

April 10, 2010



Culture & Change

***“Dialogue to promote change from within:
A grandmother-inclusive & intergenerational approach to promote
girls’ health and well-being and to eliminate FGM “***

« Développement Holistique des Filles » (DHF)

A project implemented by World Vision in Velingara, Senegal
with technical assistance from The Grandmother Project (GMP)

Preliminary project results and lessons learned

Synthesis of key findings from:

- Mid-term Project Review conducted in October 2009
by Ministry Quality Unit, World Vision Senegal,
- Rapid assessment conducted by Dr. Joyce Olenja,
Community Health Department, University of Nairobi, October 2009

Written by: Judi Aubel, PhD, MPH
Coordinator of GMP technical assistance to DHF Project

February 2010
Rome

Funding for the DHF project is provided by World Vision/Canada, GMP and USAID



Community feedback on the DHF project approach

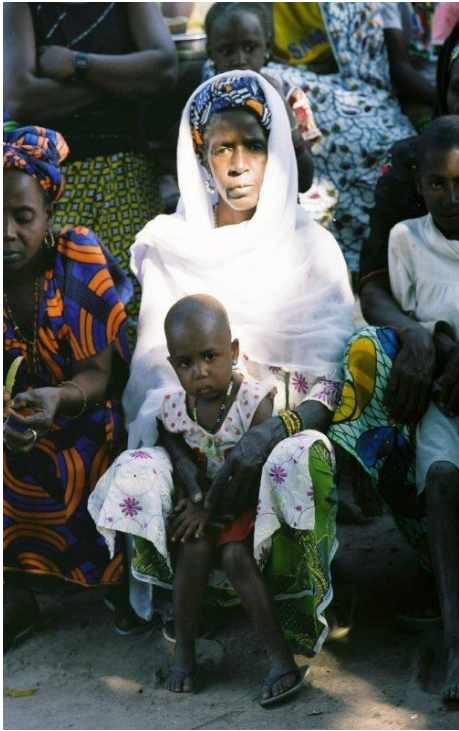


Photo: Flore de Préneuf, 2009

“After the law was passed (against FGM), we were invited to various meetings where we were told that our village headman could be sent to jail if FGM continued. At that time, in our hearts we were not convinced but many of us stopped out of fear. Since the DHF project has been here we have understood the risks of FGM for girls and women, and we know now that our religion does not require it. Now we have stopped because in our hearts we know that it is harmful.”

Hawa
Grandmother Leader
Sare Adjia Village



Photo: Judi Aubel, 2009

“It is important to tell a person what is good in their behavior and what is not. We know now that women who are not cut are not at all at risk, that they can be happy, fulfill their religious duties and give birth. We have learned that during delivery, women who are cut can have all sorts of problems that can even end in the worst possible scenario. We are sure that we are going to continue the positive practices (for girls’ development and well-being) and abandon the negative ones. ”

Faly
Village Imam
Mountoumba village

Contents

	Page no.
1. Executive summary	4
2. Introduction	6
2.1 Purpose of this document	
2.2 Sources of information for this report	
3. Overview of the DHF project	7
3.1 The goal of the project	
3.2 Key project objectives	
3.3 Fundamental project principles	
3.4 Six key project strategies	
4. Key findings of the assessments	8
4.1 Strong sense of community ownership of the project	
4.2 Community feedback on key project principles and strategies	
5. Initial project results	16
6. Conclusions	21
7. Lessons learned	24
Endnotes	26

1. Executive Summary

The goal of the *Développement Holistique des Filles* (DHF) project is to strengthen the capacity of local communities to promote the revival of positive cultural values and practices that contribute to the optimal physical, moral, spiritual, social and intellectual development of girl children and to advocate the abandonment of female genital mutilation (FGM) and other harmful practices.

The DHF project is built on a series of principles, several of which distinguish it from other programs. These include: recognition and inclusion of grandmothers; strengthening intergenerational communication; a holistic approach that promotes all facets of girls' development; strengthening positive cultural traditions while discouraging harmful ones; and use of an innovative adult education and community development approach.

Implementation of field activities in the DHF project started in September 2008. In October 2009 a Mid-term Project Review was conducted by the World Vision Design, Monitoring and Evaluation unit and also a rapid assessment of the project was carried out by a consultant hired by World Vision Africa Region, Dr. Joyce Olenja. During the two reviews in-depth discussions were held with more than 136 community members as well as education/development agents to elicit their feedback on project principles, strategies and initial results.

The feedback received through the two assessments is quite positive both in terms of community attitudes toward the DHF approach and the initial results it appears to have produced. After only one year of project implementation, both assessments suggest that the DHF strategy has had three positive effects at the community level. It has strengthened relationships and communication within and between groups of all ages and both sexes; it has increased both appreciation and promotion of positive cultural traditions by children, adults and elders; and it appears to be catalyzing change in community attitudes toward harmful traditions, including FGM and early marriage.

Based on the conclusions of the two assessments and also on extensive qualitative documentation collected during project implementation, key facets of the project approach are identified that appear to have contributed to the positive preliminary results. Based on these elements a series of "lessons learned" were developed that should inform ongoing implementation of the DHF project and that may be applicable in other settings.

A holistic approach to promoting girls' health and well-being that addresses all facets of their growth and development is more acceptable to communities than one that narrowly addresses a single "problematic" aspect, such as FGM.

Explicitly honoring local cultural roles, values and traditions in community programs responds to a deep-seated and generally unaddressed community concern about the loss of cultural identity and values.

Recognition and inclusion of senior women, or “grandmothers”, based on their culturally-designated role in families and communities, validates their central role in the lives of children and families, a cultural reality that is often not taken into account in development programs, and unleashes an abundant resource for change.

Inclusion of elders who are viewed as a valuable cultural resource, lends credibility to the DHF project. All community groups, and especially younger people, clearly state that they are more comfortable with an approach that explicitly involves elders, creating a synergy between the wisdom of the elders and the energy of youth.

Strengthening intergenerational communication as a basis for community dialogue and change contributes to developing consensus regarding immediate issues and problems but also increases social capital and social cohesion for collectively dealing with other community concerns.

A bottom up approach to promoting child rights has been used in which communities are challenged to identify the “needs” of girls in order to ensure their healthy growth and development based on cultural, religious and other community and universal values. The DHF experience suggests that communities are more responsive to an approach that involves them in defining girls’/children’s “needs” and their own responsibilities related to such needs than to an approach in which child “rights” are dictated to them and they are told what they should do to properly educate and raise their own children.

The use of open-ended communication/education methods, which encourage community dialogue and critical thinking, help to develop a consensus both among and between community groups on priority needs related to practices that should be preserved and those that should be changed. Many NGO and government field workers have been trained in more directive communication approaches based on message-dissemination and therefore, adoption of this alternative approach requires considerable retraining.

Using an approach based on *Unconditional Positive Regard (UPR)* to promote change. There has been very strong community support for the UPR approach in which greater emphasis is given to validating existing values and practices than to promoting change. This approach can be effective in strengthening community engagement and openness to reconsider age-old practices like FGM and early marriage.

