

Tostan
Dignity for all

2025 Annual Report

A yearly report summary highlight



Ensemble agissons pour le
bien-être communautaire

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Opening letter,

Dear Friends & Partners,

2025 was not an easy year for communities or for the organizations that choose to stand with them.

Resources tightened across the development sector. In several contexts where Tostan works, insecurity and fragility placed additional pressure on communities already navigating difficult conditions. More broadly, long-standing assumptions about how development is financed, who defines its priorities, and what counts as lasting progress are being questioned, and rightly so.

What this year confirmed, once again, is that sustainable change does not depend only on favorable conditions. It depends on people's collective capacity to understand their realities, organize around shared priorities, and act with purpose.

That conviction is at the heart of Tostan's work.

It does not begin with predefined solutions. It begins with education in local languages, through dialogue, reflection, and a shared exploration of rights, responsibilities, and what communities want for their future. That process strengthens individuals. Women, men, and young people build knowledge, confidence, and the capacity to lead. Those individual shifts become collective. Communities organize, define priorities, and take action. Over time, those actions shape the wider territory: more children in school and registered at birth, stronger local governance, reduced conflict, improved access to health services, and more inclusive local economies.

This is the pathway behind the results in this report.





Across Senegal, The Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea, and Mali, communities used this process in 2025 to address challenges that carry real weight in daily life. In Kédougou, young people from Bassari communities defined a response to mental health grounded in their own cultural practices, without waiting for an external expert to name the problem or design the solution. In Mali, community peace committees resolved land disputes and household tensions before they escalated, extending their reach to 130 communities beyond those directly engaged in the program. In Senegal and Guinea-Bissau, women and youth turned learning into economic initiative: managing community loan funds with a 95% repayment rate, financing micro-projects, and strengthening their participation in local markets. I also want to recognize our teams across the region, whose steady presence alongside communities made this work possible in a year marked by real uncertainty and strain.

These results matter beyond the communities where they were produced. The challenges communities addressed in 2025: school inclusion, civil registration, maternal health, conflict prevention, economic resilience, and the protection of girls, are also the challenges that national development agendas across the region have committed to address. Senegal's Vision 2050 places human capital, social equity, territorial development, and good governance at the center of national transformation. The Gambia's Recovery-Focused National Development Plan (RF-NDP) prioritizes education, local governance, civil registration, and women's empowerment. Mali's National Strategy for Emergence and Sustainable Development (SNEDD) links peace, decentralization, citizenship, and human development. Guinea-Bissau's national cooperation framework centers democratic governance, access to social services, and structural economic transformation.

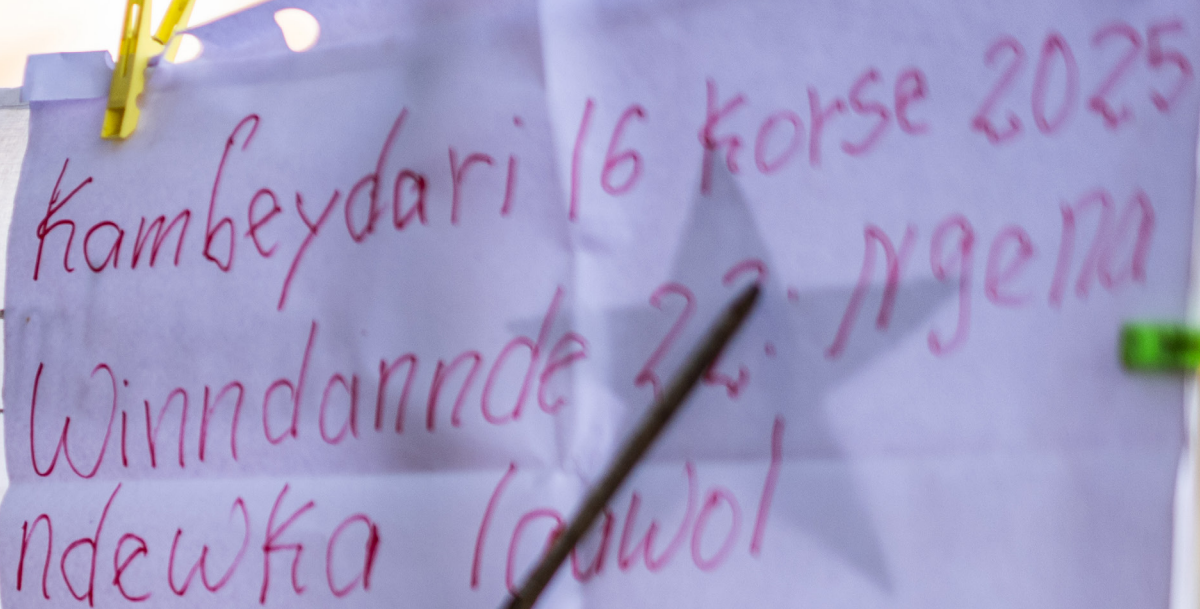
Tostan's contribution is not to substitute for public systems. It is to strengthen the community-level conditions, participation, trust, local organization, and sustained agency that public systems need in order to work.

