

Female Genital Cutting in The Gambia:
A Case Study of Tostan

by
Sarah Kopper

MPP Essay
submitted to
Oregon State University

in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Public Policy

Presented June 1, 2010
Commencement June 2010

Master of Public Policy essay of Sarah Kopper presented on June 1, 2010

APPROVED:

Rebecca Warner, representing Sociology

Bryan Tilt, representing Anthropology

Janet Lee, representing Women's Studies

Sarah Kopper, Author

ABSTRACT

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines female genital cutting (FGC) as “all procedures that involve partial or total removal of the external female genitalia, or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons” (WHO, 2010). This practice has existed in Africa for thousands of years, but over the past few decades it has captured the attention of Western audiences and development organizations.

One organization that has received a considerable amount of attention is Tostan, a NGO that implements a human-rights based, non-formal educational program in West and East Africa. Tostan vaulted onto the international scene in 1997 when it began facilitating the first public declaration abandoning FGC. To date, close to 5,000 communities in 5 countries have publically announced their abandonment of FGC in front of political leaders, religious leaders, and other communities in their area.

This essay is a case study that explores why Tostan’s program and approach have led to FGC abandonment in The Gambian context. Using curriculum review, classroom observation, and interviews with staff and participants, I found that Tostan’s success stems from its use of a holistic, respectful approach that incorporates community values. An application of the multiple streams policy framework and innovation and diffusion policy models enrich the findings by bringing further insight to FGC at the national level.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There are numerous people who have contributed to the success of this essay. First, I would like to thank my committee. I appreciate your flexibility, suggestions, and insight. I am particularly grateful to my chair, Becky Warner, for her detailed feedback and commitment to my project. Despite her busy schedule, she has always made time to help me improve as a researcher, writer, and student.

I feel a deep sense of gratitude for the MPP program and its director, Brent Steel. Thank you for developing a program that effectively meets different students' needs, including making it possible for me to leave the country for two terms and still graduate on time!

This essay would not exist if Tostan had not given me the opportunity to live, work, and conduct research in The Gambia. Throughout my stay I received numerous insights from the Director of Monitoring, Evaluation, Research, and Learning—Cody Donahue. He not only helped with the logistical details, but also offered insight into research design and the intricacies of the Tostan program. I appreciate both his support and friendship. I would also like to thank all of my fellow volunteers—life as a Toubab in West Africa would not have been the same without you. A special thanks to Katie Fair for her optimism and confidence that I could successfully complete this project. There's no one I'd rather speak terrible French with in the Salim Boutique.

Finally, I would like to thank my wonderful group of family and friends who helped me laugh at myself during this process, even when I felt like I'd rather cry. Neil, I would not have made it through this experience without your patience and understanding. In the future, I will try not to leave the country for extended periods of time without taking you with me. I can't wait to take on the world with you by my side.

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION.....	1
RESEARCH QUESTION	2
DESCRIPTION OF THE CASE AND RESEARCH SITE	2
<i>Tostan</i>	2
<i>The Gambia and the Upper River Region</i>	6
ESSAY OUTLINE	8
A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY	8
BACKGROUND ON FGC AND ABANDONMENT EFFORTS.....	10
TYPES OF FEMALE GENITAL CUTTING, PREVALENCE, AND ASSOCIATED HEALTH RISKS.....	10
<i>Types of FGC</i>	10
<i>Prevalence</i>	11
<i>Health Risks</i>	12
REASONS FOR THE PRACTICE AND ITS ORIGINS	13
<i>Rite of Passage</i>	13
<i>Control of Women’s Sexuality</i>	14
<i>Religious Practice</i>	15
<i>Social Convention and Marriageability</i>	16
APPROACHES TO ABANDONMENT	17
<i>Right-to-Health Approach</i>	17
<i>Human Rights Approach</i>	20
<i>National Laws and International Agreements</i>	20
<i>An Economic Strategy: Compensation for Cutters</i>	22
<i>Public Declarations</i>	22
SUMMARY.....	26
METHODS	28
CASE STUDY METHODOLOGY	28
<i>Curriculum Document Review</i>	28
<i>Classroom Observation</i>	29
<i>Participant and Staff Interviews</i>	30
METHODOLOGY LIMITATIONS.....	36
RESULTS.....	37
CURRICULUM REVIEW	37
<i>Trust, Respect, and Dialogue in CEP Sessions</i>	38
<i>FGC Specific Sessions</i>	38
CLASSROOM OBSERVATION	43
<i>Accommodating Classroom Atmosphere</i>	43
<i>Familiarity and Trust with Facilitator and Between Participants</i>	44
STAFF INTERVIEWS	45
<i>Holistic Approach Based in Human Rights</i>	45
<i>Respectful Approach to FGC Abandonment</i>	47