Maintaining close and supportive relationships with community members by development field staff is a key factor in promoting ongoing community dialogue for action. Considerable earlier research clearly shows that while mass media activities can provide information to people, interpersonal communication and support is required to promote collective and sustained change in practices at the community level. This lesson has significant implications for program design, allocation of human resources and field supervision.

2. Introduction

The title of this document, “Dialogue to Promote Change from Within”, reflects the overarching approach adopted in the “*Developpement Holistique des Filles*” (DHF) (“Holistic Girls’ Development”) project. The DHF project aims to catalyze community dialogue around the question of how best to promote girls’ development and well-being and to encourage community members to decide themselves what actions to take to ensure girls’ optimal development. The impetus for dialogue comes from several key project-supported activities that involve groups of men, women and children within the community.

The three-year DHF community project is being implemented in rural communities in the Velingara area of Senegal by World Vision with technical assistance from the Grand-mother Project (GMP). It officially started in May 2008 and will continue through April 2010. Actual implementation of field activities began in September 2008. The aim of the project is to promote girls’ development and at the same time to discourage harmful practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM) and early marriage.

2.1 Purpose of this document

The purpose of this document is to share key findings of two recent assessments of the DHF project. First, an overview of the DHF Project is presented. Second, highlights from the findings of the two assessments are summarized and analyzed. Lastly, initial lessons learned drawn from the first year of implementation are outlined. This report does not discuss other operational issues, nor strengths and weaknesses in project implementation that were analyzed in the World Vision Senegal review.

This report contributes to the “documentation for learning” component of the DHF project which involves ongoing analysis and synthesis of project implementation through interaction and dialogue with community members, program implementers and outside observers. The approach being used in DHF is experimental and therefore this component is of great importance in order to maximize learning.

2.2 Sources of information for this report

This document is based on information drawn from two sources:

- **2009 Rapid Assessment conducted by Professor Joyce Olenja, Anthropologist, Department of Community Health, University of Nairobi.**¹ Professor Olenja has been involved in evaluating FGM projects in East Africa for a number of years. She was contracted by World Vision Africa Region to conduct a rapid assessment in Kenya, Tanzania and Senegal (RAKTS) of the organization’s FGM projects there. Key findings and conclusions of that

¹ Joyce Olenja & Pamela Godia. *Abandonment of female genital mutilation/cutting in Kenya, Tanzania and Senegal: Programmatic Considerations*. World Vision, East Africa Regional Office, Nairobi, 2009.

assessment specifically related to the DHF project in Senegal are included in this report.

- **2009 Mid-term Project Review (MTPR):**² In October 2009, after 14 months of field implementation, an extensive review of the DHF Project was carried out by the Ministry Quality Unit of World Vision/Senegal (the full report of the review is available in French.) A participatory methodology was used in the review in which approximately 100 community members, including elders, young men and women, children, teachers and development workers were interviewed.

(See Note no.1 at the end of this Report for more information on the methodology used in the Mid-term Review)ⁱ

3. Overview of the DHF project

3.1 The goal of the DHF project is to strengthen the capacity of local communities to promote the revival of positive cultural values and practices that contribute to the optimal physical, moral, spiritual, social and intellectual development of girl children and to advocate the abandonment of female genital mutilation (FGM).

3.2 The key project objectives are:

1. To strengthen knowledge and use of positive cultural values and practices in families, communities and schools that contribute to the holistic well-being of girls
2. To promote changes in community attitudes and norms regarding FGM, early marriage, teenage pregnancy, corporal punishment and other forms of violence toward girls

3.3 Fundamental project principles

The DHF project is built on a series of fundamental principles, several of which distinguish it from other programs:

- **Recognition and inclusion of grandmothers**
- **Intergenerational communication**
- **Participatory adult education and communication approach**
- **Holistic approach that promotes all facets of girls' development**
- **Strengthening positive cultural traditions and discouraging harmful traditions**

3.4 Six key project strategies:

² *Rapport Evaluation Mi-parcours: Projet Action communautaire pour promouvoir la santé et le bien être des filles et éradiquer la mutilation génitale féminine.* World Vision Sénégal, Dakar, Oct. 2009.

Strategy 1: Intergenerational Community Forums to elicit discussion of issues related to girls' development and to mobilize community members to promote beneficial cultural practices and to discourage FGM and other harmful practices

Strategy 2: Participatory learning sessions with groups of grandmothers (GMs) and of women of reproductive age (WRA) to discuss different aspects of girls' growth and development

Strategy 3: Activities with schools to promote appreciation of local cultural values and traditions and strengthen intergenerational communication

Strategy 4: Cultural education by grandmothers with groups of young girls in which positive traditional values and activities are passed on³

Strategy 5: Strengthening health workers' involvement in promoting abandonment of FGM at the community level

Strategy 6: Continuous and final documentation for program learning. Given that the DHP approach is being used for the first time, there is a process of ongoing documentation and lesson learning so that both the DHF project and others can learn from this experience.

The attached "DHF Visual Framework" (below) gives more details of the six strategies, the objectives of each, who is involved in each and the expected results.