We close this year with gratitude to the partners and donors who sustained this work, and above all to the communities who continue to lead it. We also close with confidence: in communities that keep moving forward with dignity and determination, and in the young people whose ideas, courage, and commitment are helping shape more just and more resilient futures.

Sobel Aziz Ngom
Chief Executive Officer







Kambeydari 16 korse 2025
Winndannde 22. Ngerna
ndewka laawol

About Tostan

Tostan is a non-profit organization that empowers communities to define priorities and lead their own development. Headquartered in Thiès, Senegal, Tostan operates in five West African countries and collaborates with partners across Africa and globally.

Tostan implements the Community Empowerment Program, an African-inspired education program grounded in human rights and shared responsibilities. Through participatory methods in local languages, the program strengthens communities' capacity to analyze their context, organize collectively, and engage with public institutions. Over the past three decades, Tostan's education program has reached over seven million people, contributing to measurable progress in good governance, social transformation, and human development.

As a technical partner, Tostan collaborates with African governments and development actors to advance priorities including education, health, gender equality, child protection, youth employment, and social cohesion.

Tostan also trains development practitioners, including grassroots NGOs and government leaders, in its education model through a sharing and mutual learning approach.

Tostan's Work

The **Community Empowerment Program (CEP)** is a three-year, non-formal education program implemented in local languages and designed with communities.

It begins by strengthening understanding of human rights, shared responsibilities, and collective wellbeing. Through dialogue, participants define a shared vision for their future. The program then builds practical skills in literacy, governance, health, environmental management, and economic initiatives, enabling communities to act on these priorities.

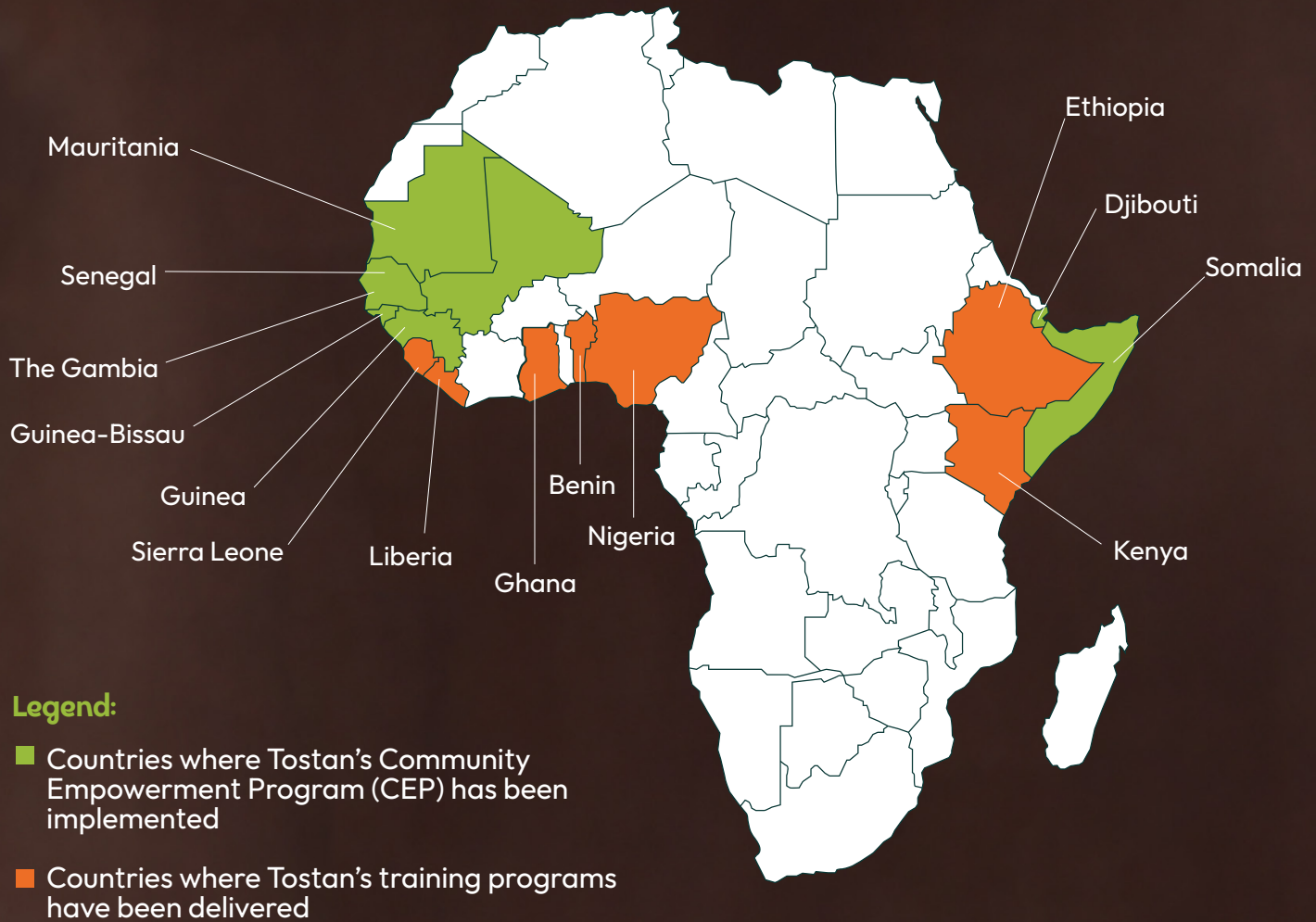
The CEP is inclusive, with separate classes for adolescents and adults. Communities establish representative management committees, with strong participation of women and youth, to lead local initiatives and engage with public institutions. Children's Councils further support youth participation. Knowledge spreads beyond participating communities through social networks, contributing to broader changes in practices and social norms.

