



SAMUEL CENTRE  
FOR SOCIAL  
CONNECTEDNESS

**GRANDMOTHER**  
**PROJECT** CHANGE THROUGH CULTURE

**The Grandmother Project's intervention in  
Vélingara: What are the positive outcomes for  
grandmothers that foster social connectedness?**

By Maude Jodoin Léveillé  
Social Connectedness Fellow 2021  
Samuel Centre for Social Connectedness  
[www.socialconnectedness.org](http://www.socialconnectedness.org)  
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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In a context where development organizations often place more emphasis on the well-being of young girls than older women, this report aims to highlight the positive impacts that the Grandmother Project's intervention in Vélingara has had on grandmothers. By focusing on an intergenerational approach that values the traditional cultural role of grandmothers, GMP has shown that it is possible to modify positively the communities' perception towards grandmothers, to improve grandmothers' self-confidence, to help grandmothers gain "modern" knowledge, to change grandmothers' attitudes toward existing cultural practices and adolescent girl behaviour, to strengthen the role of natural grandmother leaders, to increase solidarity between grandmothers, to enhance grandmothers' relationships within the family and the wider community, to expand grandmothers' civic participation, to enhance community's appreciation of grandmothers' role in transmitting positive cultural values to younger generations, and mostly, to extend their social connectedness.

After highlighting grandmother-focused findings from previous GMP-sponsored research, this report demonstrates that GMP's approach has been successful in reducing grandmothers' social isolation and increasing their social connectedness.

To build on GMP's work in Southern Senegal, this report recommends that there be increased recognition of the role of grandmothers as agents of change in African societies, by placing them at the center of all community development projects. It is therefore important to bring grandmothers together, but also to organize multigenerational activities that promote intergenerational dialogue and increase grandmothers' sense of belonging to the community. Such an approach will produce positive impacts for the entire community.

## INTRODUCTION

The Grandmother Project-Change Through Culture (GMP) is an American-Senegalese non-governmental organization (NGO) that was established in 2005. It intervenes in the department of Vélingara, located in the region of Kolda in southern Senegal. The mission of the GMP “is to improve the health and well-being of women, children and families in countries in the Global South by empowering communities to drive their own development by building on their own experience, resources and cultural realities.”<sup>1</sup> To do so, it promotes the idea that grandmothers are an underutilized resource that is “valued and actively contribute[s] to building healthy families and communities.”<sup>2</sup> By using grandmothers as advocates and agents for changing social norms, the organization has already demonstrated that its interventions have had positive effects on adolescent girls, such as reducing pregnancy and early marriage, abandoning female genital mutilation, and reducing school dropout among girls.<sup>3</sup>

But what about the grandmothers themselves? What are the positive outcomes of the Grandmother Project intervention in Vélingara for grandmothers? Based on 9 major research reports published in collaboration with the Grandmother Project, this report aims to highlight the various positive impacts of this NGO's activities directly for grandmothers. This report also seeks to illustrate how the Grandmother Project's intervention reduces social isolation and promotes social connectedness for grandmothers.

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<sup>1</sup> GMP, 2020a.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> IRH, 2019; IRH, 2020; Lulli, 2011a; Lulli, 2011b; Lulli, 2018; Lulli, 2020.

First, this report will present the socio-cultural context of Vélingara, in which the GMP intervention was created. The methodology used will then be detailed. Next, it will discuss 11 impacts that GMP's activities had on the grandmothers, namely, the modified communities' perceptions and attitudes towards grandmothers, their improved self-confidence, their new knowledges, the increased solidarity between grandmothers, the enhanced relationships within the family and with other community members, and their expanded implication in the community. Finally, this report will suggest recommendations and courses of action related to the results presented here.

## CONTEXT

### *Statistical portrait*

#### **Demographic distribution of the population**

In 2020, the total population of Senegal was 16.7 million people.<sup>4</sup> More than half of the population lives in rural areas (54.8%).<sup>5</sup> With 52.0% of the population aged 19 and under, this is a particularly young population.<sup>6</sup> Only 10.8% of the population is 50 and over, 5.6% is 60 and over, and solely 0.67% is 80 and over.<sup>7</sup>

#### **Map representing the 14 regions of Senegal<sup>8</sup>**

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<sup>4</sup> République du Sénégal, 2020.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Retrieved on: <https://amref.fr/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/?C=M;O=D>.



Senegal is a West African country subdivided into 14 administrative regions. The activities of the Grandmother Project are currently taking place in the Kolda region, which includes the municipality of Vélingara, located in Casamance, in southern Senegal. In 2020, the Kolda region represents 4.9% of the total population, or 822,003 people.<sup>9</sup> Its population is younger than in Senegal as a whole, while 57.0% of the population is under 19 years old. There is therefore a lower proportion of people aged 50 and over (8.9%), 60 and over (4.3%) and 80 and over (0.43 %).<sup>10</sup> For each of these age groups, men and women represent a similar proportion. The commune of Vélingara accounted for 42.0% of the region's population in 2018.<sup>11</sup> There is 71.6% of this population living in rural areas.<sup>12</sup>

### **Detailed map of the Kolda region<sup>13</sup>**

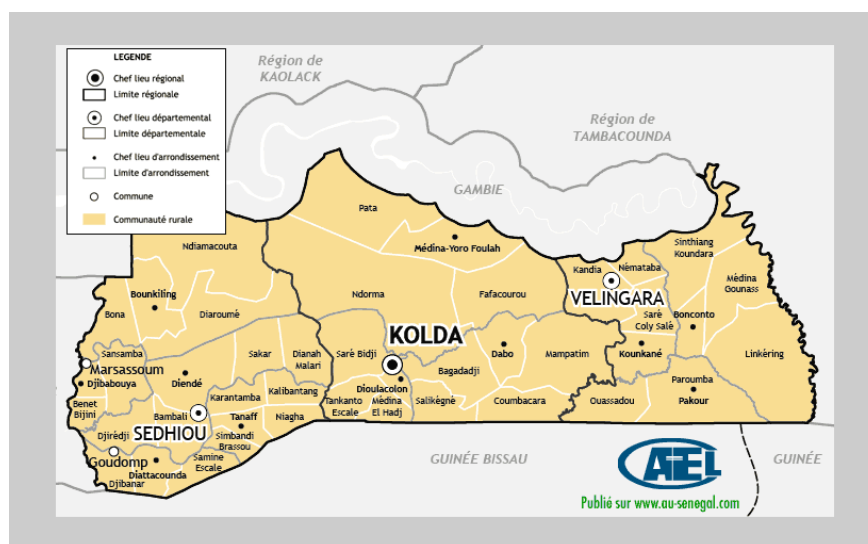
<sup>9</sup> République du Sénégal, 2020.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> ANSD, 2017-2018.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Retrieved on : <https://www.au-senegal.com/carte-administrative-de-la-region-de-kolda,035.html?lang=fr>.



Senegal has several ethnicities. The Pulaars are the second majority ethnic group (28.0% of women and 26.0% of men) following the Wolofs (40.2% of women and 38.6% of men).<sup>14</sup>

### Index of human development

In 2018, Senegal had a human development index of 0.514, which represents a low human development index.<sup>15</sup> Senegal ranked 166th out of 189 countries.<sup>16</sup> By comparison, the average index is 0.541 regionally for sub-Saharan Africa and 0.731 globally.<sup>17</sup>

### Literacy and education

In 2013, the literacy rate for individuals aged 10 and over was 45.4%.<sup>18</sup> This rate is higher for men (53.7%) than for women (37.7%).<sup>19</sup> In the Kolda region, just 25.8% of women are literate compared to 40.4% of men.<sup>20</sup> Across Senegal, the literacy rate decreases with age and is lower among the elderly, especially among women over 70.<sup>21</sup> For example, the literacy rate for women aged 90 to 94 is 3.3%, compared to 58.4% for girls aged 10 to 14.<sup>22</sup> Over time, we can see that girls'

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> UNDP, 2019.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> ANSD, 2014.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

education has been promoted in Senegal. During the 2017-2018 school year, the gross elementary school enrolment rate was 99.0% for girls compared to 92.9% for boys,<sup>23</sup> demonstrating higher enrolment among girls. However, the highest secondary school graduation rate (baccalaureate)<sup>24</sup> is higher for boys (29.7%) than for girls (23.1%).<sup>25</sup> Hence, the region has high school attrition with a gross enrolment rate of 95.9% in elementary, 39.8% in middle, and 23.6% in high school in 2018.<sup>26</sup>

### **Marital status and fertility**

Marriage, particularly among women, is prevalent among the 15-49 age group and reaches 65.3%.<sup>27</sup> Yet, only 38.4% of men in the same age group are married.<sup>28</sup> There are up to 60.5% of men in this group who are single, compared to 29.8% of women.<sup>29</sup> The Kolda region has the highest proportion (34.7%) of women aged 15-49 who are in a polygamous union and living with a co-wife in the country.<sup>30</sup> Also notable is that within the Kolda region, the median age of first marriage is 17 years.<sup>31</sup> This phenomenon is often discussed in the press.<sup>32</sup> Early marriages are a way for the community to prevent out-of-wedlock pregnancies that are perceived as a serious dishonour.<sup>33</sup>

Nationwide in Senegal, 7% of girls aged 15 to 17 have started their reproductive life, meaning that they have had a live birth or are pregnant with their first child.<sup>34</sup> The Kolda region is the third region with the highest percentage of girls aged 15 to 19 who have already started their reproductive life (29.8%).<sup>35</sup> This statistic is strongly associated with educational attainment and the level of economic well-being.<sup>36</sup> Among all women aged 15-49, 17.9% used a modern contraceptive method.