4. Key findings of the assessments

4.1 Strong sense of community ownership of the project

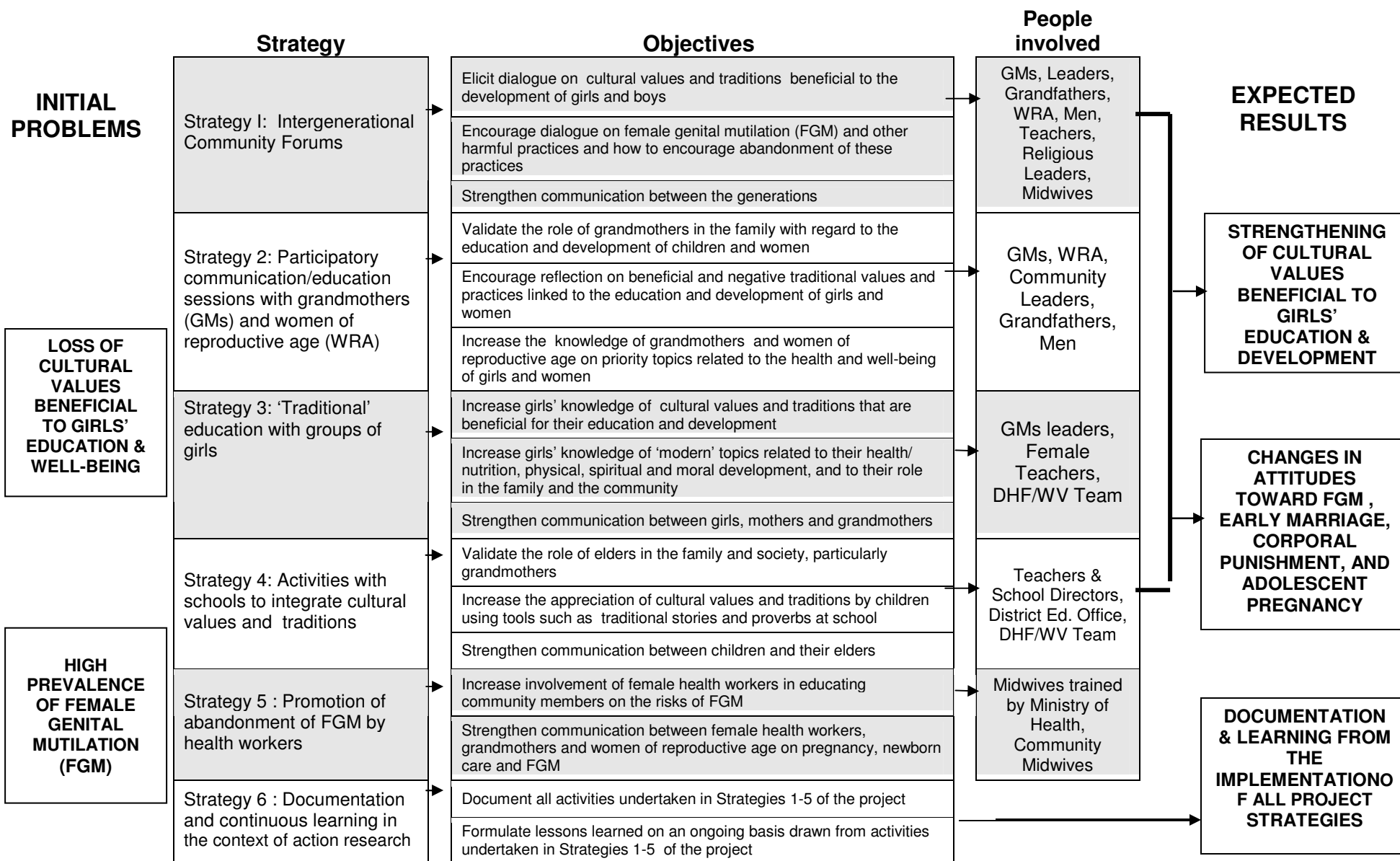
A key finding of both the MTPR and the RAKTS is that there is a strong sense of community ownership of the DHF activities. The World Vision review unequivocally concludes that "there is unanimous and strong support for the DHF project on the part of all sectors of the community." The MTPR points out that this sense of ownership is particularly strong among grandmothers: "Grandmothers stated that in earlier community projects they were never consulted nor invited to fully participate. They clearly stated that the DHF project belongs to them" (p. 8).

³ In the project plan it was anticipated that an "Alternative Rite of Passage" (ARP) ceremony would be organized once a year in each of the villages. However, in light of grandmother-initiated efforts in several villages to organize regular sessions with groups of girls in order to pass on traditional songs, stories, dances and values, it was decided to analyze this grandmother initiative to see how this effort can be reinforced and shared with other villages. At the same time it was decided to abandon the idea of organizing ARPs.

VISUAL FRAMEWORK: GIRLS' HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT PROJECT (DHF)

COMMUNITY ACTION PROJECT TO PROMOTE THE HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT OF GIRLS AND THE ABANDONMENT OF FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION
PROJECT IMPLEMENTED BY WORLD VISION WITH TECHNICAL SUPPORT FROM THE GRANDMOTHER PROJECT

Jan 28, 2010



"In contrast to other projects, in this project we are the ones in the driver's seat and the project team members are the passengers."

Chef de village, Sare Demba Mary

Similarly, the RAKTS assessment identified two aspects of project implementation that appear to have directly contributed to the strong sense of community ownership. First, community members were involved from the outset (during the preliminary phase) in the rapid community assessment and first intergenerational community forums. The project design itself was fundamentally altered by ideas and concerns of community members expressed during that initial consultative phase. Second, the sense of community ownership is also derived from the ongoing process of *consultative participation* in the project which is grounded in strong relationships with and ongoing dialogue with community members.

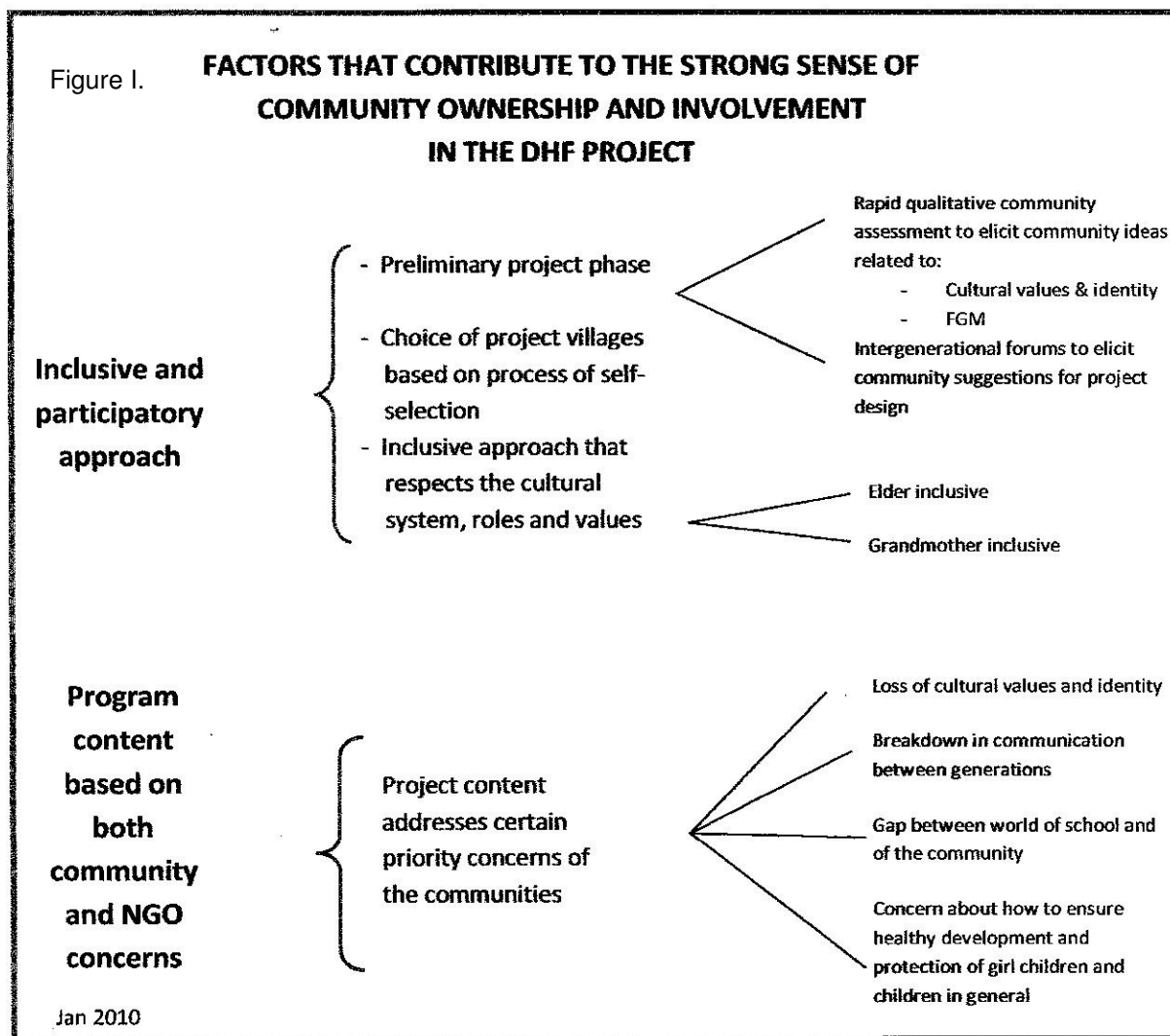
During the MTPR many interviewees compared the approach used in the DHF project to more directive approaches used in other projects.