The program builds the conditions for sustained, community-led development grounded in local leadership and collective action.

The model behind the CEP also travels beyond Tostan's direct program footprint. Through the Tostan Training Center in Thiès, Senegal, practitioners from NGOs, government bodies, and development organizations engage with the methodology through participatory sessions, field visits to partner communities, and direct exchanges with community management committees and facilitators. More than 1,000 participants from 50 countries have completed these programs to date, through formats ranging from five-day orientation seminars to three-week trainer preparation programs and customized deepening work in partner countries. This is how the approach extends: through practitioners and institutions that have experienced community-led education from the inside and carry it into their own work.



Where we Work



Our Team

We are a positive, vibrant global community of 500 women, men and young changemakers working towards dignity for all.





2025 Results at a Glance



Learning Reached People



150,000 Peoples

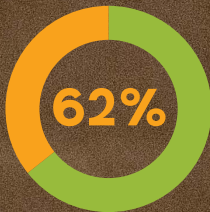
engaged in Tostan's education programs across West Africa



110,000 Additional People

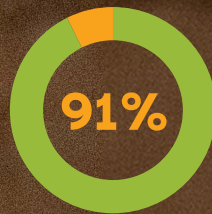
reached through community-led awareness-raising activities

Communities Took Action



62% of children

identified as out of school were enrolled through community-led initiatives



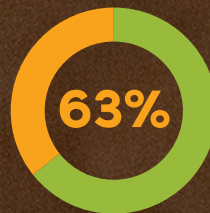
91% of pregnant women identified

in partner communities attended prenatal consultations



More than **14,000** children

were vaccinated through community mobilization



63% of children

identified as unregistered at birth were registered

Governance and Citizenship





145

local elected officials trained in local governance and public accountability in Senegal and The Gambia



How Change Happens





The process begins with education: in local languages, through dialogue and facilitation, grounded in human rights and shared responsibilities. Education here is an invitation to reflect, to question, and to imagine what change is possible.

That starting point carries more weight than it might appear. When people learn in the language they think and dream in, when they are invited to examine their own realities rather than receive someone else's diagnosis, something shifts that goes beyond knowledge. Women, men, and young people develop the confidence to speak, the capacity to analyze, and the willingness to lead. They begin to see themselves as actors in their own development.

In the remote and underserved communities **where Tostan works**, women, men, and young people form or reinforce management committees, define shared priorities, and launch initiatives around challenges they have identified themselves. They determine what gets done, in what order, and with whom. These are precisely the communities that public systems most consistently struggle to reach: households that fall outside administrative data, women and girls

excluded from formal decision-making, and youth without access to economic opportunity.

As communities act, the effects extend into local public life. Children out of school get identified and enrolled. Births that went unregistered get recorded, improving the civil registration data that planning ministries depend on. Pregnant women are connected to health services. Land disputes find structured resolution before they escalate. Local elected officials engage more effectively with the communities they represent. Public institutions gain a stronger local foundation for delivering on the commitments governments have made.

This is what makes the results sustainable. When education builds on knowledge communities already hold, and when it strengthens collective capacity rather than individual compliance, change does not depend on the continued presence of an external actor. It spreads through social networks. It survives funding gaps. And it generates forms of local accountability that no external monitoring system can replicate. This is what community-led development looks like.



What Defined 2025





Tostan Kept Evolving

In 2025, Tostan continued to refine how it supports community-led change. This included adapting the **Community Empowerment Program** curricula for **SolarSPELL**, a solar-powered offline digital library designed for low-connectivity settings and accessible via mobile phone. The adaptation also advanced broader program revision to integrate new knowledge around relational wellbeing and mental health. The goal is a model

that stays rooted in local-language learning, dialogue, reflection, and community ownership, while remaining relevant and accessible to the realities rural communities face today. For governments and partners working in areas with limited infrastructure, that combination matters: it means the approach can reach the communities that most development programming leaves behind.