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> The baccalaureate is the last diploma of secondary education, prior to university.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> ANSD and ICF, 2019.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> ANSD and ICF, 2019; IRH, 2019.

<sup>32</sup> Lulli, 2011b.

<sup>33</sup> IRH, 2019

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> ANSD, 2019

<sup>36</sup> ANSD, 2019; ANSD and ICF, 2019



Among women aged 15-49 in union, this figure increases to 25.5%.<sup>37</sup>

### **Female genital mutilation (FGM)**

Although *Law 99-05* prohibits and punishes the practice of FGM, FGM is still practiced. In 2017, 24.0% of women aged 15-49 were cut.<sup>38</sup> This represents a slight decrease from 2010-2011 (25.7%) and 2005 (28.2%).<sup>39</sup> The practice varies by ethnicity, with up to 49.3% of Pulaar women being cut. Kolda is among the six regions with the highest proportion of women who have been cut (63.6%).<sup>40</sup> Most women undergo the practice before the age of five (79.6%).<sup>41</sup> Smaller proportions are cut between the ages of 5 and 9 (12.1%), 10 and 14 (4.3%), and even after their fifteenth birthday (0.7%).<sup>42</sup>

### **Gender relations and violence**

Whether in the area of health care decisions, decisions on major household purchases, or decisions on family visits, it is the male spouse who often decides alone, in 70.8%, 60.0%, and 57.1% of cases, respectively.<sup>43</sup> However, the higher a woman's level of education, the more she participates in all three decisions, either alone, or together with her husband or partner. There are 21.4% of women with secondary education participating, compared to 16.1% of women with primary education and 11.3% with no education.<sup>44</sup>

Gender relations are often marked not just by inequality within household decision making, but also, in certain instances, outright gender-based violence. The Kolda region is among the five regions where the proportion of women aged 15 to 49 who have experienced physical violence since the age of 15 is the highest, reaching 33.4%.<sup>45</sup> The proportion of women who experienced physical violence

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<sup>37</sup> ANSD and ICF, 2019

<sup>38</sup> ANSD, 2019

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

during pregnancy is particularly high in the Kolda region (7.0%), which ranks second among the 14 regions of Senegal.<sup>46</sup> Across Senegal, it is in most cases, the spouse/current partner (61.9%) who is cited as responsible for these acts of sexual violence.<sup>47</sup> Overall, the percentage of women aged 15-49 who have experienced domestic violence (emotional, physical, or sexual) at any time reaches 37% in the Kolda region, the second highest rate in the country.<sup>48</sup>

### ***Traditional place of elders and grandmothers***

The Sub-Saharan African societies, and those of the Fulani<sup>49</sup> communities of southern Senegal, are deeply hierarchical according to the age of their members.<sup>50</sup> There is a right given to elders,<sup>51</sup> which give older men and women a superior status vis-à-vis, their younger counterparts.<sup>52</sup> This relation of seniority between the generations is a social institution that associates age with authority.<sup>53</sup> In a logic of reciprocity, elders are given a privileged status for all they have done for the community.<sup>54</sup> In a society where unequal gender relations also shape social relationships, this gives grandmothers a special position compared to younger women, because they can use their right as elders to influence younger men's decision-making processes within the community.

In Halpular societies of southern Senegal, grandmothers have traditionally fulfilled several roles. As explained to students in a booklet on the roles of the elderly in African societies,<sup>55</sup> grandmothers accomplish many activities within both the family the community. They teach cultural values and traditions; they are in charge of the care of the children; they participate in the upbringing of children; they guide young married women; and they contribute to the well-being of their

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Fulani is used as a synonym for Peul, Pular and Halpular, who all speak Pulaar.

<sup>50</sup> Antoine, 2007; Dial, 2018

<sup>51</sup> Gruénais, 1985.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Attané, 2007.

<sup>54</sup> Lamesse, 2013.

<sup>55</sup> GMP, 2017.

community.<sup>56</sup> They thus represent a valued source of knowledge that they seek to transmit to the younger generations.

However, over the past decades, we have observed a gradual loss of the roles held by grandmothers, and a loss of the traditional values of respect towards them. The privileged relationship that existed between grandmothers and young girls has weakened following the interruption of the dialogue between the generations.<sup>57</sup> In a study prior to the establishment of the GMP in the commune of Némataba, the majority of the interviewees declared that young girls did not listen to and did not respect the grandmothers.<sup>58</sup>

Several researchers have been interested in the factors that have contributed to this devaluation of traditional cultural values towards elders. The various studies carried out in the GMP intervention areas have also attempted to explain this depreciation of the role of grandmothers in communities and families.

### ***Causes of the devaluation of traditional cultural values***<sup>59</sup>

#### **Modernization and westernization**

To explain this loss of traditional cultural values, Lulli<sup>60</sup> and Morgan cite the “modernity and the increasing influence of western cultures.”<sup>61</sup> Western values are mostly promoted and broadcasted through television and internet, but also through emigrants, who influence the imagination of youth.<sup>62</sup> These cultural transformations “have progressively isolated elders and diminished their influence.”<sup>63</sup> By spending more time watching television, young people spend less time with their elders. All of this creates a “breakdown in communication between the generations,” which ultimately contributes to “a

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 4-5.

<sup>57</sup> Lulli, 2018.

<sup>58</sup> Balde, 2017; Lulli, 2018.

<sup>59</sup> See Appendix 1 for a visual illustration of this section.

<sup>60</sup> Lulli, 2011b.

<sup>61</sup> Morgan, 2021: 4.

<sup>62</sup> Lulli, 2011b; Newman, 2017.

<sup>63</sup> IRH, 2019: 12.

loss of identity, traditional values, and knowledge.”<sup>64</sup> This observation is shared by several authors who use modernization theory to explain the decline in the status of seniors in the 21st century.<sup>65</sup>

### **Modern school system**

School is also a place where young people are imbued with modernity. As the IRH explains, “educational programs that ignore cultural values, new technologies, and social media all contribute to a growing rift between adolescents, adults, and elders.”<sup>66</sup> Both modern and traditional elements must be included in the scholar curriculum to reconcile the community with the modern school, and adolescents with the traditional knowledge held by elders.

For parents and grandparents interviewed by Lulli,<sup>67</sup> they sensed that the school system was solely responsible for educating young people. Then, they have gradually withdrawn from the education of youth. This creates a vicious circle, wherein each individual is less and less involved in the relationship with the other generation.<sup>68</sup> In this sense, schooling can be considered a factor that contributes to widening the gap between children and the elderly.<sup>69</sup>

### **International development projects**

This disengagement of elders, this breakdown in intergenerational dialogue, and this loss of traditional cultural values has only been accentuated by the work of international organizations in southern Senegal.<sup>70</sup> Most international organizations that focus on empowering youth think in terms of the nuclear family,<sup>71</sup> *without* including grandparents and other community members in their theory of change. Nonetheless, in a collectivist society, the real empowerment of young people is only

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<sup>64</sup> Morgan, 2021: 5.

<sup>65</sup> Baya and Laliberté, 2007; Macia et al., 2019; Maïga and Baya, 2014 Manor, 2020; Omobowale, 2014; Omobowale and Akanle, 2017; Powell, 2014.

<sup>66</sup> IRH, 2019: 7.

<sup>67</sup> Lulli, 2011a ; Lulli, 2011b.

<sup>68</sup> Lulli, 2011b.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Lulli, 2011b; Morgan, 2021.

<sup>71</sup> Morgan, 2021.

possible through the involvement of *all* members of the community.<sup>72</sup> There is a need to think beyond individual empowerment and promote family and community aspects of youth empowerment.