"In this project everyone has a chance to give his/her own ideas and to feel as though the project belongs to them. This project is based on our ideas and that is why we insist that it is 'our project'".

Abdoulaye Mballo, young man

Data from both the MTPR and The RAKTS point out two sets of factors that appear to contribute to the strong sense of community ownership of and engagement in the DHF project (See Figure I below).

First, the *inclusive and participatory approach* has included: a preliminary rapid assessment and dialogue with communities to determine their priorities and incorporate those into the project design; the ongoing use of participatory adult education methods that build on community knowledge and experience; the active involvement of elders and the explicit recognition of grandmothers' role in the education and development of girl children; and the central place accorded them in project activities. Second, the fact that *project content addresses several priority community concerns*, namely: the loss of cultural identity and values; the breakdown in intergenerational communication; the gap between schools and communities; and the development and protection of girls in particular, and children in general.



4.2 Community feedback on key project principles and strategies

During both the MTPR and RAKTS assessments, community members were asked to critique the core principles upon which the DHF project is built.

DHF Principle no. 1 → *Recognition and inclusion of grandmothers* as key actors in promoting girls' growth and development and in discouraging FGM

Most FGM programs do not explicitly and actively involve senior women, or grandmothers. During the review, all segments of society (elders, adults and children) acknowledged that in the family and community grandmothers play a central role and expressed regrets that in development and school programs the importance of their role is not fully recognized.

The following quotes reflect community approval of grandmother inclusion in the project:

"A house without a grandmother is like a tree without leaves."

Imam Sylla, President of Association of Imams

"All of the other projects ignored the grandmothers. Today they are fully involved in the DHF activities."

Fatoumata, a young woman

"It was the grandmothers who took the girls off to be cut and it was only later that the parents were informed what had been done. A project that is dealing with FGM in a community must involve the grandmothers because they are the ones who decide about FGM in the family and they are the ones who are the most attached to this practice."

Bebel, woman of reproductive age

The MTPR concluded that grandmother inclusion is extremely relevant in a program addressing child education and development. "Recognition and involvement of grandmothers in the education of girls and boys is a decisive element. Their involvement in DHF project activities is also a key to strengthening social cohesion within the family and community" (p.16).

The RAKTS concurs that, from a cultural perspective, involving grandmothers in a project dealing with girls' development, and specifically FGM, is of great relevance: "Grandmothers are an invaluable resource for FGM programs that has long been untapped. Furthermore, they are an excellent entry point into the community" (p.97). The assessment points out the limitations of many FGM programs that focus primarily on younger women: "Younger women may receive information on the disadvantages of FGM but they will usually not be able to make a decision on their own to abandon FGM given their lower social status in the community" (p. 88).

In some FGM projects, educational and/or income-generating activities are targeted at the cutters, usually senior women. Based on the analysis/evaluation of other FGM projects in East Africa, Olenja states that the effectiveness of strategies to re-educate or reorient cutters is unclear. She supports the DHF approach in which the cutters are involved in community activities along with other mothers and grandmothers but they are in no way singled out.

DHF Principle no. 2 → Intergenerational communication between adolescent, adult and elder community members to elicit discussion on key issues related to girls' development

Many development programs and specifically FGM programs do not explicitly involve elders. During the preliminary phase of the project a priority concern that emerged from

discussions with communities is the serious breakdown in communication between generations.

“Most young people spend most of their free time watching television, playing soccer or listening to music and they don’t spend much time communicating with parents/ grandparents from whom they could learn a lot. That’s why we don’t have a lot of opportunities to pass on our cultural values.”

Diabou, grandmother

“It is the elders who are knowledgeable about our cultural traditions and young people should be learning from them. But if there is no contact between elders and youth we won’t be able to learn and their knowledge will be lost forever.”

Boubacar Balde, young man

Based on community concern with this situation, and given the culturally-designated role of elders in African societies, in the DHF project one of the objectives is to strengthen communication between children, adults and elders, and between the sexes. GMP has developed a methodology for conducting “intergenerational forums” to elicit dialogue on various topics related to girls’ holistic development. Activities with primary schools also aim to strengthen communication between generations and at the same time increase appreciation for local cultural values.

During the MTPR, community members, younger and older alike, expressed strong support for project activities that bring younger and older community members together and that strengthen mutual respect and communication between them. The MTPR report concluded: “The intergenerational (IG) forums have been very effective in helping establish dialogue between generations on sensitive subjects like FGM, early marriage and corporal punishment” (p. 16).

Similarly, the RAKTS concludes that the DHF IG activities are beneficial for two reasons. First, it is important for elders, including grandmothers and religious leaders, to be involved in such programs, given their status and the power they wield in communities. Second, involvement of all segments of society is advantageous because: “Strategies that improve communication between various social categories in the community help break down barriers between them and enhance social cohesion, thereby leading to benefits that go beyond the well-being of girls to that of the whole community” (p. 100).

DHF Principle no. 3 → Participatory adult education and communication methods to catalyze community dialogue for collective action

Many community programs use a message-based approach in which the objective is to persuade community members to adopt solutions proposed by experts. DHF communication and education activities are based on an adult education “constructivist” notion of learning in which individuals and groups are encouraged to critically reflect on

both past and new information and to decide for themselves if and how the two sets of ideas can be combined and applied in real-life situations.

During the MTPR, community members were asked to judge the communication approach used in DHF activities. Those interviewed all stated their preference for the participatory approach used in the DHF project, as opposed to the more directive approaches often used in other programs.

"We have never before seen a project like this. In other projects development workers come to tell us what they have in their own heads and what we should do. The project team never told us that we should abandon FGM. Rather they asked us to reflect on our cultural traditions and to decide which ones are beneficial and which ones are not."

Youssouf Balde, President of local Parent Teacher Association

"The fact that you asked our opinion was very important. If the project had come to tell us to abandon FGM, we would have said yes but we would have continued in secret."

Aissatou, Grandmother

Another conclusion of the MTPR is that the DHF participatory adult education approach has been important insofar as it "encourages interaction and strengthens relationships between different community actors" (p. 7).

