

"Strengthening cultural identify and intergenerational communication"

"It is grandmothers who teach children important traditional values like empathy, solidarity with other family members, generosity and patience."
Amadou Cissé, Senegalese Teacher

Why did The Grandmother Project develop this initiative?

- In an era of globalization, in many non-Western societies (throughout) Africa, Asia and Latin America local cultural values and traditions are being undermined.
- Some Western values that are influencing young people in non-Western societies are in conflict with positive, traditional family and community values.
- In many societies respect for elders, once held in high regard, is eroding.
- The transmission of cultural values from one generation to the next is primarily the grandmothers' responsibility.
- In many countries, school curricula are based largely on Western models and do not include discussion of positive cultural values and traditions. Children who go to school are often torn between the traditional values of their families and communities and those that are taught in schools.

What are the objectives of the initiative?

- To strengthen intergenerational communication between elders and school age children
- To encourage teachers to develop activities that help to "bridge the gap" between home and school and increase children's interest in and respect for positive cultural roles and traditions
- To support development of educational materials/activities for use in schools and in communities that encourage teachers and students to explore ways to increase communication between school children, parents and grandparents
- To encourage teachers to incorporate cultural values and traditions into school activities

Our accomplishments

- In Southern Senegal in West Africa, with financial support from World Vision, The Grandmother Project worked with teachers and community outreach workers to develop a booklet on the multi-faceted role of grandmothers in the local *Halpular* culture.
- The booklet is illustrated with children's drawings from a contest carried out in fourteen schools in southern Senegal.



"The Role of Grandmothers in Halpular Culture in Senegal"

- The booklet was published in French for use in the schools. It was also published in Pular (the local language) for use in adult literacy classes and other community groups.
- Workshops were organized with 240 primary and secondary school teachers during the summer of 2006 to discuss: how the “Grandmother Booklet” could be used in classroom activities; how grandmothers and grandfathers can become involved in school learning activities; and how students can become involved in recording the traditional knowledge and wisdom of the elders in their families and communities.
- The booklets have been used in the schools since late 2006.

Plans for learning activities with children inspired by the grandmother booklet:

- Story-telling by grandmothers in the classroom and discussion with children on the moral lessons of each story
- Using booklets as reading material for primary and secondary school students and for adults in literacy classes
- Organizing “story-telling evenings” in the community for families where grandmothers tell their favorite tales
- Presentation of skits by children based on different chapters in the booklet with community groups
- Creating collections of traditional stories through interviews by students with grandparents

Feedback from community members on the “grandmother booklet”

Recognition of grandmothers’ role

“I have never seen a book that talks about our role in society. It is true what it says that we do all that we can to ensure the well-being of the family. But usually our role isn’t recognized and we are not invited to participate in development activities.”

Coumbayel Mballo, Grandmother

“This initiative will increase grandmothers’ confidence in themselves and commitment to their important work in the family. It will help show them that we respect their role and their knowledge.”

Demba Balde, Teacher

“There are two types of schools: public schools and grandmothers’ schools. Both are important for children’s development.”

Malang Sanyang, District Education Supervisor

The central role of grandmothers in families

“GMs are the guardians of the home and of the culture. They are the ones who care for young children in the family. Their role is very important in our society.”

Demba Coly, Teacher

Loss of cultural identity and values

“This initiative is very important. If we don’t do something fast, in twenty years we will find that our culture has been completely lost. And grandmothers are an important part of our culture.”

Moussa Mballo, Elder

“Schools and television are contributing to the loss of cultural values. We must find a way to balance what is taught to children about western and traditional values. The grandmother booklet is a positive development in this regard.”

Pierre Ndiaye, Teacher

Improving the image of grandmothers in the community

“People often say that ‘grandmothers are a bad influence’ or ‘they are no longer useful.’ If we read the booklet and discuss everyone will acknowledge their important role and they will feel more confident.”

Thierno Moussa, Literacy teacher

“As teachers we must do more to promote the teaching of cultural values and traditions. The booklet gives us lots of ideas of what we can do to pay more attention to our culture and our grandmothers.”

Baba Coulibaly, Teacher

Bringing culture into the classroom

“The children of today don’t know their culture and schools don’t teach about culture. Children need to learn about the cultural and moral values of their society. This booklet is a great thing because it will help us to teach about culture and values in the classroom.”

Moussa Touré, Teacher

Cultural and moral values taught by grandmothers

“We must preserve key cultural values and traditions, like our festivals, our stories and our proverbs. These are the things that teach our children who we are. The booklet will help teach them to value these things.”

Mamadou Alpha, elder

“The booklet will encourage everyone to reflect on our culture and our values and to decide what is really important for our society in the future.”

Ferdinand Kenny, District Education Supervisor

Intergenerational communication

“If children hear teachers talking about the importance of elders in our society this can help bring children and elders closer together. In the past, we never invited grandparents into the classroom. The booklet helps us see how we can do so.”

Mariama Sabaly, Teacher

“This can encourage children to spend more time with their grandparents and listen to them more.”

Pathe Diao, Community leader

What are the next steps in this initiative?

Based on the very positive feedback from community members and school staff alike, there are plans to extend this activity to many more schools in the Velingara area in southern Senegal. In other parts of Senegal, staff of World Vision and of other organizations, including Plan International have expressed interest in being able to obtain copies of the booklet and introduce it into schools that they are supporting.

Outside of Senegal, considerable interest in this initiative has been expressed by organizations working in the education sector in Mali, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Djibouti, Nicaragua and India. Grandmother Project aims to obtain resources to support development of this activity in various other countries.

Grandmother Project (GMP) is an American NGO that was established in 2005. GMP's objective is to develop community approaches that build on cultural and community values and resources in order to promote positive and sustainable changes in the lives of women and children. GMP's work is based on an organizational capacity building approach and all of its work is carried out in collaboration with other organizations which implement activities at the community level, often with technical support from GMP. GMP aims to strengthen the capacity of partner organizations by helping them to develop programs that: involve grandmothers in an active way; and promote intergenerational learning in order to bring about promote positive changes in families and communities.

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