The Model Kept Spreading

In 2025, Tostan's methodology continued to expand through training, mutual learning, and institutional partnerships. In northern Benin, 22 local organizations working in fragile, high-risk areas adapted Tostan's approach, combining social cohesion work with attention to the mental health needs of women, youth, and communities bearing the heaviest cost of instability. In Ethiopia's Omo Valley, participants from five indigenous communities engaged with Tostan's model, leaving with concrete action plans and newly established community management committees. In Accra, 30 civil society actors from West and East Africa sought out Tostan's methodology as a practical framework for social norms change and community-led transformation. Seminars also took place in Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal, and The Gambia. What these experiences reflect is a distinction that matters for how institutional partners think about

scale. Organizations are not seeking to reproduce Tostan's program as designed. They are drawing on its methodology to address their own contexts, adapting tools, sequencing, and content to specific social realities. Since 2015, 1,025 practitioners from 50 countries have learned about Tostan's approach and methodology in our sharing and mutual learning seminars. The more demanding question is what happens when those practitioners carry the approach forward without Tostan's direct presence. A **Global Fund for Children** learning review provides significant evidence on that point. Among organizations that applied Tostan's methodology independently in Liberia and Sierra Leone, reviewers documented stronger leadership by women and youth, reduced conflict and gender-based violence, improved school attendance, and communities reexamining harmful practices through dialogue grounded in their own values.

[Download the full report](#)



“What I experienced through Tostan’s training was a shift in how we approach development work. This training changed how we design programs. Instead of applying predefined approaches, we now work with communities to define priorities and build ownership from the outset. This makes our interventions more relevant and sustainable.”

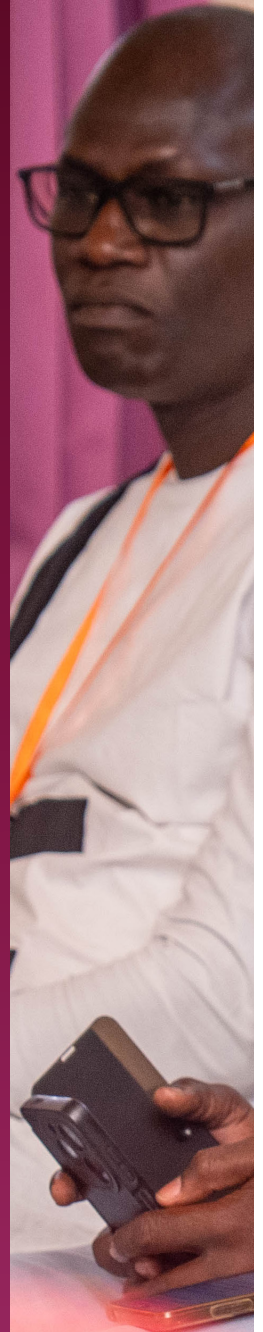
Songaye George Buannie,

Male Engagement and GBV Specialist, Sierra Leone, 2025

“Although we often enter communities with good intentions, our approach sometimes leaves critical gaps. This training emphasized allowing communities to define their own vision and identify the resources they already possess. Meaningful development happens with communities, not for them. At Caritas Ghana, we plan to cascade this approach to our local substructures so that those working directly with communities can integrate it into their daily work.”

Richard Nyihaba Akругu,

Caritas Ghana, Ghana, 2025







Our Impact





Early Childhood, School Access, and Civil Registration

4,176

caregivers reached through parenting education in Guinea-Bissau, The Gambia, and Mali

1,626

children supported with school kits, including 767 girls, in Guinea-Bissau

62%

of children identified as out of school in partner communities were enrolled through community-led initiatives

63%

of children identified as unregistered at birth were registered

In many remote communities, children's opportunities are shaped long before they enter a classroom. Family practices, early brain stimulation, and the relationship between households and local education systems all determine whether children arrive at school ready to learn, and whether they arrive at all. Where these conditions are weak, exclusion begins before formal schooling does. Closing that gap requires working at the household level and the system level at the same time, which is precisely where public education systems, stretched thin across large and sparsely populated areas, most consistently fall short. Governments across West Africa have recognized this priority. The Gambia's Recovery-Focused National Development Plan, Mali's National Strategy for Emergence and Sustainable Development, and Guinea-Bissau's national cooperation framework each place human capital,

equitable access to education, and stronger civil registration among their core development commitments. Delivering on those commitments in remote and underserved communities remains the hardest part.

Tostan's contribution begins with education and dialogue. Across 76 communities in Guinea-Bissau, The Gambia, and Mali, 4,176 parents and caregivers participated in learning sessions on early brain stimulation, child development, communication, and social norms, conducted in local languages through reflection and facilitated dialogue. Monitoring documented changes in daily caregiving practices, including fathers and mothers speaking more often with their children during routine activities such as feeding and bathing, reading to their children at home, and reviving the practice of storytelling together.

These shifts reflect something deeper than behavior change. They reflect a recalibration of what families understand to be their role in children's learning, before and during school age.

Participating communities identified children who were out of school, followed up with families, and mobilized around enrollment and birth registration. In partner communities, 62% of children identified as out of school were enrolled, and 63% of children identified as unregistered at birth were registered. Both figures matter beyond the household. Birth registration is a legal threshold: without it, children cannot access health services, sit national examinations, or be counted in the planning data governments use to allocate

education budgets. When communities close it, they contribute directly to the accuracy of the population data that national planning ministries use to allocate education and health budgets.