The RAKTS notes that, in order to bring about social change at the community level (related to FGM or to other issues), a process of collective decision-making is required that involves different segments of the society. Furthermore, a community decision to change must be initiated by community members themselves and this requires a process of genuine and sustained community dialogue. The RAKTS concludes that in the DHF project "Ongoing community dialogue is the main tool for enabling people to re-evaluate their beliefs and values and to embrace change, which may include FGM" (p. 9). "The community dialogue approach encourages community members to identify problems and to collectively decide what action to take" (p. 91).

Based on observations during Velingara field visits, the RAKTS evaluator was particularly impressed with the quality of facilitation during the intergenerational community sessions and pointed out an important lesson in this regard. "The type of community participatory process used in the DHF project involves bringing together of different ages and sexes who are not used to talking to each other, and especially talking about sensitive topics. In order for it to work effectively...resource persons with a high level of facilitation skills are necessary " (p. 100). This is an important lesson for organizations and programs interested in using this approach. In participatory processes at the community level, there is a big difference between group discussions based on clear objectives that are well facilitated and group discussions that involve enthusiastic exchange of ideas but that do not lead to any clear outcome.

DHF principle no. 4 → Holistic approach that promotes all facets of girls' development (intellectual, spiritual, physical, psychological and moral)

Many programs that address FGM narrowly focus only on that issue. During initial community forums in the preliminary phase of the project, community members expressed their concern about a variety of issues related to the education and development of girls and boys. Based on this input it was decided that a holistic approach would be adopted in which all key facets of girls' growth and development would be addressed.

During the project review, all community interviewees stated a strong preference for the holistic approach to girls' development adopted in the DHF project as contrasted with an approach which deals with only one aspect of their well-being, such as FGM.

"What is really important in this approach is that it contributes to girls' full development. If the project came to only talk about FGM we would have rejected it."

Demba Balde, elder man

"The approach used in the DHF project is like diversified agriculture. Instead of only growing one type of crop, it is better to plant several varieties. Considering girls' development, it is important to consider all aspects so that we are sure that they will be developed comprehensively."

Ablaye Mballo, middle-aged man

According to the MTPR report, "The holistic approach to girls' development that includes, but is not limited to, FGM, is very much appreciated by communities. All interviewees agreed that they prefer this approach compared to the approach used by other programs that aim only to get them to abandon FGM" (p. 16-17). The RAKTS assessment findings confirmed this preference on the part of community members. It concluded that whereas many programs have a narrow focus on FGM, a more holistic approach, such as that used in the DHF project, is more acceptable to communities and therefore, more likely to engage them in promoting girls' well-being in a broad sense.

DHF Principle no. 5 → Strengthening positive cultural traditions and discouraging harmful traditions

All of GMP's work, including the DHF project, is grounded in the cultural realities of each society. The project strategies are also based on two concepts from psychology: an *assets-based approach* and a perspective called *unconditional positive regard* (See end notesⁱⁱ these concepts deal with how change can effectively be promoted within community systems of values and practices. In the DHF approach, both concepts are reflected by the fact that initially positive cultural roles, values and traditions are identified, valued and explicitly promoted. Only later are harmful practices questioned. The two main objectives of the DHF project (above) reflect these concepts. A significant difference between this approach and that of many programs is the emphasis given to explicitly and continuously promoting positive cultural values, roles and traditions.

Amadou Hampate Ba, a Malian philosopher, proposed that Africans should “be grounded in our positive cultural traditions and abandon those that are no longer useful” (1985). His statement, which echoes the two concepts mentioned above, is woven into all project activities and is frequently discussed.

In the MTPR, all interviewees expressed support for the DHF approach in which positive cultural values are recognized while at the same time harmful ones are discouraged.

“The DHF approach is very relevant because, when we examine our traditions, we find that some of them are not at all positive. Therefore, we should choose and preserve the more useful ones and abandon the negative ones.”

Alpha Kande, village elder

“It is like when you harvest your crops, you keep the good part of the harvest and you throw away the part that isn’t any good.”

Waly Balde, young man

A leading religious figure in the area emphasized the importance he accords to the fact that all project activities revolve around local cultural roles and values.

“The main wealth of an ethnic group is its culture. I would even say that the soul of an ethnic group is its culture.”

Imam Sylla, President of the local Association of Imams

The RAKTS concludes: “The *assets-based approach* encourages communities themselves to decide what cultural practices and traditions to preserve and which ones need to be changed. This process promotes change from within” (p. 109).

5. Initial project results

After thirteen months of implementation of the DHF field activities, the MTPR aimed to identify initial project results.⁴ In October 2009 when the MTPR was conducted, only Strategies 1-3 and 6 were being implemented.

Through in-depth discussions with community members, religious leaders, teachers and development workers, a series of initial results were documented and are listed in Table II (Columns 3 and 4). This table is based on triangulation of qualitative information collected from various categories of interviewees (i.e. grandmothers, grandfathers, religious leaders, young men, young women, children, development workers and teachers). The synthesis of the information collected suggests that, after only thirteen months, there appear to be some significant changes in attitudes and behaviors in

⁴ Funding for the DHF project officially started in May 2008 but following recruitment of field staff, field level activities did not begin until Sept. 2008. This explains why the report refers to 13 months of implementation prior to both the MTPR and WV East Africa assessment.

children, adolescents, women of reproductive age, parents, teachers, and the community-at-large.

The changes reported at various levels are summarized as eight key results.

Initial Results of DHF Project Strategies

1. Increased recognition of grandmothers' role and knowledge on the part of children, adults and elder men
2. Increased communication between young people & elders
3. Increased communication within and between community groups
4. Increased interest on the part of children and adolescents in their cultural heritage and values
5. Increased efforts by family and community members to transmit positive cultural values & traditions to young people
6. Increased integration of cultural knowledge and values into school programs and greater acceptance of the school by community members
7. Strengthened relationships between teachers and community members, especially grandmothers
8. Positive changes in community attitudes toward traditional practices that are harmful to girls

Each of these results, discussed below, is illustrated by one or more quotations from MTPR interviewees expressing community sentiments:

5.1 Increased recognition of grandmothers' role and knowledge on the part of children, adults and elder men

MTPR results clearly show that attitudes toward grandmothers of both younger and older community members have changed for the better.

"Our perception of grandmothers has greatly changed. Before we thought they were there only to eat, sleep and scold. Ever since my teacher showed us the booklet, "The Role of Grandmothers in African Societies" [developed in the DHF project] that talks about the importance of grandmothers, I spend my evenings with my grandmother talking to her and listening to her stories and to what she knows about what happened in our village before I was born. I didn't do that before (the DHF project)."

Woulde, 12 year old student

"Before we thought that elders' knowledge was not useful to us and that is why we spent all of our evenings with our young friends. The recognition and involvement of grandmothers in this project has been very significant to us young people. We are now starting to understand just how important the grandmothers are."

Ablaye Mballo, young man

“Before, many children would run away when they saw a grandmother because they thought they were all witches. Even if the grandmother had a tree full of mangoes they were afraid to take fruit from her tree. Now children are spending all of their time with the grandmothers.”