### ***Growing marginalization and social isolation of grandmothers***

The intergenerational divide and the loss of respect towards the elders lead to the growing marginalization and social isolation of grandmothers. As reported by the IRH, “marginalization [of grandmothers was first a purely biological reality” where it was “considered that as part of the life cycle, they had made their lives.”<sup>73</sup>

Another consideration of note is that within Senegal, grandmothers are traditionally associated with witchcraft, which makes them feared by children.<sup>74</sup> As potential witches, they could impair the physical and mental health of people.<sup>75</sup> Conforming to traditional beliefs, their preferred targets would be members of their own family. Then, according to the IRH, “marginalization started within the family,”<sup>76</sup> because their own family members are afraid of them and keep their distance from them. This results in “intra-family isolation.”<sup>77</sup> Thereafter, being accused of witchcraft has led grandmothers to keep their own distance from other members of society and especially children, which “has resulted in self-marginalization.”<sup>78</sup> As we explained earlier, reducing social contacts deepens the generational divide<sup>79</sup> and leads to deeper misunderstandings. Therefore, the accusation of witchcraft is an important source of social exclusion for grandmothers, which add up to the devaluation of their social role, linked to modernization, westernization, schooling and international development projects. Elders, and especially grandmothers, are then faced with a current context that excludes them from family and community spheres, thereby increasing their social isolation.

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<sup>72</sup> Cajete, 2016; IRH, 2019; Ncube, 2010; Omobowale, 2014; van Breda, 2019.

<sup>73</sup> IRH, 2019: 50.

<sup>74</sup> IRH, 2019; Lulli, 2011b.

<sup>75</sup> IRH, 2019.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid: 13.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid: 51.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid: 13.

<sup>79</sup> Uhlenberg and Hammil, 1998 ; Wright-Bevans *et al.*, 2020.

### ***The Grandmother Project's response to this context***

In the face of this degraded social context, the GMP wished to intervene to restore the traditional cultural role of grandmothers, which in turn would ideally have positive effects on the community as a whole, and particularly on adolescent girls, a group particularly targeted by international development imperatives.<sup>80</sup> As detailed in the statistical portrait, adolescent girls in the Kolda region, and particularly in the commune of Vélingara, face a high proportion of early marriages, early onset of childbearing, female genital mutilation, and a high school dropout rate. The GMP intervention is particularly sensitive to these realities that affect gender relations and opportunities for young women.

By embracing an intergenerational approach, GMP recognizes the benefits of educating the elderly as well, and not just younger people as most programs do. For adolescents, it is not “natural” and socially accepted to show the ropes to their parents and elders. However, in the opposite situation, it is quite natural and in the order of things for grandmothers to pass their knowledge on to adolescents and their mothers, but also to intervene with their son on the behalf of their granddaughters and stepdaughters. In this logic, educating grandmothers means educating the whole society including adolescent girls and their parents. Thus, grandmothers represent a stream of knowledge being transmitted to various members of the community.

Although all grandmothers were involved in some GMP activities, other activities targeted only grandmothers who were considered to be community leaders. Targeting grandmother leaders is based on the idea that these leaders have influence over their peers, and that when armed with the right understanding, they will influence their peers in a positive way.

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<sup>80</sup> Equipop, 2021.

The programs developed by the GMP are distinguished by their emphasis on the local culture of communities in which they take place. According to the GMP team interviewed by Quiroz Saavedra, taking into account the cultural context in which communities live “is a distinctive and innovative feature that constitutes an essential condition for the success of their programs.”<sup>81</sup>

The GMP is currently active in conducting four main programs, which are 1) Girls’ Holistic Development Program, 2) Integrating Positive Cultural Values into Schools, 3) Capacity Building of Other NGOS, 4) Maternal and Child Health and Nutrition.<sup>82</sup> In the framework of this work, we will focus on the activities and impacts related to the Girls’ Holistic Development Program (GHD) and to a lesser extent the component of “Integrating Positive Cultural Values into Schools, with grandmothers serving as a special resource for teachers to help promote an education that reflects local values and culture inside and outside the classroom.”<sup>83</sup> In fact, the Girls’ Holistic Development program was the most funded program of the GMP in 2020, accounting for 63.9% of community-based program expenditures.<sup>84</sup>

### **Girls’ Holistic Development Program**

The GHD program was first implemented between 2008 and 2011 through a partnership between GMP and World Vision. By 2020, nearly 2,000 grandmothers and more than 10,000 students had participated in GMP-led activities, in a total of 77 villages.<sup>85</sup> This program has two main objectives: 1) to promote positive cultural practices and values that contribute to the development and education of girls, and 2) to promote changes in cultural norms, with a focus on addressing FGM, early marriage, corporal punishment, and other forms of violence that do not promote the development and education of girls.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Quiroz Saavedra, 2020: 7.

<sup>82</sup> GMP, 2020b.

<sup>83</sup> Morgan, 2021: 3.

<sup>84</sup> GMP, 2020c.

<sup>85</sup> Morgan, 2021.

<sup>86</sup> Quiroz Saavedra, 2020: 17.

In order to participate in the holistic development of girls, grandmothers' traditional cultural role is supported while grandmothers are trained and encouraged to take action to, among other things, "bloc[k] child marriages planned by fathers, increas[e] family support for girls' education, and mobiliz[e] their communities to abandon female genital mutilation."<sup>87</sup> In other words, the Girls' Holistic Development approach "involves using grandmothers as agents of change in order to bring about certain changes related to adolescent health and well-being."<sup>88</sup> This participatory approach further "catalyze[s] social mobilization of community leaders and groups"<sup>89</sup> beyond grandmothers' intervention.

The GHD program includes many different activities, including: "Intergenerational forums; Days of Praise of Grandmothers; All women forums; Grandmother-teacher workshops; Under-the-tree participatory learning sessions on GHD topics with girls, mothers, and grandmothers; Grandmother Leadership Training; Discussion groups with boys and men; Days of Dialogue and Solidarity."<sup>90</sup> The main component of this program on which the results of this report are based is the training sessions under the tree for grandmother leaders and the intergenerational forums.

### *Under-the-tree for grandmother leaders*

The under the tree training sessions for grandmother leaders is an intervention that has been particularly studied by researcher Francesca Lulli,<sup>91</sup> and thus has contributed strongly to the findings presented in this report. The 'under the tree' of the GHD approach has been initiated since 2016, and consists of 4 training modules of 2 days each, for a total of 8 days of training spread over 6 months with small groups of 10 grandmother leaders.<sup>92</sup> Meetings were held by the GMP community

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<sup>87</sup> Aibel, 2020: 14.

<sup>88</sup> IRH, 2019: 13.

<sup>89</sup> IRH, 2020: 12.

<sup>90</sup> Morgan, 2021: 8.

<sup>91</sup> Lulli, 2018.

<sup>92</sup> Aibel, 2010; Lulli, 2018.



mobilizers with all the grandmothers in each village before the training began, allowing them to identify those who were natural leaders and therefore the most likely to share the content of the training with all the grandmothers once they return to the village.<sup>93</sup>

The objectives of these activities were “to strengthen the knowledge and leadership role of grandmothers, building on their traditional advisory role, to promote improved adolescent girls’ health and well-being, with specific emphasis on early/forced marriage (EFM), teen pregnancy and female genital mutilation (FGM).”<sup>94</sup> The training intended “to increase the capacity of [grandmother] leaders, both individually and collectively, to take action within their own communities to protect and promote girls’ well-being.”<sup>95</sup> Five themes were addressed during the training sessions: 1) self-confidence of grandmothers in their leadership role, 2) “solidarity and understanding between grandmothers,” 3) “physical and psychological development of adolescents,” 4) “effective communication skills with teenage girls,” and 5) “collaboration with other community actors (traditional leaders, religious leaders, teachers, health workers, etc.) to take action in favor of girls, and children in general.”<sup>96</sup>

## METHODOLOGY

The findings presented in this report were compiled from several previous research reports that sought to evaluate GMP's activities. I read, annotated relevant information, and reorganized these passages and findings into themes that addressed the research questions presented above. Newman used a similar methodology when writing her report entitled "Evidence Synthesis Review of The Grandmother Project's "Girls' Holistic Development" Programme.”<sup>97</sup>

This report is based on the results of 9 previous major research reports, 5 of which report on unpublished data and 4 of which report on an amalgam of previously collected and published data.

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<sup>93</sup> Lulli, 2018.

<sup>94</sup> GMP, 2016: 1.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid: 2.

<sup>97</sup> Newman, 2017.

Here are the four meticulously read and analyzed reports that themselves restore previously published data:

- *“Empowering Grandmother Leaders to Support and Protect Girls: an experience from Senegal,”* by Judi Aubel in 2020;
- *“Lessons Learned Report. Grandmother leaders: A resource to improve the lives of adolescent girls,”* by GMP in 2016;
- *“Catalyzing Change for Girls: Grandmothers Support Girls’ Holistic Development,”* by Sarah Morgan in 2021;
- *“Evidence Synthesis Review of The Grandmother Project’s “Girls’ Holistic Development,”* by Anneke Newman in 2017;

The following is a brief summary of the methodologies employed by the reports that present original data collection:<sup>98</sup>

- *“Grandmothers Project - Change through Culture: Program for Girls’ Holistic Development: Qualitative Research Report,”* by IRH in 2019.

