social expectations provided important insights into changes in the acceptability of behaviors and into changes in the strength of the social norms that may have kept them in place. The qualitative data both validated the quantitative findings and provided an evidence-based narrative of how the changes took place. Given the major interest by both Tostan and its partners in how communities bring about sustainable improvements to their well-being that involve changes in social norms, Tostan will look to further refine its indicators and survey instruments. It will also seek external partnerships to conduct future evaluations with data collection carried out by trained individuals that are not part of or associated with Tostan so as to further minimize positive social bias.

These improvements will be part of a revision to the overall methodology for monitoring and evaluating the CEP, which Tostan is undertaking to reflect the revisions to the CEP since 2016. Recent CEP revisions include those stemming from the Strengthening Democracy and Citizen Engagement (SDCE) innovation that Tostan piloted and developed in 2018–22. The innovation engages and provides dedicated training to officials of local governments and reinforces their capacity to use resources toward improving well-being in the communities they represent. The institutional change and the strengthened interaction between communities and their elected officials is aligned and connected to community-led social change, further contributing to systemic and sustainable positive change.

7. CONCLUSION

The evaluation of the Breakthrough Generation (BG) Initiative provides major lessons for a deeper, more evidenced-based understanding of how best to support communities in resource-poor, mostly rural contexts in improving their individual and collective well-being. It goes further than previous Community Empowerment Program (CEP) evaluations in exploring the reinforcement of community capacities brought about by the program and its impact in enabling them to improve individual and collective well-being. The evidence indicates major improvements across priority areas and highlights the dramatic changes toward the abandonment of harmful practices. It also places new attention on the importance of the relational changes – including changes in gender roles – that begin to take place from the earliest days of the program and that continue, and are reinforced, over the course of three years. It makes more evident than past evaluations that these are considered by community members to be among the most important results and also appear to facilitate the achievement of results in other aspects of well-being.

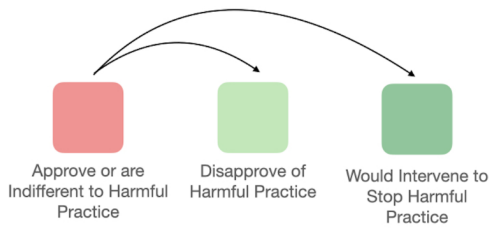
The finalization of this evaluation is concurrent with Tostan’s launch of its new 2023–2030 strategy, “In Partnership for Community Well-being.” Phase I, through 2025, is devoted to consolidation and co-creation with partners. It will serve to systematize the programmatic and methodological lessons from this evaluation in the revision of the CEP and to revise the monitoring and evaluation framework and instruments.

Through its decade-long commitment to monitoring and evaluation, as documented herein, Tostan has strengthened its programming and its understanding of how change happens when social norms are deeply embedded in communities. Tostan hopes that its monitoring and evaluation efforts have not only provided a solid springboard for the directions that Tostan has identified going forward but that they also contribute to strengthening the efforts of others engaged in supporting communities as they lead their own development and improve their well-being.

ANNEXES

A.1: Guide to visualizations

Success and improved well-being is when people who are Red in the Baseline move to Green in the Endline - the darker the green the better.



How we look at this:

	Country 1	Country 2	Country 3
Topic 1	█	█	█
Topic 2	█	█	█
Topic 3	█	█	█

HUGE TRANSFORMATION



Baseline Endline

This means that at the start many of the people supported a harmful practice or were indifferent, but were motivated to act to prevent it at the end

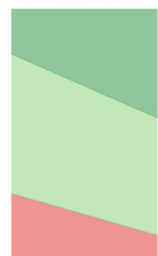
CONVERSION TO ACTION



Baseline Endline

This means that there was steady progress and while some people were motivated to act at the start, they increased substantially by the end