Mballo, primary school teacher

MTPR concludes that grandmothers’ own self-confidence has increased as “their place in society has been restored.” Most grandmothers are now actively involved in community activities, which was not previously the case.

“For a long time it was as though the GMs were closed up in a room and the door was shut and we felt alone. When the project came the door opened. Now our role and experience are valued by everyone and GMs are actively involved in all community activities.”

Hawa Balde, Grandmother Leader

5.2. Increased communication between young people & elders

The MTPR report concludes as follows: “According to all groups interviewed, communication between the generations has improved and children now communicate much more easily with parents and elders. This can be explained by the fact first, that young people now show more interest in learning about their own traditions and second, that they are now more respectful of adults” (p. 11) and for these reasons adults are now more comfortable interacting with them.

Improved communication between adolescent males and elder men is discussed in the following quote:

“Before the elders didn’t want us (young men) to sit with them under the ‘arbre a palabre’. But since the intergenerational forums were held the elders have been more open toward us and now they encourage us to sit under the tree with them to discuss and to share their knowledge.”

Alassane Sabaly, adolescent man

5.3. Increased communication within and between community groups

The MTPR report notes that “different categories of community interviewees repeatedly stated that project activities have contributed to strengthening ties both between people within villages and between villages” (p. 12).

“The project has helped us to reunite the village. Now there is a greater sense of understanding and solidarity between us.”

Village headman, Sare Demba Mare

“Now there is greater understanding and better relations between people from Mountoumba and Dialakegni villages”. [These are the two villages that participate in the same intergenerational forums].

Fali, Village Imam

5.4 Increased interest on the part of children and adolescents in their cultural heritage and values

Based on MTPR interviews with young people and adults alike, it was found that children are now much more interested in their cultural traditions than they were in the past. During the review, school age girls proudly presented traditional stories and songs that they had learned from the grandmothers and that they didn't know before the DHF activities were initiated.

Children's adoption of certain more traditional cultural values is reflected in the following statement by a young girl:

"Grandmothers are bringing back our cultural values. Since the project started, we have seen a change in children's behavior. Now children greet adults when they pass by and bring water to drink to visitors. Yes, the grandmothers have taught us many things that they didn't teach us before".

Kadidiatou Balde, girl, 16 years old

5.5 Increased efforts by family and community members to transmit positive cultural values & traditions to young people

The review revealed that, since the creation of schools many years ago, many parents and grandparents in the community believed that their own knowledge, based on cultural and historical traditions, was no longer important or relevant to the education and development of today's children. Through the DHF community forums and other group discussions, they have realized that children's education should include not only school learning but also learning from elders about their cultural heritage, values and traditions. The MTPR concluded that grandmothers and other family members are now more committed and actively engaged in communicating with children and young people in order to pass on to them traditional knowledge and skills. Children, mothers, fathers and grandmothers all agree that grandmothers are now much more actively involved in story-telling and that many children who before did not know any traditional stories are now able to recite them at school and in the family.

"Now, grandmothers are always calling us (their grandchildren) to sit with them and discuss. In fact, in the past there was a certain distance and distrust between us but now there is a feeling of trust. You can tell that now they are very enthused about teaching us what they know."

Binta, young girl, 12 years old

5.6 Increased integration of cultural knowledge and values into school programs and greater acceptance of the school by community members

The MTPR concluded that the inclusion of cultural knowledge and of grandmothers in classroom activities has contributed to closing "the gap" between schools and communities. "These activities are helping to combine the traditional and modern worlds

of knowledge and experience and this in turn has contributed to a more positive view of schools on the part of community members.”

“We have read the booklet about the role of grandmothers to our students and explained to them the grandmother’s importance. I think we can no longer limit our teaching to what we know. It is important that we involve grandmothers in classroom activities so that children can also be taught by grandmothers many things that we young teachers don’t know.”

Boubacar Diaw, Primary School Director

“The booklet about the role of grandmothers in schools is very beneficial as it validates the role of grandmothers in children’s lives and it reinforces certain positive cultural practices, such as story-telling.”

Malang Sagna, School Director & District Supervisor

“Before it seemed that the school was competing with the community and the community saw the teachers as foreigners. We were encouraged to include elements from the local culture into the school program and now both the teachers and the school is better accepted by the community.”

Oumar Balde, Teacher

5.7 Strengthened relationships between teachers and community members, especially grandmothers

The MTPR concluded that in the past, communities felt that school attendance tends to pull children away from their cultural milieu. The participation of teachers with community members in the IG forums has been an opportunity for teachers to listen to such concerns on the part of community members and has helped them to be more respectful of community elders. The review also stated that most teachers are now more integrated into their communities and participate more in community activities.

5.8 Positive changes in community attitudes toward traditional practices that are harmful to girls, including FGM, early marriage, corporal punishment, and teenage pregnancy

The project aims to promote changes in various community socio-cultural norms. A major objective of the project is to catalyze discussion among key community groups, by sex and by age, around the various traditional harmful practices, in the hope that they will gradually come to a collective decision, or consensus, to modify existing practices. The MTPR aimed to broadly assess community attitudes toward the DHF project strategies and to collect information on “observed changes” at the community level. It did not seek to directly survey community stakeholders regarding their attitudes toward FGM, early marriage, corporal punishment, etc. While questions of this nature were not asked, in all communities, many interviewees did explicitly talk about changes in attitudes regarding these priority harmful practices. And through triangulation of the data collected, the MTPR concludes that, “In all communities there are positive changes in attitudes toward traditional practices that are harmful to girls” (p. 17).

Given the responsibility of senior women, or grandmothers, for preserving and transmitting traditions to younger generations, their strong attachment to tradition has been observed since the outset of the project. However, during the MTPR various grandmothers, along with other community members, clearly articulated the fact that some of their attitudes are changing.

“Our ancestors told us that girls should be cut so that they will be more faithful to their husbands but we don’t believe that any more. And we now know that in Islam it is not written anywhere that girls must be cut. Now young people in the village are against it and almost everyone has agreed to stop. There are at least 30 little girls in the community born the past two years who have not been cut.”

Dinde, one of the eldest grandmother leaders

“I think it is a big problem in this part of Senegal that people have always thought that children need to be beaten in order to educate them. I think we need to change our ways and talk more to our children rather than hitting them all the time. If you look at children in families where parents spend more time talking to their children and less time beating them you will see that those children are better behaved and have more self-confidence.

Binta, grandmother & village midwife

At this point it is impossible to precisely evaluate changes in attitudes and practices toward harmful practices related to young girls in project-supported communities. However, the available evidence suggests that in all communities there is a positive trend toward abandonment of FGM and other practices.

6. Conclusions

After only one year of project implementation, the results, identified by two separate assessments of the Developpement Holistique des Filles (DHF) project in Senegal are very positive both in terms of community attitudes toward the DHF approach and the initial results that are reported. Based on community feedback it appears that the project strategy has had three effects at the community level:

- It has strengthened relationships and communication
- It has increased appreciation and promotion of positive cultural traditions
- It has catalyzed change in community attitudes toward harmful traditions, including FGM.