It was “an endline qualitative study that sought to understand the contextual characteristics and mechanisms of change that influence whether and how GHD achieves its objectives related to child marriage, early pregnancy, FGM/C, and girls’ education.”<sup>99</sup> In 4 of the 7 villages targeted by the GHD program, a total of 20 focus groups and 48 individual interviews were conducted with very young adolescent girls, grandmother leaders, parents of adolescent girls and community leaders. As explained by the IRH, “the data analysis focused on understanding the processes of change

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<sup>98</sup> See « Appendix 3 » for a summary.

<sup>99</sup> IRH, 2019: 7.

described by the interviewees to determine the various factors, interactions, and conditions that contributed to these changes.”<sup>100</sup>

- *“Grandmothers Project - Change through Culture: Program for Girls’ Holistic Development: Quantitative Research Report,”* by IRH in 2020.

After completing a qualitative data collection, the objective of this second study “was to quantitatively assess the impact of the GHD intervention on expected programmatic outcomes including: 1) target [very young adolescent] girl behaviors; and 2) key influences for those behaviors among [very young adolescent] girls, their caregivers, and grandmothers.”<sup>101</sup> Those behaviors consist of “early marriage, adolescent pregnancy, girls’ schooling and retention, and FGM.”<sup>102</sup>

The data aimed to compare individual’s answers from 7 intervention villages to 7 non-intervention villages, after 18 months of activities. Questionnaires were administered to 297 individuals in the intervention villages and 503 individuals in the non-intervention villages. In the intervention and non-intervention villages, 161 and 238 adolescent girls; 80 and 125 caregivers; and 56 and 140 grandmothers were respectively interviewed. Vignettes were used to elicit responses to the survey.

- *“Les mariages et les grossesses précoces diminuent grâce aux efforts conjoints des enseignants et des grand-mères. Projet de Développement Holistique des Filles,”* by Francesca Lulli in 2011(b).

During this qualitative study, 451 people from 12 villages involved in the GMP were interviewed in groups divided by gender and age, involving a total of 63 elders, 83 grandmothers, 94 mothers of adolescents, 104 adolescent girls, 84 adolescent boys, 21 teachers and 2 matrons. The

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<sup>100</sup> IRH, 2019: 20.

<sup>101</sup> IRH, 2020: 12.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

themes of the interviews concerned the assessment of the state of the phenomenon of early marriage and pregnancy, as well as the representations, attitudes, and practices that people say they use in relation to these phenomena. Most of the questions were asked in group interviews, but those concerning the age of marriage and the state of early pregnancy in the villages following the project intervention were asked individually to each person in the interview groups. The discussions that took place in the Intergenerational Forums were also transcribed and analyzed.

- “« *Sous l’arbre – l’Éducation participative pour les Grand-mères Leaders* » *Une étude sur l’approche de renforcer et amplifier le rôle de Grand-mères pour le bien-être des jeunes filles et l’action communautaire,*” by Francesca Lulli in 2018.

This study aimed to evaluate the results of the training of grandmother leaders through the under-the-tree component. Individual semi-structured interviews with 51 of the 62 grandmothers trained were conducted in the 9 villages targeted by the project. In addition, 32 young girls and 29 notables from the same villages were interviewed in separate small groups of 3 to 6 people. These focus groups were designed to obtain the perceptions of adolescent girls and community leaders regarding changes in the grandmothers' behaviors, knowledge, and attitudes after the training.

- “*Étude sur les effets du programme de Développement Holistique des Filles de Grandmother Project – Changement par la Culture,*” by Francesca Lulli in 2020

The two objectives of this report were: 1) to identify changes in men's and women's attitudes in terms of women's self-confidence and their ability to speak out, and 2) to identify changes in gender relations across the three generations (elders, adults, adolescents). To do this, 253 people were interviewed: 78 grandmothers, 53 mothers of children and adolescents, 70 young girls, 35 men and notables, and 27 adolescents boys. Once again, homogeneous groups in terms of age and gender were formed to facilitate the collection of these qualitative data.

## IMPACTS ON GRANDMOTHERS

The imperatives of the international aid context tend to emphasize the impacts that the Grandmother Project has had on adolescent girls, leaving the impacts on grandmothers in the background. The outcomes for grandmothers are then considered by the development practitioners and the international donors as desirable, but not the most significant element. Because they are located at the intersection of youth and gender themes, young girls are at the heart of many development goals and programs.<sup>103</sup> Nevertheless, it is also important to recognize the positive outcomes on grandmothers as an end in itself for development project.

Hence, this section of the report focuses on the effects produced by the GMP on the grandmothers and highlights the benefits of designing and implementing programs including elders, and especially grandmothers. Thus, promoting the right to belong<sup>104</sup> for elderly people should be a sufficient development objective for NGOs. The 11 leading impacts on grandmothers will be developed in the following section as shown in Appendix 3.

### ***1- Modifying the communities' perceptions and attitudes towards grandmothers***

As cited by the IRH, “the revival of [positive] traditions through elders, and in particular, grandmothers, is a center piece of the theory of change developed by GMP.”<sup>105</sup> One of the premises of GMP intervention thus was “to resocialize the grandmothers by changing the image associated with them and seeing them as resourceful people, capable of transmitting knowledge and values which the adolescents and all other segments of society could build on in order to drive change by and for the community.”<sup>106</sup> Positioning grandmothers “as change agents” in the community contributed to reshaping the perception of community members of the grandmothers.<sup>107</sup> For example,

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<sup>103</sup> EQUIPOP, 2021.

<sup>104</sup> Samuel, 2019.

<sup>105</sup> IRH, 2019: 23.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid: 44.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid: 23.

young people interviewed by Lulli<sup>108</sup> now believe that grandmothers and grandfathers are of great importance, because of their extensive life experience, rather than seeing them as “outdated.”<sup>109</sup>

While grandmothers used to be accused of witchcraft, these misconceptions are now less prominent. The IRH<sup>110</sup> explains that girls now feel comfortable around grandmothers at night, which is the time of the day where witches could transform themselves. Spending time with grandmothers at night is thus proof that they no longer associate grandmothers with witches.<sup>111</sup> The data collected by Lulli also showed that men now consult, listen to, and value more the opinions of grandmothers in the family and community.<sup>112</sup>

The IRH quantitative study also concluded that “there is clear indication that grandmothers’ position in the community has expanded,” with 87.5% of grandmothers in intervention villages feeling valued by their communities, compared to only 60.4% in non-intervention villages.<sup>113</sup> As for Morgan, she reports that 100% of grandmothers in intervention villages “feel appreciated by their communities,” while it’s the case in only 53% of them in non-intervention villages.<sup>114</sup> Quiroz Saavedra<sup>115</sup> also arrived at the conclusion that grandmothers feel more valued and useful than before.

In short, since the intervention of GMP, various studies have shown that the perceptions and attitudes of communities towards grandmothers have changed positively. Their general voice in the community is now more valued, their role as promoters and protectors of girls is recognized and their role as transmitters of positive cultural values to young people is more appreciated. Overall, the intervention of GMP has generated more respect for elders, notably grandmothers.<sup>116</sup> A large majority

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<sup>108</sup> Lulli, 2011b.

<sup>109</sup> IRH, 2019.

<sup>110</sup> IRH, 2019.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Lulli, 2020.

<sup>113</sup> IRH, 2020.

<sup>114</sup> Morgan, 2021: 13.

<sup>115</sup> Quiroz Saavedra, 2020.

<sup>116</sup> Newman, 2017.

of grandmothers mention this increase in respect and consideration shown towards them from other members of the community.<sup>117</sup>

## ***2- Improving their self-confidence***

Being more valued and respected by the community has contributed to improving grandmothers' self-confidence. All of the grandmothers interviewed by Lulli affirm that their self-confidence has been strengthened by the GMP's activities.<sup>118</sup> They are now able to express themselves publicly in family and in community.<sup>119</sup> Similarly, World Vision Senegal's external mid-term evaluation<sup>120</sup> "documented how grandmothers [...] felt more confident expressing their opinions in public,"<sup>121</sup> illustrating increased self-confidence.

## ***3- Acquire new knowledge on "modern" and new ideas on Girls' Holistic Development***

As mentioned earlier, the under-the-tree component of the GHD approach disseminates new ideas and stimulates discussions with grandmothers around issues related to girls' health and well-being such as puberty-related changes, early/forced marriage, teenage pregnancy, female genital mutilation, and girls' school attendance.<sup>122</sup> Through GMP's intervention, the grandmothers were introduced to new ideas and "modern" knowledge. These activities increased grandmothers' knowledge on all aspects of GHD. This has enabled grandmothers to become a particularly valued source of knowledge on these issues, as they combined this "modern" knowledge with their life experiences.

