

A close-up portrait of a young girl with dark skin and her hair styled in many small braids. She is wearing a bright red top and small hoop earrings. She has a gentle smile and is looking directly at the camera. The background is a soft, out-of-focus brown.

**Tostan**  
Dignity for All



# Tostan

is an international nonprofit headquartered in Dakar, Senegal.

We envision a world where everyone is treated equally and respectfully, and has the tools they need to reach their full potential. By facilitating the spread of human rights education and practical skills, we provide rural communities with the knowledge to determine their own vision and develop sustainably.

We have spent over 20 years developing a way to put communities in charge of their own futures through our grassroots holistic education program. We are headquartered in Africa, always putting our communities first. Our facilitators come from our partner communities, and the hiring and training of African staff is a priority.



# The Tostan Model

Our three-year empowerment program puts rural communities in charge of their own futures. They set their own community vision while learning about democracy, human rights, hygiene and health, and as part of the problem-solving sessions, decide which practices help or hinder their development.

The holistic nature of our proven model allows communities to partner with us on areas important for community wellbeing - education, health, governance, economic growth and environment. By working on all these areas together over a three-year period, our program lays the foundation for future progress.

Underpinned by human rights education, communities also address a number of other prevalent issues during the program. These include abandoning harmful traditional practices, such as child/forced marriage and female genital cutting (FGC), the empowerment of women and girls, and the importance of early childhood development.

We currently work in six countries in West Africa.

# Our Community Empowerment Program (CEP) is:

## Human Rights-Based

Knowledge of human rights and responsibilities is the foundation for learning

## Respectful & Inclusive

Information is shared in a non-judgmental way

## Holistic & Sustainable

Program covers five key impact areas and has sustainability at its core





# Innovation in the CEP

We work with communities to strengthen their development efforts through innovative additions and extensions of our program.





# Reaching Across Social Networks and Country Borders



Our Community Empowerment Program and other projects reach beyond communities and into the social networks in which communities live and interrelate. This means our work often stretches across country borders and the impacts can be seen on a regional scale, such as the movement to abandon female genital cutting and child/forced marriage.



# Ensuring Sustainability

Seventeen-member Community Management Committees (CMCs) are democratically selected and trained in management skills to implement projects in their communities. At least half of committee members must be female. The CMCs embody our vision for sustainable development: democratic, community-based organizations working to meet community needs and improve the wellbeing of all community members. Over time, many register as official community-based organizations in their respective countries, which helps ensure local ownership and sustainability of projects.



## Working in Partnership

We work with local government, civil society, NGOs, and international partners to implement our Community Empowerment Program in eight countries in Africa. We have also set up our Empowered Communities Network (ECN) to support communities to partner with other organizations on development initiatives. Through the ECN, we connect trained CMCs with nonprofit partners, microfinance institutions, businesses, government authorities, and other service providers so they can access resources and funding to continue their community-led development projects.

# Community Success

Working with communities, our holistic approach has contributed to outcomes in many different areas, including:

- Large-scale abandonment of female genital cutting and child/ forced marriage
- Promotion of grassroots democracy
- Enhancement of economic opportunities at a local level
- Emergence of female leadership in the community
- Improvement of literacy and math skills
- Environmental sustainability
- Improved behaviors for the reduction of malaria, HIV/AIDS, and other diseases
- Increase in vaccination rates
- Increased enrollment of girls in formal school
- Protection of maternal and child health
- Protection of children's rights.

Since 1991, more than 200,000 individuals have participated in our Community Empowerment Program, affecting the lives of over two million people indirectly through *organized diffusion*, our unique community outreach approach.



We have been recognized for our work by the Conrad N. Hilton Humanitarian Prize, the UNESCO King Sejong Literacy Prize, the Skoll Award for Social Entrepreneurship (SASE), the Anna Lindh Award for Human Rights, and others. Our approach to the abandonment of female genital cutting has been integrated into national and international strategies including the Donor's Working Group on FGM/C and ten UN agencies. In Senegal, the Government has adopted a National Action Plan that calls for using the human rights approach pioneered by Tostan to end FGC by 2015.



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