In Guinea-Bissau, Tostan worked alongside the Ministry of Education to support community teachers, many of whom had received no prior formal teacher training. That collaboration strengthened classroom practices and improved coordination between schools and families. It also points to something with broader policy relevance: community-based educators, properly supported, can extend the reach of public education systems into areas where the state is structurally underrepresented.



Education & Children

When a Community Comes Together for Education

The Gambia - Sare Malaw



Scan the QR code to view the story



Conflict Prevention

3,356

participants engaged in peace and security learning sessions across 30 communities in Mali

130

additional communities reached through community-led dialogue and mediation mechanisms

In Mali, the retreat of state authority across large parts of the country has left many rural communities managing tensions over land, household relations, and shared resources with little institutional support. When those tensions go unaddressed, they escalate. The question is not whether local conflict prevention matters. It is whether the conditions for it can be built and sustained. Mali's SNEDD places peace and security, decentralization, citizenship, resilient territories, and the restoration of state legitimacy at the center of national development strategy.

Tostan's learning sessions on dialogue, governance, and collective responsibility gave that local capacity a structured foundation. In 2025, 3,356 people across 30 communities in Mali engaged in these sessions. Women played a central role, building legitimacy as actors

in processes from which they are routinely excluded.

Communities turned those capacities into structured action. Community Peace Committees addressed land disputes, household tensions, and relations between neighboring villages. Through mediation, peer outreach, and intercommunity exchange, these committees extended their reach to 130 additional communities, none of which had participated directly in the program. Public declarations, signed by administrative, traditional, and religious authorities, formalized the link between community decisions and local governance structures.

That formalization matters for sustainability. When community-led peace work is recognized by local authorities, it gains legitimacy that outlasts any single program cycle.

Economic Inclusion

2,580

people accessed financial support through community-managed loans across 100 communities in Senegal, The Gambia, and Guinea-Bissau

\$112,000

approximately in seed capital was provided through Tostan's programme and placed under community management.

\$59,000

in additional grants provided through the ECOWAS Fund for Regional Stabilization and Development in Guinea-Bissau

6 times

Capital circulated an average of 6 times within the same communities.

95% repayment rate

In many rural communities across West Africa, the barrier to economic activity is not ambition or capacity. It is the absence of financial mechanisms that communities can actually use: accessible, appropriately sized, and governed by people who understand the local economy. Formal banking infrastructure does not reach most of the rural areas where Tostan works. Where it does reach, its terms rarely fit the income cycles and risk profiles of smallholder farmers, market traders, or young people starting out. Senegal's Vision 2050, and Guinea-Bissau's national cooperation framework each place productive inclusion, women and youth participation, and territorial economic resilience at the center of public development ambition. The implementation gap is consistent: formal financial systems do not reach the communities these frameworks are designed to serve.

The gap is not primarily one of ambition or productive potential but one of governance capacity. Communities cannot manage individual or collective finance reliably without literacy, numeracy, and accountability skills. For adults who have not completed formal schooling,

those skills need to be built deliberately. Education in local languages, through dialogue and collective practice, did exactly that. Across 100 communities in Senegal, The Gambia, and Guinea-Bissau, community management committees acquired the skills to manage collective funds, issue microloans, and track repayments. Approximately \$112,000 in seed capital placed under community management enabled 2,580 individuals to access small loans for agricultural processing, small trade, and food production.

In Senegal, the **Meew liggey tekki Jiggeen-West african scaling Up** (MELITEJI-WASU) project deepened that process across 25 communities connected to the dairy value chain, where women and youth built literacy, numeracy, project management, and collective decision-making skills that translated directly into stronger participation in local markets. The funds across the three countries maintained a 95 percent repayment rate, reflecting the accountability that comes from lending within a community where relationships and accountability carry weight that no formal credit scoring system can replicate.



Capital did not stop at the first round of borrowers. It circulated an average of six times within the same communities, extending access to financing without requiring additional external resources. One dollar invested in a community-managed fund produced six rounds of economic activity before leaving the system. That is the financing efficiency case for community-governed capital, and it is visible in the repayment and circulation data from all three countries. At the household level, access translated into more than income generation. Participants drew on savings and loan mechanisms to cover health consultations and school fees, reducing dependence on high-cost informal borrowing and protecting productive assets during periods of financial


pressure. At that scale, financial inclusion becomes a household resilience mechanism with direct consequences for health and education outcomes.

In Guinea-Bissau, in addition to the community-managed loan fund, grants totaling \$59,000 were provided through the ECOWAS Fund for Regional Stabilization and Development, with Tostan as the implementing partner. These grants supported economic initiatives across 36 communities in Bafatá and Gabú. A total of 406 individuals, including 303 women and girls, financed micro-projects that contributed to household income and local economic stability. More than 2,000 people also received training in agroecology and agricultural product processing, strengthening the productive base on which those micro-projects depend. These results were produced in fragile regions that ECOWAS has designated as stabilization priorities. They suggest that where communities have built literacy, numeracy, and collective accountability, financial inclusion produces durable results. Capital circulates, repayment holds, and households build resilience.