6.1 Strengthened relationships and communication:

Interviews with all segments of society, younger and older, men and women, provide evidence of the following changes:

- increased communication between young people and elders
- communication strengthened especially between girls and grandmothers

- increased communication within community groups (of different ages and sexes)
- strengthened relationships between communities
- strengthened mutual respect and communication between teachers and community members, especially grandmothers

The DHF project did not set out explicitly to strengthen relationships within families and communities. However, the data from the two assessments and the qualitative documentation collected since the outset of the project all suggest that this is a positive and unanticipated result of the DHF intergenerational and grandmother-inclusive strategies.

Community members of both sexes frequently refer to the fact that there is now greater communication between grandmothers and young girls. And there are numerous reports from both community members and teachers that this increased communication has better prepared young girls to avoid the advances of boys and men and that teenage pregnancy has greatly decreased. There are plans to systematically investigate this potentially significant information.

The positive changes in community relationships and communication suggest that the project has contributed to increasing the *social capital* that exists within communities.⁵ At the international level, extensive research has shown the relationship between a community's level of social capital and its ability to address community needs and problems: "Social capital allows individuals, groups and communities to resolve collective problems more easily."⁶ Bringing about change in community social norms, related to FGM or other harmful practices, requires that there be strong communication and collaboration between different segments of the society.

6.2 Increased appreciation and promotion of positive cultural traditions

One of the priority objectives of the DHF project is to promote positive cultural values and traditions that contribute to girls' education and development. Both assessments revealed evidence of positive changes in both community and school contexts, namely:

- increased efforts by family members to transmit positive cultural values and traditions to young people
- strengthened confidence and role of grandmothers in transmitting cultural values and traditions to children/young people
- increased integration of cultural knowledge and values into school programs

The assessments showed that attitudes of both community members and teachers have changed as regards their respective roles in educating children and in passing on cultural traditions. Adults and elders are now more convinced than before that it is

⁵ *What is social capital?* (2000) World Bank web site. www.worldbank.org/poverty/scapital. The World Bank has defined social capital as "the glue that holds a community together" consisting of relationships, networks, trust and reciprocity.

⁶ *The well-being of nations: The role of human and social capital*. p. 41. OECD, Paris, 2001.

important for them to be actively involved in passing on to their children their cultural heritage. Grandmothers, in particular, are much more involved in story-telling and they are actively gathering together young girls and teaching them the songs, stories, riddles and values that can help them to know their past and to deal with the challenges of today's world. Many grandparents felt before that their knowledge was "outmoded" but now they realize that children need to acquire knowledge not only at school but also to learn about the history and culture of their families, and communities. Teachers have realized that their own knowledge is insufficient and that they should partner with community members who have knowledge that they do not have and that is useful to children as they are growing up. In some communities men have taken the initiative to gather together groups of boys for traditional games; however, grandmothers are still much more actively involved in the socialization of young children.

6.3 Positive changes in community attitudes toward harmful traditional practices

The second priority objective in the DHF project is to promote change in community attitudes and practices related to FGM, early marriage, corporal punishment and teenage pregnancy. Changes in community socio-cultural norms and practices related to such issues generally do not happen within a short period of time and are also quite difficult to evaluate. In some FGM strategies, community members are asked to "pledge" or "declare" that they will change their practices, but this was not done in the DHF project.

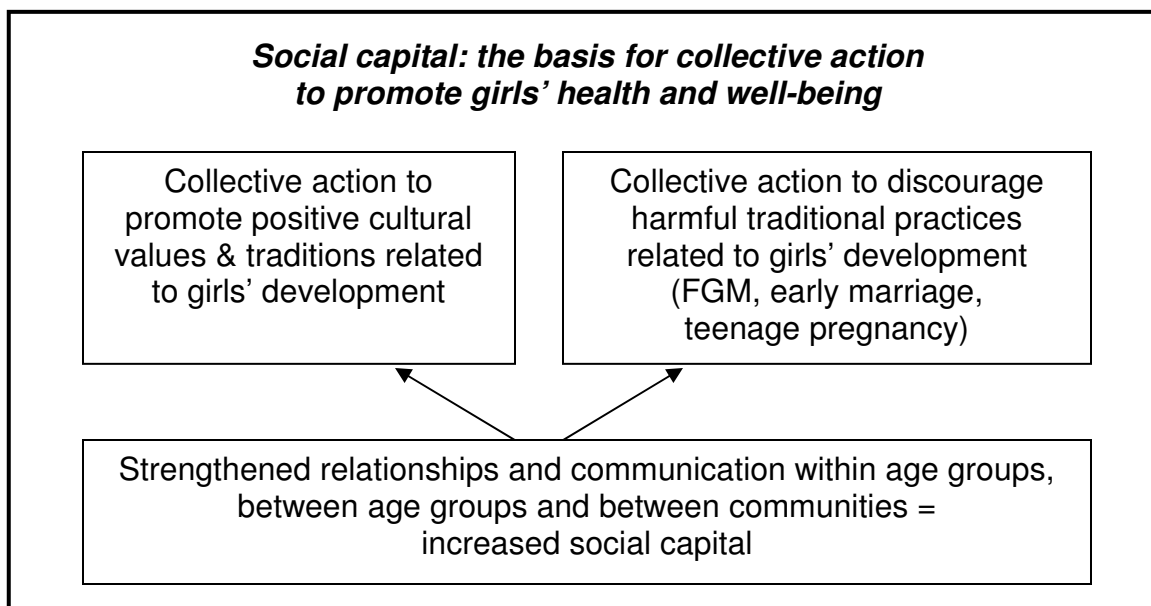
During the MTPR community interviewees were not directly asked if they had changed their behavior related to FGM, early marriage, or other traditional practices. Nevertheless, many statements were made, particularly by elder women and men, including local Imams, which suggest that after one year of project implementation attitudes, are changing particularly related to FGM. As stated above, based on triangulation of responses from different categories of community members, the MTPR concluded that there have been positive changes in attitudes toward FGM and other traditional practices in all communities. Given the central role that grandmothers play in passing on this tradition the changes in attitudes observed within social networks of grandmothers, and especially among grandmother leaders, are especially significant.

Based on observations and feedback from communities, it appears that the approach adopted in the DHF project of *unconditional positive regard*, including celebration of local culture, validation and inclusion of elders, and especially grandmothers, has contributed to greater self-confidence on the part of communities themselves and, in turn, has made them more open to reconsidering aspects of their tradition that may not be as beneficial as they had believed in the past.

6.4 Increased social capital - a basis for collective action

The diagram below presents the relationship that appears to exist between these three categories of changes reported at the community level. Strong relationships and fluid communication across generations and between the sexes are the foundation for

collective reflection and action to deal with priority issues related to girls' development, namely: how to promote positive cultural traditions within their education and upbringing, and how to discourage harmful traditional practices that can hinder their development. This conclusion is supported by the extensive research on social cohesion and social capital in other settings and suggests that strengthened relationships and communication within DHF-supported communities will increase their capacity to collectively deal with various types of problems in the future.