During the GHD program, grandmothers also gained crucial communication and negotiation skills. Almost all grandmothers found these new skills, related to the methodology of dialogue and listening, useful because they have learned to approach people, in a family and community context.

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<sup>117</sup> Lulli, 2018.

<sup>118</sup> Lulli, 2018.

<sup>119</sup> Lulli, 2020.

<sup>120</sup> World Vision Senegal, 2009.

<sup>121</sup> Newman, 2017: 16.

<sup>122</sup> GMP, 2016.

<sup>123</sup> Their ability to listen to children and adolescent girls has been strengthened by the program by providing “grandmothers with new methods of play and of dialogue to gain their trust.”<sup>124</sup>

In brief, the GMP has an impact on grandmothers’ knowledge of the components of girls’ holistic development and their ability to communicate more easily with younger women.

#### ***4- Changing grandmothers’ attitudes toward existing cultural practices and adolescent girl behaviour***

Several studies have shown that grandmothers’ attitudes towards existing cultural practices, such as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), child marriage, early pregnancies and girl’s education, evolved in a positive sense during the implementation of the GMP’s activities.

Firstly, grandmothers assert being better informed about sexual and reproductive health issues regarding girls,<sup>125</sup> as well as being more knowledgeable led to changes in their attitudes toward early marriage, early pregnancy, FGM and girl’s education.<sup>126</sup> About two third of grandmothers declared a shift of their attitude relating to “when girls should marry (67.9%), how long girls should stay in school (66.1%), when girls should have their first child (64.3%), and FGM (64.3%).”<sup>127</sup> Intergenerational forums, under-the-tree sessions, days of grandmother solidarity, and teacher-grandmother discussions are the activities having specifically led to a change in their attitudes as stated by more than half of the grandmothers surveyed.<sup>128</sup> These results reveal that when thoughtfully included in development programs, grandmothers showed “such openness to change.”<sup>129</sup>

Secondly, the change in their attitude towards cultural norms prompts grandmothers to intervene in the community relating to these matters. They play an intermediary role to create behavior change within families by negotiating a shift of social practices on behalf of adolescent girls.

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<sup>123</sup> Lulli, 2018.

<sup>124</sup> IRH, 2019: 24.

<sup>125</sup> IRH, 2019; Morgan, 2021.

<sup>126</sup> IRH, 2020.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid: 48.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> IRH, 2019: 45.



For example, in villages targeted by the GMP, 71% of grandmothers now advise *not* to cut their daughters, compared to 49% of grandmothers in villages without the intervention of the GMP.<sup>130</sup> In intervention villages, the proportion of grandmothers who would report that they would support a girl to delay her marriage was significantly higher (69,6%) in intervention villages than in comparison villages (59,7%).<sup>131</sup>

In addition to intermediating directly with members of their family, grandmother leaders have been expanding their role in the community, and gathering members of their community to act in support of girls' well-being. After their training with the GMP, grandmother leaders have organized "meetings with village chiefs, grandmothers, teachers and boys to discuss girls' development and protection, including [early/forced marriage] EFM, teen pregnancy and girls' schooling."<sup>132</sup> These community initiatives have a larger impact on the decreasing of the practices of FGM, child marriage, early pregnancy and girl school dropout.

Overall, there has been a documented shift in grandmothers' attitudes toward harmful cultural practices concerning adolescent girls (e.g., FGM, early marriage) that has translated into a personal willingness to change these practices and to mobilize other family and community members to change their behaviors with regard to these issues.

### ***5- Strengthening the role of natural grandmother leaders***

Several activities organized by the GMP brought together natural grandmother leaders, that is, grandmothers who were identified by a participatory process as being the most capable of influencing their community and passing on the knowledge they had acquired. It is thus important to highlight the specific contribution that has been made by grandmother leaders versus grandmothers in general.

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<sup>130</sup> IRH, 2020.

<sup>131</sup> IRH, 2020.

<sup>132</sup> GMP, 2016: 13.

Due to their increased self-confidence and inclusion in the community, studies showed that almost all natural grandmother leaders who have participated in GMP activities “now feel more empowered”<sup>133</sup> and more confident<sup>134</sup> as leaders. All the grandmothers identify changes in their role in family and community since they no longer hesitate to get involved, to give their point of view and to take initiatives.<sup>135</sup> For these reasons among others, all the grandmothers greatly appreciated the leadership training.<sup>136</sup>

Furthermore, the traditional role of grandmothers as community leaders and advisors has been reinforced. The grandmother leaders surveyed by Lulli<sup>137</sup> say their perspective is more solicited when a problem to be solved arises, and their opinion is listened to with attention and respect by the other community actors.<sup>138</sup>

As empowered community leaders and advisors, natural grandmother leaders are now an integral part of the community, and thus feel less isolated and more connected.

## ***6- Increasing solidarity between grandmothers***

The quantitative research report conducted by the Institute for Reproductive Health of Georgetown University<sup>139</sup> reveals that 92% of grandmothers feel “that there is more solidarity between them than in the past.”<sup>140</sup> Prior to the IRH evaluation, all grandmothers questioned by Lulli<sup>141</sup> acknowledged that solidarity has increased between them, and that they see each other and discuss community problems together much more frequently than before to seek solutions. Hence, grandmothers state that they have a closer relationship with their peer grandmothers, that they visit each other, and discuss children's, village and school issues more often.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> GMP, 2016: 13.

<sup>134</sup> IRH, 2020.

<sup>135</sup> Lulli, 2018.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Lulli, 2018; Newman, 2017.

<sup>139</sup> IRH, 2020.

<sup>140</sup> Aubel, 2020: 13.

<sup>141</sup> Lulli, 2018.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

As we will see in a later section, many grandmothers got involved in diverse community initiatives after their participation in the GMP. Among those who engaged in community initiatives, 88% did so with other grandmothers.<sup>143</sup> This demonstrates that their collaboration flourished beyond the scope of GMP activities. The increased solidarity among grandmothers extends beyond the group of the ones who participated in GMP activities, the grandmother leaders. In fact, three quarters of them share the contents of the training with the other grandmothers, and involve them in collective initiatives.<sup>144</sup>

In short, exchanges and solidarity between grandmothers have increased following the implementation of the GMP. Although improving solidarity between grandmothers is an objective in itself, and constitutes an important resource, which contributes to their social connectedness, this solidarity has further benefits for the whole community.

### ***7- Enhancing grandmothers' role and influence in the family***

It was not only the relationships between grandmothers that have been reinforced during the GHD approach, but also the relationships of grandmothers within their families including adolescent girls, girls' mothers and fathers, and even, to a lesser extent, adolescent boys.

Having their leadership and communication skills enriched enabled the grandmothers to approach and mobilize other members of the community more effectively.<sup>145</sup> A third of grandmothers claim they have met all age and gender groups to share training content, and to discuss community issues related to schooling, education and protection of young girls, the importance of cultural values and diverse village problems like sanitation.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Lulli, 2018.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> GMP, 2016.

<sup>146</sup> Lulli, 2018.

In a collectivist society where family and community values are central,<sup>147</sup> improving these relationships is an outcome in itself that is highly valued by grandmothers and other community members.

### **7.1- Grandmothers' relationship with and support to adolescent girls**

The relationships of grandmothers that have been specifically improved are those with adolescent girls and girls' mothers.<sup>148</sup> It should be noted that the grandmothers developed as much of a relationship with their own granddaughters as they did with the teenage girls in the wider community.

As mentioned previously, educating grandmothers helps educate all generations of the community. In fact, 94% of the grandmothers participating in the GMP say they now discuss topics related to sexuality with young girls.<sup>149</sup> Among these discussion topics, three quarter of grandmothers cite the avoidance of early pregnancy, half mentioned menstrual hygiene, and one quarter spoke about puberty-related changes.<sup>150</sup> The young girls questioned confirm these numbers.<sup>151</sup> Almost all of them affirm that they feel comfortable and appreciate discussing these conversation topics with their grandmothers.<sup>152</sup> Furthermore, some grandmothers underline the importance of talking clearly to girls about topics related to their sex education, so that girls can fully understand and be better protected.

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Before the training, it was the norm for grandmothers to use an educational approach based on fear and orders.<sup>154</sup> The training sessions on communication and puberty offered by GMP fostered the adoption of an approach based on listening and dialogue by all grandmothers.<sup>155</sup> Grandmothers

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<sup>147</sup> IRH, 2019.