Economic Inclusion

Ndumbe Bah's Journey to Financial Freedom

The Gambia - Sami Pachonki 

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Gender-Based Violence Prevention

95

communities in Senegal and Guinea-Bissau publicly committed to ending child marriage, female genital cutting, and gender-based violence

7,226

people engaged in community-led mobilization in Guinea-Bissau

Practices like female genital cutting and child marriage are not maintained by indifference to harm. They are held in place by shared expectations, enforced quietly through what families believe others will accept, what communities believe tradition requires, and what individuals believe they have the standing to question. Changing them requires the conditions in which communities can examine those expectations together and arrive at a different shared understanding.

Those conditions are built deliberately. Communities begin by exploring human rights principles in their own languages, examining what those principles mean in daily life and what they demand of the people who hold them. That knowledge becomes the basis for dialogue. Women, men, and youth reflect together on how their practices align with the values and vision of wellbeing they have defined for themselves and their children. Practices that cause harm do not survive that examination intact. The commitment to change that follows is collective, grounded in shared values, and reinforced through the same relationships that once sustained the practices being abandoned.

In 2025, that process led 75 communities in Senegal to declare the abandonment of child marriage, female genital cutting, and gender-based violence in the presence of administrative, traditional, and religious authorities. Those declarations committed communities to a monitoring structure with defined roles: identifying risks, raising alerts, and engaging families before situations escalate.

In Guinea-Bissau, community-led campaigns reached 7,226 people across Bafatá and Gabú. Religious and community leaders trained on gender-based violence and child protection led that work, engaging directly with families and bringing 20 communities to formalize commitments grounded in human rights and their own vision of community wellbeing.

Beyond prevention, targeted action reached women living with obstetric fistula in Guinea-Bissau and The Gambia. In partnership with UNFPA and the Ministry of Health, women who sought care received surgical repair, medical support, financial assistance for income-generating activities, and structured accompaniment back into community life. Fistula isolates. The work of reintegration, economic, social, and relational, is what restores a woman's place in her community, and it is the part of fistula response that most programs do not reach.

The commitments to abandon harmful practices documented across 95 communities in two countries reflect an obligation that African states have formally accepted. The Maputo Protocol requires signatory states to prohibit and eliminate harmful practices affecting women and girls, including female genital mutilation and child marriage, and to take active measures to ensure protection. Community declarations backed by monitoring mechanisms and trained local leaders are one of the few documented pathways through which that obligation successfully moves from policy text into daily practice.

Youth Mental Health

In Kédougou, young people from Bassari communities identified mental health as a collective priority before any program had named it as one. Through their engagement in Tostan's education sessions, they proposed a response rooted in their own cultural practices, without waiting for an external framework to define either the problem or the solution.

Tostan's role was to create the conditions for that process: the space, the facilitation, and the structured dialogue through which youth could speak openly, reflect together, and shape a response they recognized as their own. That process led to The Art of Wellbeing, launched in October 2025 in collaboration with the Being Initiative and with support from Grand Challenges Canada. The initiative supports 200 young people through dance, music, and visual arts, combined with facilitation that deepens understanding, reduces stigma, and sustains dialogue on mental health within the community.

What shifted first was not a behavior or an indicator. It was the capacity of young people to name a challenge that had previously gone unspoken and claim collective ownership of a response. From that starting point, a broader community pathway to wellbeing began to take shape.

The policy relevance is direct. Mental health remains one of the least resourced priorities in West African public health systems, despite its documented effects on productivity, social cohesion, and youth participation.

Senegal's Vision 2050 links human capital, youth engagement, and territorial cohesion as interdependent development goals. Work that addresses mental health through culturally grounded, youth-led processes contributes to all three simultaneously, and does so in communities that national health infrastructure has not consistently reached.



Reintegration of Women in Detention

1,707

direct and indirect program participants engaged in education and practical training sessions

Training covered income-generating activities aligned with local market demand, including food processing, tailoring, and small-scale production

In Senegal, leaving detention does not end the conditions that made reintegration difficult in the first place. Stigma limits employment opportunities. Family ties, often strained or broken during incarceration, do not repair themselves. Without income and without restored relationships, women released from detention face a narrow path back into community life, and the absence of structured support makes that path narrower still.

In 2025, 339 women in detention participated directly in education sessions and practical training in food processing, tailoring, and small-scale production, skills selected for their alignment with local market demand and realistic income potential upon release. Beyond the direct participants, 1,368 additional people were reached through the program: family members engaged in mediation and follow-up visits, prison guards trained to support the reintegration process, and former detainees who benefited from program activities. Together they represent the broader circle of support that determines whether reintegration holds after release from prison.

Reintegration efforts addressed family relationships directly. Mediation sessions and structured follow-up visits helped

re-establish communication between detainees and their families, rebuilding the social ties that income alone cannot restore. Upon release, selected participants received start-up capital to begin income-generating activities, reducing immediate financial pressure and dependence on informal or unstable sources of support.

The combination of practical skills, restored family relationships, and access to start-up capital reflects a documented pattern in reintegration programming: economic stability and social belonging reinforce each other. Monitoring data from this program shows that women who accessed both were better positioned to stabilize their situation after release, though a consolidated outcome study across the full participant group would strengthen that finding considerably.