An important lesson that can be drawn from this analysis for future community programs in all sectors is that if strong relationships and communication do not exist between community groups and networks such communities will be less likely to be able to act collectively and effectively to solve community problems.

7. Lessons learned

Findings of the two recent assessments of the *Developpement Holistique des Filles* (DHF) project, both carried out in Oct. 2010 were summarized above. Since the project began in September 2008 extensive qualitative documentation on project implementation has also been carried out and discussed with project implementers and collaborators in Velingara. Based on these three sources, a series of preliminary lessons have been formulated that should inform ongoing implementation of the DHF project and that should also be relevant to other development programs with similar goals.

Honoring local cultural values and traditions

Communities in Senegal are profoundly concerned about the loss of cultural identity and values. Various facets of the project involve honoring local cultural traditions (related to the role of elders, use of local language, songs, dance, games and so on). The very

strong sense of ownership of the DHF project and involvement therein on the part of communities appears to stem in large part from the fact that the project responds to this deep-seated and generally unaddressed community need.

Inclusion of senior women, or “grandmothers”, based on their culturally designated central role in families and communities

Acknowledgement and validation of the central role played by grandmothers in the lives of children and families reflects a cultural reality that is often not taken into account in development programs. Inclusion of grandmothers in development activities related to their domains of expertise unleashes an untapped resource for change and also contributes to community support for such interventions, especially on the part of men.

Inclusion of elders for cultural continuity and systemic change

Explicit and active inclusion of elders in DHF strategies lends credibility to the project. Young people who were interviewed clearly stated that they too are more comfortable with an approach that explicitly involves elders along with younger community members as it creates a synergy between the wisdom of the elders and the energy of youth.

Holistic approach to girls’ development

Programs should reflect the holistic concern that families have for girls’ development. Communities are more receptive to an approach that deals holistically with girls’ development and well-being rather than one that narrowly addresses a single “problematic” aspect of their well-being, such as FGM.

Ongoing community dialogue to develop consensus for change

Development programs often target different community groups but few explicitly aim to strengthen communication between such groups on priority issues. In order to change community norms, related to FGM or other development issues, there must be a consensus between community groups regarding the need for change. To encourage consensus-building both among and between community groups, programs need to adopt more open-ended methods of communication/education that encourage collective dialogue and critical thinking as opposed to those that aim to persuade people to adopt prescribed solutions.⁷

Bottom up approach to promoting child rights

Communities are often very uncomfortable with a “rights-based approach” that instructs them on what they should do to educate and raise their children. In the DHF project a

⁷ This approach is based in part on the “communication for social change” model. Figueroa, M.; Kincaid, L.; Rani, M.; Lewis, G: (2002). *Communication for Social Change: An Integrated Model for Measuring the Process and Its Outcomes*. Communication for Social Change Working Paper Series. John Hopkins. Published in 2002 by The Rockefeller Foundation, New York

“needs based approach” is used through a bottom-up process in which communities are challenged to identify “the needs of girls to ensure their healthy growth and development” in today’s world based on cultural, religious and other community and universal values. The DHF team in Velingara feels strongly that given both cultural realities and the experiences of communities with past “rights-based” programs, a focus on “girls’ needs” is much more appropriate and acceptable than one that focuses on “girls’ rights.”

Intergenerational communication strengthens social capital and collective action for change

Communities are very concerned about the breakdown in communication between generations. According to community informants, project activities have contributed to strengthening mutual respect and dialogue between generations. Development programs that strengthen intergenerational communication not only contribute to developing consensus regarding immediate development issues but also increase social capital and social cohesion for collectively dealing with future issues.

Unconditional Positive Regard to promote change

In most community programs the focus is on promoting change, either to encourage communities to adopt a new practice or to abandon an existing one. The DHF project is based on the principle of Unconditional Positive Regard (UPR) wherein greater emphasis is put on validating existing values and practices than on promoting change. The adoption of this concept appears to contribute to the engagement and openness of communities to reconsider age-old practices like FGM and early marriage. This principle should be tested in community programs addressing other deeply-entrenched norms and practices.

Ongoing relationships with communities to catalyze community dialogue and community-initiated change

The DHF project strategy is based on close and ongoing relationships between DHF program field staff and community leaders and groups. Establishing and maintaining close and supportive relationships with community members is a key factor in promoting ongoing community dialogue for action. Research has shown that mass media activities can effectively provide people with information but strong interpersonal relationships are required for open dialogue to take place and for genuine change to come about.

Endnotes:

ⁱ Note no. 1: Methodology for conducting Mid-term Project Review

At the outset of the project, in October 2008, a quantitative baseline survey was carried out in which information was collected on the two key project objectives. (The baseline survey will be repeated at the end of the project in April 2010.) In the midterm review in

October 2009 the focus was on collecting qualitative information on project implementation, especially regarding community feedback on the principles, activities and effects of the project strategies, and using multiple data collection methods. In-depth individual and group interviews were conducted. Extensive qualitative documentation collected since September 2009 was analyzed, and community forums with representatives of all 12 villages involved in the project were held. During the review a total of 136 project stakeholders were interviewed as follows: children (16); women of reproductive age (20); grandmothers (22); men (19); community leaders including religious leaders (18); teachers (31); World Vision and District Education office staff (10). The baseline survey will be repeated at the end of the project in April 2011.

The full report of the mid-term review is available in French from World Vision/Senegal. Contact: sagane_thiaw@wvi.org or babacar_ndour@wvi.org.

ⁱⁱ Note 2: *Unconditional Positive Regard* (UPR) is a concept developed by the psychologist, Carl Rogers. It refers to accepting an individual, no matter what he or she believes, in order to increase the person's self-confidence and make him/her more open to examining his/her attitudes and beliefs and to considering the possibility of modifying them. According to this theory, it is the total acceptance of another individual that makes them more open to change.

The Grandmother Project applies the concept of *unconditional positive regard* in its work with communities to promote change from the inside. The communication/education methods developed by GMP validate the role and experience of grandmothers, and elders in general, increase community confidence in their socio-cultural knowledge and experience and then encourage collective dialogue and re-examination of existing values and alternative ones. GMP's experience shows that Roger's concept of UPR is valid at the community level and that by increasing community self-confidence in their "past" they become more open to considering an alternative "future."

The Grandmother Project (GMP) is an 501(c) 3 non-profit organization established in 2005. GMP develops community approaches that promote improvements in the lives of women, children and families by building on existing cultural and community values, roles and resources. GMP's approach is one of *organizational capacity building*. We provide support to other organizations, which have operational community programs, to help them develop grandmother-inclusive and intergenerational programs. We believe that involving GMs as resource persons and strengthening intergenerational relationships will both improve results of programs that promote the well-being of women and children and increase social cohesion in families and communities.

More information on the work of the Grandmother Project can be found on our website:
www.grandmotherproject.org