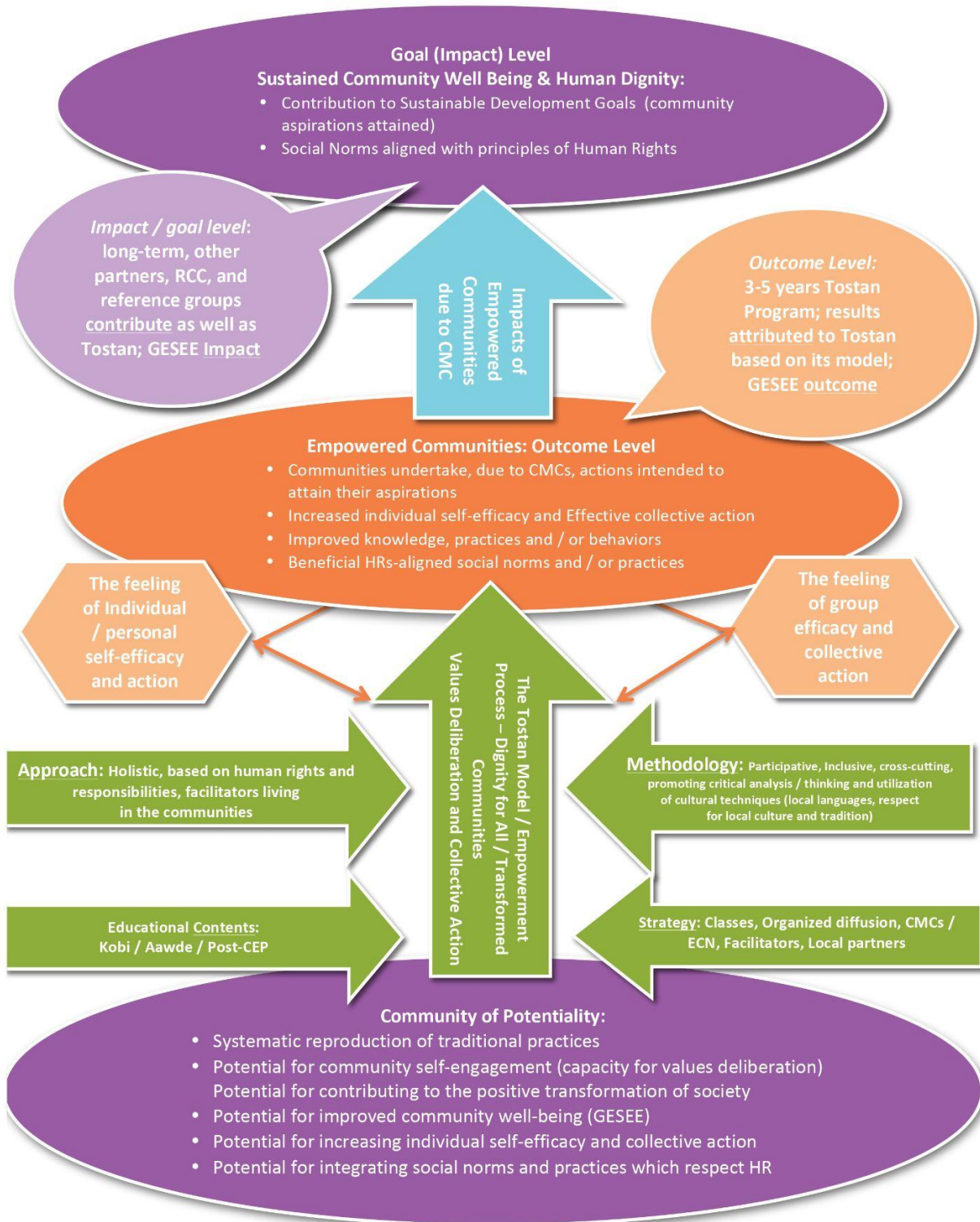
STEADY GAINS



Baseline Endline

This means that not too many people were indifferent at the start, but those who disapproved were motivated to act at the end

A.2: Tostan CEP Theory of Change (circa 2016)



A.3: Respondent demographic characteristics for quantitative segment of the evaluation

	Baseline		Endline	
	N	%	N	%
Sex				
Female	883	58%	1618	59%
Male	640	42%	1125	41%
Age				
15-29 years old	746	49%	1317	48%
30-45 years old	472	31%	192	7%
45 years old and above	305	20%	1234	45%
Education				
No education	1142	75%	2002	73%
Primary school	228	15%	494	18%
Secondaire 1e cycle	153	10%	247	9%
Higher education	0	0%	0	0%
Marital status				
Single	335	22%	576	21%
Divorced	15	1%	27	1%
Monogamous	640	42%	1125	41%
Polygamous	487	32%	933	34%
Widow or widower	46	3%	110	4%
Type of participant				
RSCM	1523	100%	1528	56%
Adopted learner	N/A	0%	580	21%
Participants	N/A	0%	635	23%
By country				

	Baseline		Endline	
	N	%	N	%
Sex				
Female	883	58%	1618	59%
Male	640	42%	1125	41%
Age				
15-29 years old	746	49%	1317	48%
30-45 years old	472	31%	192	7%
45 years old and above	305	20%	1234	45%
Education				
No education	1142	75%	2002	73%
Primary school	228	15%	494	18%
Secondaire 1e cycle	153	10%	247	9%
Higher education	0	0%	0	0%
Marital status				
Single	335	22%	576	21%
Divorced	15	1%	27	1%
Mali	372	24%	706	26%
Guinea	410	27%	763	28%
Guinea-Bissau	398	26%	724	26%
Gambia	343	23%	550	20%
Total	1523		2743	

A.4: Synthesis of country report themes from the qualitative segment of the evaluation

Theme	Gambia	Mali	Guinea	Guinea-Bissau
1	Communities become less violent as CMC member/class participants are active in conflict mediation	Community engagement	Community engagement	Community engagement
2	CMCs engage with their communities and adopted communities as facilitators of positive change for improved well-being	Partnerships with local leaders and public officials	Newfound and strengthened community solidarity	Newfound and strengthened community solidarity
3	CMC participants demonstrate their ability to take new actions based on evidence-based knowledge about health and hygiene	Newfound and strengthened community solidarity	Women's empowerment – increased voice and agency	Women's empowerment – increased voice and agency
4	Women now have a voice in the family, community meetings, and awareness raising activities.	Women's empowerment – increased voice and agency	Significantly improved health and hygiene	Significantly improved health and hygiene
5	Abandonment or decreased FGC, child marriage and corporal punishment	Significantly improved health and hygiene	Abandonment or decreased FGC, child marriage and corporal punishment	Abandonment or decreased FGC, child marriage and corporal punishment
6	CMCs and participants discussed their abandonment of child marriage in detail—which	Decreased cases of and intent to abandon harmful practices	Accurate reasoning for abandonment of FGC, child	Accurate reasoning for abandonment of FGC, child marriage,

	stood out, making it a separate theme.		marriage, and corporal punishment	and corporal punishment
7	Cited evidence-based information cited for abandoning FGC, child marriage, and violence against children	Resistance strategies: awareness raising and dialogue	Partnerships with local leaders and public officials	Partnerships with local leaders and public officials
8	CMCs form local partnerships with imams, village chiefs, health workers, schoolteachers, and local government authorities	NONE	NONE	Resistance strategies: dialogue, nonjudgmental information sharing, hard work