<sup>148</sup> Lulli, 2018.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Lulli, 2018.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

have learned to be more tolerant of girls going through puberty.<sup>156</sup> Thus, the communication between grandmothers and girls has improved considerably.<sup>157</sup>

It is a traditional practice for grandmothers to tell folktales to children. In 2011, three years after the implementation of the GMP program, 62% to 68% of grandmothers in the project villages were carrying on this practice, against only 18% before the start of the program in 2008.<sup>158</sup> The use of “educational stories and riddles and humor” to convey messages allowed grandmothers to acquire a “special place” with young girls, especially when discussing reproductive health.<sup>159</sup> Instead of attending the “*soirées*” previously organized by youth, most adolescent girls now preferred to spend time with their grandmother during storytelling evenings.<sup>160</sup> The interviews conducted by Lulli,<sup>161</sup> showed that girls particularly enjoyed the tales told by the grandmothers. This is an occasion for adolescent girls and grandmothers to spend quality time together. Besides, after the GMP intervention was initiated, all the girls interviewed by Newman<sup>162</sup> affirmed that they spent more time with grandmothers. They now see their grandmothers “from every two days to once a week, depending on how busy they were with other things.”<sup>163</sup>

As they communicate less authoritatively and use storytelling to engage in discussion on a variety of topics including sexuality, all studies report that grandmothers' relationships with adolescent girls have improved. Having strengthened their relationship with adolescent girls, grandmothers can now better support girls either in terms of knowledge transfer or in terms of emotional support.<sup>164</sup> Since the cultural role of grandmothers is “to serve as advisors and confidants to young girls,”<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> Aubel, 2020; Lulli, 2011b.

<sup>157</sup> Lulli, 2018; Ndione *et al.*, 2011.

<sup>158</sup> Ndione *et al.*, 2011; Newman, 2017.

<sup>159</sup> IRH, 2019: 25.

<sup>160</sup> IRH, 2019.

<sup>161</sup> Lulli, 2011b.

<sup>162</sup> Newman, 2011.

<sup>163</sup> Newman, 2011; Newman, 2017: 10.

<sup>164</sup> Lulli, 2011b.

<sup>165</sup> GMP, 2016: 12.

relying on “culturally-rooted communication channels” deepens the adherence of girls and grandmothers to GMP activities.<sup>166</sup>

## **7.2 -Grandmothers’ relationship with adolescent girls’ mothers**

The second type of relationship that has been particularly improved through the GMP intervention is the one between grandmothers and adolescent girls’ mothers, which include their own daughters, their daughters-in-law, and more broadly, women of childbearing age. In this report, for concision purposes, we will use the three terms interchangeably.

GMP’s activities allowed grandmothers to meet up more regularly with the mothers of girls. Lulli<sup>167</sup> reported that they meet more often within the family, and also within the community. As we said before, grandmothers represent a stream of knowledge that is transmitted to various members of the community. After training the grandmothers on girls’ holistic development, they had more discussions on the subject with the mothers of teenage girls.<sup>168</sup> Two-thirds of grandmothers say that they meet with women of childbearing age to share what they learned in their training and to discuss community issues.<sup>169</sup> The grandmothers informed the mothers of the teenage girls both what they learned during the training, but also of the new communication approach they were taught based on listening and dialogue.<sup>170</sup> The training sessions with grandmothers then have a multiplier effect on other members of the community.<sup>171</sup> Passing on these new communication techniques also allows mothers to improve their communication with their daughters.<sup>172</sup>

While they used to be distant from each other, GMP’s intervention has facilitated the reconciliation between mothers-in-law and their daughters-in-law.<sup>173</sup> It has been found, through

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> Lulli, 2018.

<sup>168</sup> Lulli, 2018.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> GMP, 2016.

<sup>173</sup> Lulli, 2011b.

different studies, that respect from women of reproductive age towards grandmothers (their mothers-in-law) have increased during the GMP intervention.<sup>174</sup> In focus groups led by Ndione, Faye and Nagnonhou,<sup>175</sup> the women explained that they now understand their mothers-in-law better, that they no longer consider them as witches, and that they therefore allow them to care for their children.

Therefore, grandmothers and teenage girls' mothers spend more time together and have more respect for each other, fostering stronger relationships and deeper connections.

### **7.3- Grandmothers' relationships with their sons and the fathers of adolescent girls**

As explained earlier, the grandmothers' status as elders and mothers gives them a special legitimacy to influence the decisions of their sons and the fathers of the adolescent girls regarding the latter's well-being. While the final decision on the age at which girls are given in marriage is culturally the father's, various community members interviewed by Lulli<sup>176</sup> reports that the fathers now take into account their mothers' opinion (i.e. the daughters' grandmother) and, if she objects, he rarely imposes his opinion against his mother's wishes. Grandmothers therefore have a significant say in the decision to give the daughter in marriage. Lulli confirms that in the case of child marriages, it is the grandmother who can authoritatively intervene to dissuade the girl's father (her son) from agreeing to marry off his young daughter.<sup>177</sup> A 2016 report titled "Grandmother leaders: A resource to improve the lives of adolescent girls," by the GMP narrates a story about the involvement of several grandmothers in this subject matter:

After a long discussion with his brothers and uncles, the father of 14-year old Fatou agreed to marry her off to an emigrant working in Spain, during his vacation in the village. When the grandmother leaders learned about this, 3 of them visited Fatou's mother. She was distraught but said she could do nothing to prevent the marriage. They then met with Fatou's father to try to dissuade him but he refused to change his mind. Determined, they went to see the village headman who agreed to talk to the father. However, before he did, 4 grandmother leaders joined by 3 other grandmothers returned to talk with the

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<sup>174</sup> Lulli, 2011a; Ndione *et al.*, 2011; Newman, 2017.

<sup>175</sup> Ndione *et al.* 2011.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid: 6-7.

father. Pressured by the 7 grandmothers, the father gave into their argument that “it is dangerous for Fatou to be married at such a young age” and he renounced the marriage plans.<sup>178</sup>

This quote shows that through the program they gained negotiation skills, which they apply to the whole family, and especially their sons by influencing decision-making processes relating to marriage of girls and their withdrawal from school.

Undoubtedly, “[t]heir senior status gives them [a particular] credibility with their sons,” turning them into “a precious ally for the girls.”<sup>179</sup> Thanks to the GMP activities, the men in the family consult more often with the grandmothers and listen to and value their opinions more.<sup>180</sup>

#### **7.4- Grandmothers’ relationship and influence on adolescent girls’ parents in general**

The Institute for Reproductive Health of University of Georgetown report<sup>181</sup> encompasses mothers of adolescent girls in the more general category of “caregivers,” which also includes fathers of adolescent girls and their guardians more generally. This report found that grandmothers in villages where there is a GMP intervention are twice (80.4%) as likely to think that caregivers of adolescent girls are able to seek their advice or support than those in villages without intervention (39.3%).

As caregivers, the activities carried out by GMP have also had a positive impact on the relationships between grandmothers and the fathers of the teenage girls. One third of grandmothers who have participated in GMP activities report they have met with fathers [and adolescent boys] to discuss the training topics.<sup>182</sup> In fact, grandmothers’ increased self-confidence has allowed them to intervene more often with their son to “dissuade them from perpetuating [...] traditions” which have a negative impact on girls.<sup>183</sup> An increase in the frequency and quality of their relationships and

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<sup>178</sup> GMP, 2016: 11.

<sup>179</sup> IRH, 2019: 37-38.

<sup>180</sup> Lulli, 2020.

<sup>181</sup> IRH, 2020.

<sup>182</sup> Lulli, 2018.

<sup>183</sup> Morgan, 2021: 5.



interventions with fathers, transforms them into “advocates for the abandonment of these practices.”

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## **7.5 -Grandmothers’ relationship with adolescent boys**

GMP’s program has focused primarily on adolescent girls, focusing on boys to a lesser extent. Nonetheless, the activities of the GMP have strengthened relationships between adolescent boys, and more broadly, male and female elders in communities. As said before, a quarter of grandmothers say they have met young boys [and fathers] to chat with them.<sup>185</sup> Although fewer than girls, some boys reported receiving advice from their grandmothers, and 40% said they would seek advice from their grandmothers if they faced a problem. For several young boys, their relationships with their grandmothers have strengthened and their attitudes towards grandmothers have therefore been positively modified.<sup>186</sup> All the teenage boys indicated “being closer to the grandmothers.”<sup>187</sup>

## **8- Enhancing grandmothers’ relationships with other community members**

In addition to strengthening their relationships within their families, the grandmothers also enhanced their relationships with other members of the community such as other male community leaders and elders, and teachers.

### **8.1 Grandmothers’ relationships with other male community leaders/elders**

While they were not used to working with community leaders to solve problems, most grandmother leaders report that their collaboration with other community leaders has increased since they have been involved in GMP’s program.<sup>188</sup> Now, they will often meet with the village chief and the notables to share the contents of the training with them, and they collaborate with them in actions for the benefit of the community in general and young girls in particular.<sup>189</sup> Newman found that 86% of

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

<sup>185</sup> Lulli, 2018.

<sup>186</sup> Lulli, 2020.

<sup>187</sup> Newman, 2011; Newman, 2017: 11.

<sup>188</sup> Lulli, 2018; Lulli, 2020.

