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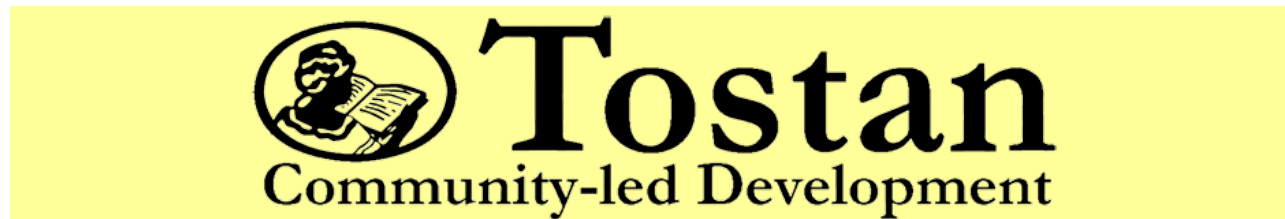
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Tostan Newsletter Summer 2008, Issue VII

Breakthrough in Somaliland

Hundreds discuss FGC abandonment during intervillage meeting



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Somaliland, June 26: Over 400 people from several communities in Somaliland gathered at a school in the village of Mahamed Moge to discuss the practice of female genital cutting (FGC). The meeting was organized by Community Management Committees (CMCs) and Tostan class members from the communities of Mahamed Moge, Daami, Ayaz One, and Arabsiyo following their participation in the first phase of the Tostan Community Empowerment Program (CEP). The intervillage meeting is being hailed as a significant event in a region where FGC is almost universally practiced and rarely discussed publicly.

Two respected religious leaders attended the event and explained that FGC is not an obligation of Islam, as many community members had previously believed. A representative of the Ministry of Family Affairs and Social Development congratulated the participants on the large turnout and on their commitment to raise awareness to improve the health and well-being of women and girls in Somaliland. The local health center nurse gave an informational presentation on the negative health impact of FGC on girls, women and society as a whole.

The theater troupe of the Somaliland Culture and Sports Association (SOCSA), the local NGO partnering with Tostan in Somaliland, performed an educational sketch presenting the dangers of FGC and sang two songs about the importance of protecting the health of girls and women.

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Shamis, Coordinator of the Community Management Committee from Arabsiyo, spoke of her commitment to

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To empower African communities to bring about sustainable development and positive social transformation based on the respect of human rights.*




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Committee from Aradsiyo, spoke of her commitment to ending FGC throughout Somaliland. She emphasized the important role men play in ending the practice and called on husbands, fathers, sons and brothers to support the movement of women and girls for better health and a brighter future.

The CMC coordinator from Mahamed Moge spoke to conclude the event, saying that this was "only the first of many meetings to come" as they continue to raise awareness about harmful traditional practices like FGC. Since 2007, Tostan has been implementing its nonformal education program for community-led development in 14 communities in Somaliland, as well as in 28 communities in Northeast (Puntland) and South Central Somalia.



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FGC Abandonment Movement in Senegal Reaches Two Key Zones

Declarations in Fatick and Casamance Regions of Senegal Bring Total Number of Communities Declaring Abandonment to 3,260

Némanding joins the movement

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Thirty communities assembled at Némanding on March 30, 2008 for a public declaration taking "the solemn commitment...to abandon the practice of female genital cutting (FGC) and child marriage in [their] communities."

Among those declaring an end to FGC was Mbaat Sarr, who shared a moving testimony explaining that in her life, she could never have believed that one day the blades would be abandoned by the [women who performed the cutting]. She also emphasized the fact that, thanks to the Tostan program, women's voices

would now be heard in the decision-making process.





To close the declaration, the Governor proclaimed his support for protecting women's health. "The decision to abandon harmful traditional practices signifies a spirit of openness, of strong commitment for all that can raise awareness and lead to action. The mobilization must be broad because everyone is concerned, and I am optimistic having seen the progress accomplished today."

Diégoune: the Blouf region commits

In the Blouf region in the Casamance in Southern Senegal, home of the Diola ethnic group, statistics indicate that up to 90% of girls undergo female genital cutting (FGC). But on May 4, 2008, 90 communities gathered to declare their abandonment of FGC and forced /child marriage. This decision, which represents an historic turning point in this region, was attended by traditional chiefs and religious leaders, as well as administrative authorities.

"Today we join the historic movement started by Malicounda Bambara which has continued to grow in our region and throughout Senegal whereby communities have renounced the practice of female genital cutting and forced/child marriage for the promotion of the health of women and girls." read by a young girl from the Blouf region.



One by one the participants explained their decision until the final speech was delivered by the Governor. After the declaration, the Community Management Committees established a follow-through committee with the purpose of continuing social mobilization activities to promote human rights in areas that have not yet been covered.

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Profile: Tostan Senegal Volunteers

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A native of Canada, Amie Ritchie joined the Tostan Senegal team after spending six months volunteering at the office in Washington, DC. She will be working on the Adopt-A-Village project while she is in Senegal through December, 2008.



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With her adventurous spirit, Rowan Braybrook will be a dynamic addition to the Tostan Senegal team, where she will be serving through August. She is currently studying sociology and anthropology at Middlebury College and is researching the role of social networks in the decision making process for FGC abandonment.

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Mother's Day Success



Thank you to those who donated on Mother's Day 2008! Your support is greatly appreciated. Our 2008 Mother's Day campaign raised thousands of dollars-enough to help hundreds of women and their families in West Africa. Because of the great response we received, we have decided to make our Mother's Day Campaign an annual event. Next year we will be do our best to make it even easier to support our communities--by offering an expanded set of greeting cards and e-cards, additional gift options, and fully customizable messages. Thank you again for your support!

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Tostan is a 501(c)(3) nongovernmental organization based in Senegal, West Africa. For further information, please visit our website at www.tostan.org

Sincerely,
Gannon Gillespie
Director of US Operations
Tostan



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