Reintegration sits at the intersection of justice, social protection, livelihoods, and social cohesion. Senegal's Vision 2050 places social equity and human capital at the center of national transformation. Work that addresses all four dimensions simultaneously, and that rebuilds the community inclusion on which sustainable reintegration depends, contributes directly to that ambition in ways that correctional systems acting alone rarely achieve.





In the News

In 2025, Tostan's work and the communities it partners with were featured by 86 national and international media outlets in French, English, and local languages. Coverage highlighted girls' education, women's health, the abandonment of harmful practices, and social cohesion, reflecting growing recognition that community-led transformation matters not only in development practice, but in wider public debate.



PBS

Senegal group finds some success in stopping genital mutilation in African communities



Le Monde

In Senegal, Village by Village, the Long Struggle Against Female Genital Cutting



Le Soleil

Women Healed from Obstetric Fistula in Kolda



All Africa

Gambia: Female Genital Mutilation in Infancy Still Common, Gambian Mothers Say



RFI

Obstetric Fistula: Prevention and Care in the Kolda Region, Casamance



TV5 Monde

Benin: Advancing Social Cohesion with Tostan





Country Insights:

From Community Action to Public Value

Senegal: Community Capacity and the Conditions for Public Delivery



Senegal's **Vision 2050** is built on a series of interdependencies. Human capital investment depends on population data that is accurate, complete, and current. Territorial development depends on communities that can participate actively in local governance. Social equity depends on financial mechanisms that reach the households formal systems do not. Each of these dependencies rests on the same foundation: communities with the capacity to act on their own priorities, document their own realities, and engage with public institutions.

In partner communities across Senegal, that capacity produced concrete results in 2025. In communities where Tostan's program runs, women, men, and young people have developed the confidence to analyze their own realities and act collectively. Community members identified children who had never been officially recorded and organized to register them through state channels. Five hundred and thirty-seven children received birth certificates, giving them legal identity, access to school enrollment, eligibility for public health services, and a place in the population data that determines how resources are allocated in their territories. In the same communities, 760 children identified as out of school were enrolled. Both results reflect communities that have built the collective capacity to see who is being left out and to act on it through existing public institutions.

In 25 dairy-producing communities, the MELITEJI-WASU project strengthened that same

capacity through a different entry point. Women and youth built literacy, numeracy, project management, and collective decision-making skills that translated directly into stronger participation in local markets. In a separate group of 20 communities, women and youth accessed loans through community-managed funds, expanding or creating businesses with a 95 percent repayment rate. The repayment performance is the result worth examining. It reflects communities that have built the literacy, numeracy, and collective accountability to manage financial resources reliably over time. For Vision 2050's territorial economic resilience agenda, that governance quality is what determines whether financial inclusion produces sustainable results or remains a one-cycle intervention.

The education process also supported communities in building their own child protection monitoring structures and youth civic engagement initiatives, extending public commitments into territories where institutional presence is limited.

Across these dimensions, the results reflect a community-level dynamic that national development strategies depend on. Communities that can organize, document, and act on their own priorities create the local foundation that allows public investment to go further. Where that foundation exists, the distance between a national commitment and its local reality closes. Where it does not, it tends to persist.





The Gambia: Closing the Distance Between Citizens and Institutions



The Gambia's [Recovery Focused-National Development Plan 2023-2027](#) identifies a specific governance problem. Local authorities received new powers and resources from the central government, but not the training or institutional support needed to use them effectively. The plan commits explicitly to training local governance stakeholders, strengthening community-based participatory planning and budgeting, and assessing Ward and Village Development Committees for functionality. Communities, equally, need the capacity to engage elected officials as informed actors, not only as recipients of decisions made above them.

In 2025, 43 ward councilors were trained in participatory planning and budgeting, transparency, accountability mechanisms, and the roles of local actors in governance. Those are precisely the competencies the RF-NDP identifies as insufficient at the local level. Councilors left with practical tools for engaging the communities they serve.

The RF-NDP places equitable access to quality education and improved early childhood outcomes at the center of its human capital

commitments. Those commitments depend on what happens at home before a child reaches a classroom. When caregivers understand how brain stimulation, responsive interaction, and structured play shape cognitive and social development in the first years of life, the household becomes the foundation on which formal education builds. In 2025, 1,181 parents and caregivers in Tostan's partner communities participated in learning sessions on early childhood development conducted in local languages. What shifted was their understanding of their own role in that process.

In 2025, Tostan's work in The Gambia moved on both fronts the RF-NDP identifies as critical. Ward councilors built the practical knowledge to govern accountably, and caregivers developed the understanding that shapes children's learning before formal schooling begins. The RF-NDP's targets for local governance and human capital development rest on local officials who manage resources transparently and govern inclusively, and on an education system that prepares the next generation to find and build solutions to The Gambia's own development challenges.

Mali: Community Resilience in a Fragile Territory



In Mali, the question communities faced was not how to engage with public institutions. It was how to organize collective life when those institutions were too distant to reach. Land disputes arose without public arbitration mechanisms nearby. Tensions between neighboring communities accumulated without forums for resolution. In remote areas where state presence has been limited, that responsibility fell to communities themselves, to local leaders, and to the structures that exist at the level where people actually live.