<sup>189</sup> Lulli, 2018.

grandmothers declared their relationship with male elders had changed, and that they communicated more since the GMP program started both during meetings at community level and at the family level.

<sup>190</sup> They attribute this increased collaboration with male traditional and religious leaders “to their greater individual and collective confidence acquired through the training.”<sup>191</sup>

Newman found that 53% of male leaders corroborated this shift by affirming that they have more contact with grandmothers, and that they now ask them more often for their opinion on family and community matters.<sup>192</sup>

Thus, both grandmothers and leaders report that the frequency and quality of their relationships have increased.

## **8.2 Grandmothers’ relationship with teachers**

As mentioned earlier, an important component of GMP’s program takes place in schools as part of the program to integrate positive cultural values into schools. Prior to this program, most grandmothers had very little contact with teachers, and some were hesitant to approach the school at all. Related to this part of the program, three quarters of the grandmothers interviewed have since been involved in classroom activities with teachers giving values education to children,<sup>193</sup> and most of them no longer feel embarrassed by teachers.<sup>194</sup> The lessons taught by grandmothers include topics such as early marriages, teen pregnancies, but also using stories and riddles sessions inspired by Halpular traditions.<sup>195</sup> Grandmothers’ involvement in schools has made it possible to reduce the gap between traditional knowledge and the “modern” knowledge conveyed by teachers. The more frequent meetings between teachers and grandmothers contributed to their rapprochement.

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<sup>190</sup> Newman, 2017: 11; IRH, 2019.

<sup>191</sup> Aubel, 2020: 14; IRH, 2019.

<sup>192</sup> Newman, 2017.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> Soukouna et Newman, 2015.

<sup>195</sup> Lulli, 2018

## 9- Expanding grandmothers' involvement in the community and their civic participation

Prior to GMP's intervention, testimonies underline that grandmothers were potentially disinterested in community life, and were not involved in finding solutions to community problems.<sup>196</sup> There were not many community meetings, and in the cases such meetings did occur, the grandmothers were often not invited.

However, being more knowledgeable and connected with other grandmothers, and having improved relationships with other members of their community has helped grandmothers broaden their involvement in the community. According to various studies,<sup>197</sup> grandmothers' role in the community has been strengthened as a result of the training offered by GMP. Grandmothers interviewed by Lulli speak of a major personal involvement in actions in favor of community well-being.<sup>198</sup> The evaluation by Ndione, Faye and Nagnonhou<sup>199</sup> concluded that GMP gave grandmothers "a social motivation that they had lost."<sup>200</sup> Their study showed that 90% of grandmothers participated in some community activities organized by an NGO including the GMP, 92% were members of a women's organization, and 100% participated in workshops taking place in schools.<sup>201</sup>

The involvement of grandmothers in the community has many facets related to 1) mediation and conflict resolution and 2) promotion of community planning and sanitation activities.<sup>202</sup> Half of the grandmothers interviewed by Lulli say they are involved in these two areas of intervention.<sup>203</sup> Studies point out that grandmothers play an important role in resolving social problems and conflicts within the family and the community, which also has a positive impact on other women.<sup>204</sup> GMP's

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<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

<sup>197</sup> Lulli, 2018; Ndione *et al.*, 2011; Soukouna and Newman, 2015.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

<sup>199</sup> Ndione *et al.*, 2011.

<sup>200</sup> Newman, 2017: 17.

<sup>201</sup> Ndione *et al.*, 2011.

<sup>202</sup> Lulli, 2018; IRH, 2019.

<sup>203</sup> Lulli, 2018.

<sup>204</sup> IRH, 2019; Lulli, 2018; Lulli, 2020.

intervention helped to sharpen grandmothers' sensitivity and awareness towards the problems faced by the community.<sup>205</sup> They are now more involved in solving community problems,<sup>206</sup> and they have gained "an increased sense of responsibility in their role as community leaders to take action to solve problems they observe."<sup>207</sup> As grandmothers are more committed to the well-being of their community, their sense of empowerment and self-confidence are increased. In addition to providing information on increasing self-confidence, Lulli explains that the heightened involvement in community actions also demonstrates the expansion of solidarity between grandmothers and their collaboration with other community actors.<sup>208</sup>

In conclusion, all the reports showed that grandmothers were more involved in the community, particularly through conflict resolution and the implementation of solidarity initiatives.

#### ***10- Enhanced community recognition of grandmothers' role in transmitting positive cultural values to younger generations***

Establishing grandmothers as important actors in children's upbringing was one the main objectives of GMP in order to rehabilitate grandmothers in their ancestral role. GMP has helped build a bridge between the knowledge conveyed by the modern school system and grandmothers' traditional knowledge by creating opportunities for them to be involved in schools. Through GMP, the grandmothers are now "invested with the role of educators, even though they did not go to school."<sup>209</sup> Ndione, Faye and Nagnonhou<sup>210</sup> reported that grandmothers were now conducting activities such as folktales and initiations dances both within the setting of schools and families.<sup>211</sup> As follows, "the barriers which artificially separated modernity from traditional and cultural values have been broken down."<sup>212</sup> The perceptions of both teachers and grandmothers about the coexistence of the "modern"

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<sup>205</sup> Lulli, 2018.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

<sup>207</sup> GMP, 2016: 6.

<sup>208</sup> Lulli, 2018.

<sup>209</sup> IRH, 2019: 40

<sup>210</sup> Ndione *et al.*, 2011

<sup>211</sup> Newman, 2017

<sup>212</sup> Ibid: 24

school and the transmission of traditional values have changed.<sup>213</sup> The fact that grandmothers can teach in school is clearly an “indicative of the change in mentality” in which the role of grandmothers in transmitting cultural values to younger generations is recognized by the official educational institution responsible for the formal education of children.<sup>214</sup> As the IRH concluded, the GMP intervention “restored grandmothers’ confidence in their ability to pass on knowledge and made visible the relevance of their knowledge in today’s society.”<sup>215</sup> Grandmothers’ role contributing to children’s education is now acknowledged within the wider community.<sup>216</sup>

## DISCUSSION

By promoting inter-generational dialogue between different members of the community and giving grandmothers an active role, the GMP’ intervention has been resulting in positive impacts for grandmothers, but also for the whole community. While this report has focused on the impact of GMP’s intervention on grandmothers, it is important to place this report in the broader context of community well-being, holistic development of adolescent girls, and more equal gender relations. It has been shown that working through traditional cultural channels, such as women elders, and valuing positive cultural values allows for positive changes in this direction.

More positive attitudes toward grandmothers in communities mean that grandmothers are more likely to have positive relationships with different family and community members, and to be more confident in their ability to get involved in the community and act for the well-being of girls. The increased solidarity among grandmothers also contributes to their power to act collectively for the overall well-being of the community.

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<sup>213</sup> Ibid

<sup>214</sup> IRH, 2019: 24

<sup>215</sup> IRH, 2019: 39

<sup>216</sup> Ibid

Educating grandmothers about modern knowledge related to puberty, sexuality, and adolescent education and training them in effective communication techniques to engage with youth has also had positive effects on girls' holistic development, including reduced early marriage and pregnancy, abandonment of female genital mutilation, and reduced school dropout among girls.

Increasing the confidence and leadership of female elders allows them to speak to the fathers of adolescent girls and to community leaders about these issues. Their willingness to communicate more with teen fathers, other male community leaders and elders, and teachers also helps to reduce gender inequalities. Building better relationships and imparting knowledge to adolescent girls and their mothers contributes as well to multigenerational women's empowerment.

In summary, the GMP intervention participates to the discussion that increasing grandmothers' sense of social connectedness through an intergenerational and cultural approach has positive impacts that go beyond grandmothers' individual well-being and then influence community development, girls' empowerment, and more egalitarian gender relations.

## CONCLUSION

Involving grandmothers in development projects has benefits for adolescent girls and for the community as a whole, but also for the grandmothers themselves. Through this report, we have shown that the Grandmother Project's intervention in Vélingara has led to many positive outcomes for grandmothers, all of which have contributed to reducing their social isolation and increasing their sense of belonging and social connectedness. Other actors in the community and international development sector should learn from this organization's inclusive work with grandmothers and make their interventions more aware of elderly and intergenerational issues.