Mali's [National Strategy for Emergence and Sustainable Development](#) (NSED) places peace, local governance, citizenship, and territorial resilience alongside human development as mutually dependent priorities. Stability creates the conditions for governance to function. Functional governance and active citizenship reinforce each other. Human development advances when all three hold at the same time.

In 30 communities across Mali, 3,356 people engaged in learning sessions on dialogue, collective responsibility, governance, and conflict prevention. Participants built the capacity to listen across differences, deliberate under tension, and act together on challenges they had identified themselves. Women emerged as leaders of conflict mediation processes from which they were usually excluded. From that foundation, communities organized. Peace Committees trained in

structured mediation took on land disputes, household tensions, and intercommunal friction, addressing them through deliberation before they could harden into something more difficult to address. Through peer outreach and intercommunity exchange, their reach extended to 130 additional communities that had not participated directly in any program. Public declarations, signed by administrative, traditional, and religious authorities, connected what communities had built to what local governance could recognize and sustain.

When disputes are resolved through deliberation, social trust deepens and communities grow more capable of managing the next conflict that arises. Peace Committees that spread their methods to neighboring communities through existing social networks, and that carry the recognition of local authorities, become part of how a territory governs itself rather than a temporary response to a specific crisis. The NSED's territorial resilience commitments rest on exactly that kind of capacity taking root at the community level.

The 2025 results from Mali document grassroots peacebuilding that is incremental, relational, and self-reinforcing. In the Sahel, social cohesion is built in the spaces where people negotiate their differences, organize around shared responsibilities, and maintain the fabric that makes collective life possible. What the 2025 results show is that fabric holding.





Guinea-Bissau: Where Institutions and Communities Meet



In Bafatá, Gabú, and the remote communities where Tostan operates, geographic distance and poor infrastructure make it hard for public services to reach the people who need them most. In 2025, three results from those territories show what becomes possible when community capacity and institutional support work together.

Many schools across Guinea-Bissau rely on community teachers who started teaching because no qualified teacher ever arrived, who had no formal pedagogy training, and who remain the only educator their village has known. In 2025, Tostan and the Ministry of Education worked together to support 20 of these teachers. For the first time, they received training on classroom practices to engage students more effectively, children's rights, early childhood development, and how to monitor children's learning progress. The Ministry now has a tested model for how community-based educators, when supported through a public partnership, can bring national education commitments to territories where recruiting qualified staff and building new schools takes years.

Beyond education, Tostan participated in a consortium led by SWISSAID, alongside other partners, implementing the project Brilliant Professional Opportunities and Empowerment of Youth and Women for Community-Led Sustainable Development, supported by the German Government through the ECOWAS Stabilisation and Development Fund for Fragile Regions. The project focuses on human rights education, agroecology, and the economic empowerment of women and youth in Bafatá and Gabú. As part of that work, Tostan directly supported more than 400

individuals, the majority women and girls, to finance income-generating projects, and trained over 2,000 people in agroecology and agricultural product processing.

That same community reach extended into health. Community Management Committees trained through Tostan's program in the Bafatá region identified women living with obstetric fistula who had never accessed formal health services. Through a partnership with UNFPA Guinea-Bissau, those women received surgery, income support, and help reintegrating into community life, and all resumed economic activity. In areas where health workers rarely reach, community structures with the knowledge and trust to find the most isolated people are what make treatment possible at all.

Guinea-Bissau's national cooperation framework commits to equitable access to social services and structural economic transformation in the country's most remote and fragile territories. Both commitments depend on communities that can absorb external resources productively, extend the reach of public institutions, and connect isolated individuals to services they cannot access alone.

The 2025 results tell a consistent story across three sectors. Teachers received training through a Ministry partnership for the first time. Economic investments generated results in some of Guinea-Bissau's most fragile territories. Women living with fistula, unknown to the formal health system, were found and connected to treatment. In each case, community readiness built through education was what allowed institutional partners to be effective.

Tostan's Funding Partners

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Tostan Canada, Tostan Denmark, Tostan Deutschland, and Tostan Sweden continued to raise awareness, mobilize support, and contribute financially to the work carried out alongside communities.

Baobab Legacy Society

We are deeply grateful and moved by our supporters who have chosen to include Tostan in their legacy plans, ensuring their values and commitment will carry forward for generations to come. These individuals believe in Tostan's mission and their generosity and vision continue to inspire us. Their commitment to dignity for all will forever be part of Tostan's journey.

We honor the following legacy supporters:

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Our Circle Book Club in honor of Judy Miller

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As a part of our commitment to transparency, Tostan publishes comprehensive financial records and data on its website as soon as they are finalized. Please read our Audited Annual Financial Statements and our Annual Form 990 submission.





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Dignity for all



« The people know so much. But they often don't realize the importance of their culture, their past history, and their deep wisdom. »

Cheikh Anta Diop

His philosophy has shaped Tostan's approach

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