While this report was based on data already collected that focused on predetermined issues such as early pregnancy, early marriage, FGM, and adolescent school attendance, it would be

relevant to extend the analysis to other issues such as contraception and financial support for grandmothers through kinship. These two themes would be particularly relevant for two different reasons. Firstly, in a context of economic crisis, the difficulty of young people to respect the principle of reciprocity of gift and counter-gift specific to African intergenerational solidarity and the resulting impoverishment of elderly women have been widely studied by Africanists.<sup>217</sup> Indeed, the younger generation must take care of their parents when they are old in reciprocation for the care they gave them when they were children, but the context of economic crisis prevents the children from fulfilling this intergenerational contract.<sup>218</sup> It would therefore be interesting to study how the intervention of the GMP and the subsequent strengthening of social cohesion within communities have influenced, or not, the logics of intergenerational solidarity and the quality of life of older women. Secondly, the culture-based approach implemented by GMP only leads to changes in social norms that are accepted by the culture of the targeted communities. For example, the use of contraception and condoms among unmarried women is not culturally accepted, and is therefore not promoted to adolescents by grandmothers, following the GMP intervention, as a solution to avoid early pregnancy. Abstinence is the only practice presented to adolescent girls, so they do not receive all the information they need to choose how to adequately protect themselves from unwanted pregnancy. It would therefore be interesting to look at the topics that grandmothers are resisting, to see how the GMP influences their propensity to discuss them, and thus to better understand the limits of such an approach that values grandmothers' cultural and traditional knowledge. As a whole, this study has served to validate the critical importance of elders within communities in Senegal. More than that, though Senegal is situated in a particular cultural context, the lessons around valuing elders can be applied to all sub-Saharan collectivist societies and, more broadly, to communities in the global South.

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<sup>217</sup> Antoine, 2007; Antoine and Golaz, 2009 ; Badini-Kinda, 2005 ; Briaud, 2015; Calvès *et al.*, 2018 ; Laurent, 2009 ; Roth, 2010.

<sup>218</sup> Roth, 2010.

## RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPACT

This report suggests 7 main findings that should be known and recognized by actors in the development sector.

- 1) In sub-Saharan Africa, and more broadly in the Global South, grandmothers have a particular social status that allows them to intervene in favor of the well-being of adolescent girls and more egalitarian gender relations, in their communities.
- 2) In order to respect traditional cultural values and maintain respect for the elderly, elders must occupy a central place in any development project.
- 3) Although they are older and perceived as custodians of tradition, if targeted by development organizations, grandmothers have the potential to change their attitudes toward existing cultural practices and to act to modify social norms in a way that has positive impacts on gender relations.
- 4) Organizing activities that bring grandmothers together strengthens their solidarity and thus increases their civic participation, reduces their social isolation, and increases their social connectedness to the community.
- 5) Organizing multi-generational activities allows grandmothers to enhance their relationship with other members of the community, which leads to more opportunities to pass on values and life experiences, more opportunities to work together for the well-being of the community and a greater sense of community and social connectedness.
- 6) Promoting opportunities for intergenerational dialogue and fostering contact between different generations contributes to change community perceptions and attitudes about grandmothers.



- 7) Strengthening grandmothers' knowledge and valuing their role in society improves grandmothers' self-confidence and thus their propensity to act for the well-being of the whole community.

In light of these findings, there are a number of different ways through which different actors in the development sector can implement these recommendations:

**Government agencies and International institutions specializing in international development, such as Global Affairs Canada:**

- Modify Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy to make it more inclusive of older women and make visible their potential contribution to the gender equality movement.
- Ask Canadian organizations funded by Global Affairs Canada to include older women as a transversal issue in all proposed development projects, as is currently the case for gender.

**International and bilateral donors:**

- Make the integration of an intergenerational perspective a guideline for funding.
- Prioritize funding for projects that include older women in their activities and that promote intergenerational relationships.
- Provide specific funding for projects that exclusively target older women.

**Local and international development organizations:**

- When carrying out a project on gender relations, young girls should not be the only targets and grandmothers should not be ignored.
- Recognize and value the traditional cultural role of the elderly in the conception of projects.
- Promote intergenerational dialogue and activities that require sustained contact and collaboration between actors of different generations.

- Integrate the insight of seniors and especially older women in a transversal way in all development projects, from the elaboration to the implementation of a project and its follow-up.

**Samuel Center for Social Connectedness and Grandmother Project:**

- Publicize this report and its recommendations and advocate for them to be read by the above stakeholders.
  - Create a social media campaign and identify relevant stakeholders.
  - Send emails to appropriate stakeholders.

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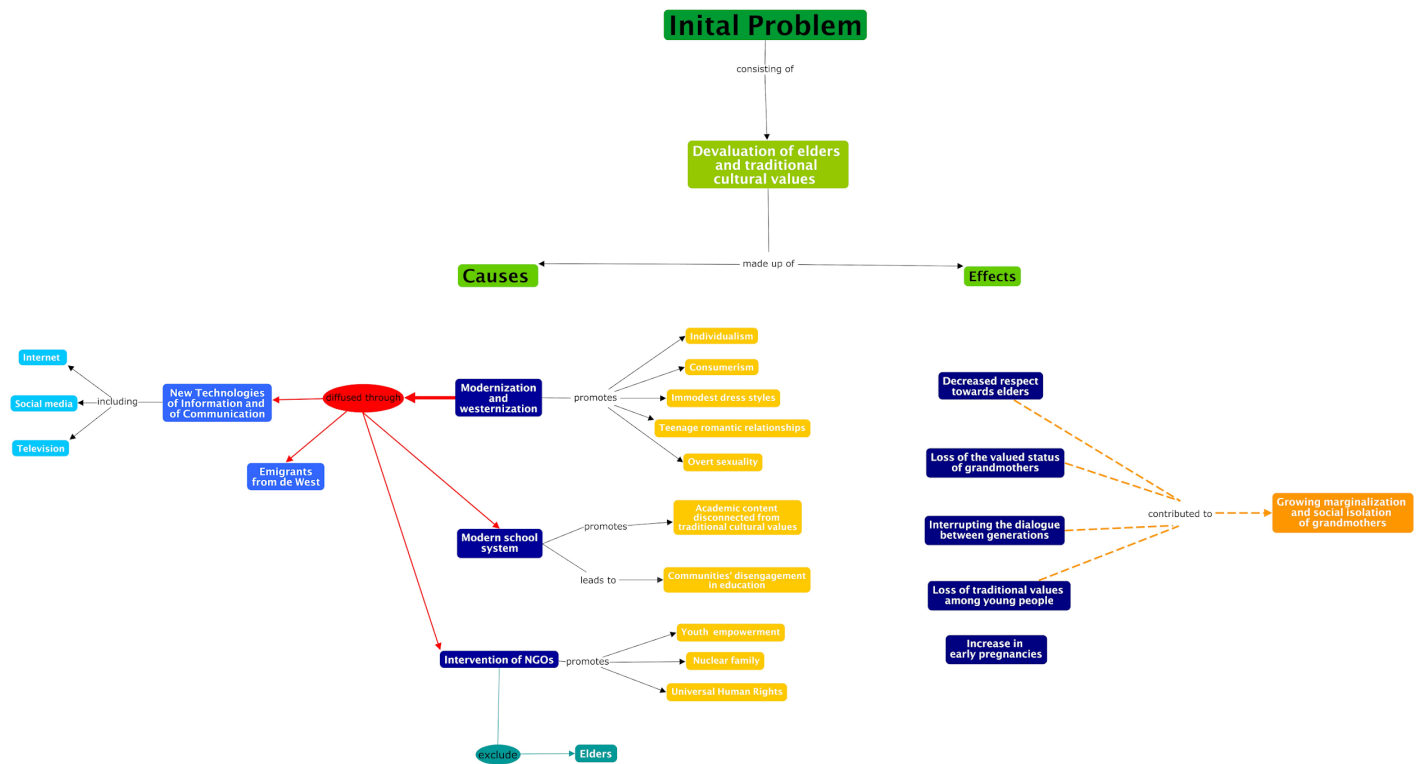
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## APPENDIX 1





## APPENDIX 2

### Sources used to study the impact of the GMP intervention on grandmothers

<b>Title of the report</b>	<b>Year of publication</b>	<b>Type of methodology</b>	<b>Themes</b>
Grandmothers Project - Change through Culture: Program for Girls' Holistic Development: Qualitative Research Report	2019	Qualitative	child marriage, early pregnancy, FGM and girls' education
Grandmothers Project - Change through Culture: Program for Girls' Holistic Development: Quantitative Research Report	2020	Quantitative	early marriage, adolescent pregnancy, girls' schooling and FGM
Les mariages et les grossesses précoces diminuent grâce aux efforts conjoints des enseignants et des grand-mères. Projet de Développement Holistique des Filles	2011	Qualitative	early marriage and pregnancy
Sous l'arbre – l'Éducation participative pour les Grand-mères Leaders » Une étude sur l'approche de renforcer et amplifier le rôle de Grand-mères pour le bien-être des jeunes filles et l'action communautaire	2018	Qualitative	changes in the grandmothers' behaviors, knowledge, and attitudes after the GMP's training
Étude sur les effets du programme de Développement Holistique des Filles de Grandmother Project – Changement par la Culture	2020	Qualitative	women's self-confidence, gender relations
L'adaptation culturelle du programme Développement Holistique des Filles et sa contribution à l'engagement communautaire	2020	Qualitative	GMP's cultural approach

## APPENDIX 3