<i>Role of Public Declarations</i>	50
<i>Role of the National Government in FGC Abandonment</i>	51
PARTICIPANT INTERVIEWS.....	53
<i>Holistic Nature of the Tostan Program</i>	53
<i>Value of Unity in Communities</i>	55
<i>Focus on the Health Consequences</i>	58
<i>National Law to Abandon FGC</i>	59
SUMMARY OF THE RESULTS.....	61
DISCUSSION	63
HOLISTIC PROGRAM.....	64
RESPECTFUL APPROACH	64
INTEGRATION WITH COMMUNITY VALUES.....	65
POLICY THEORY APPLICATION	67
MULTIPLE STREAMS FRAMEWORK	67
<i>Problem Stream</i>	68
<i>Politics Stream</i>	70
<i>Policy Stream</i>	72
<i>Policy Entrepreneurs, Windows, and Outputs</i>	73
INNOVATION AND DIFFUSION MODELS OF POLICY	74
CONCLUSION	77
LIMITATIONS	78
FURTHER RESEARCH	78
BIBLIOGRAPHY	80

List of Figures

Figure 1: Map of The Gambia	6
Figure 2: Map of the Upper River Region.....	31
Figure 3: Multiple Streams Policy Diagram.....	68

List of Tables

Table 1: Program Participant Interview Information.....	32
Table 2: Staff Participant Interview Information.....	34

Female Genital Cutting in The Gambia:

A Case Study of Tostan

INTRODUCTION

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines female genital cutting (FGC) as “all procedures that involve partial or total removal of the external female genitalia, or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons” (WHO, 2010). Also known as female circumcision (FC) or female genital mutilation (FGM), little was known about this practice in the West until the last half century. Although FGC abandonment efforts began in the early 20th century, in 1979 they gained worldwide attention at the first Seminar on Harmful Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children hosted by the WHO (Rahman and Toubia, 2000).

As information about this practice has spread outside of Africa, donors to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) began to give their support to organizations that prioritized FGC abandonment. At the same time NGOs are promoting FGC abandonment at the local level, many governments and international institutions are seeking abandonment on a larger scale through national laws and international resolutions.

My interest in and knowledge of FGC began during my search for internship opportunities focused on international development and gender issues. During my search, I learned about Tostan, an international human rights NGO that has attracted worldwide attention for its success facilitating FGC abandonment through public declarations. Tostan’s abandonment strategy—public declarations—involve anywhere from 13 to 200 communities who announce their decision to abandon FGC in front of the political leaders, journalists, religious leaders, and their peers at a weekend-long event. Communities’ decisions to abandon FGC come after their participation in Tostan’s three-year, human-rights based educational program. When Tostan first began working with West African communities, FGC abandonment was not an intended outcome of its program; its emergence as a leader in the field evolved over the last fifteen years and was initiated by the participants themselves. To date, 4,579 communities have participated in Tostan-facilitated public declarations to abandon FGC. These declarations have occurred in five African countries—Senegal, Guinea-Conakry, Somalia, Burkina Faso, and The Gambia. I had the opportunity to work as the Assistant to the National Coordinator in Tostan’s Gambian program. During my stay, I conducted research for this essay in addition to my work for the organization.

Research Question

This essay explores why the approach of a particular international NGO—Tostan—has led to FGC abandonment in some communities. Tostan is recognized worldwide as an example of a successful FGC abandonment program. Its success is widely acknowledged, but there is little information on *why* it is successful. Therefore, the guiding question for my research is, “Why has Tostan’s program been an effective tool of FGC abandonment?” I investigate this question through interviews with program participants and staff, curriculum review, and classroom observation. In my analysis, I compare the success of Tostan’s program to other abandonment strategies. Using the multiple streams theory of policy analysis, I also examine why there is no law abandoning FGC in The Gambia and the possible development of a law in the future.

Description of the Case and Research Site

For the purposes of this research, the NGO Tostan is the case. Tostan works in eight West and East African countries, but I focused specifically on Tostan’s work in The Gambia, which was the site of my internship. A brief overview of both the organization and The Gambia provides background and context for the remainder of the essay.

Tostan

Over the past decade and a half, Tostan has gained fame, not for the democracy, human rights, or problem solving aspects of its program, but for its success facilitating FGC abandonment. When Tostan became an official NGO in 1991, FGC abandonment was not a focus of the organization. The participants themselves drove its approach to abandonment as they sought to apply the lessons learned in the program to the realities of their lives and communities.

Tostan’s mission is to “empower African communities to bring about sustainable development and positive social transformation based on the respect of human rights” (Tostan, 2009: 2).

Molly Melching, an American, started Tostan. Although it was started by an American, today more than 99 percent of all employees are African. As an international NGO, Tostan relies on the support of a variety of donors to achieve its mission. In Tostan’s Gambian program, the primary donor is the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF). With UNICEF’s financial support, Tostan implements a three-part strategy: offering a holistic, human-rights based educational program—the Community Empowerment Program (CEP); creating and supporting strong

community organizations to implement development projects—Community Management Committees (CMCs); and utilizing existing social networks for community-led outreach.

Community Empowerment Program

The CEP is a three-year, holistic educational program and is the foundation of the Tostan program. Tostan emphasizes the holistic nature of the CEP, which addresses a variety of topics and issues using a human-rights framework. The CEP is comprised of two components: Kobi and Aawde. Kobi is the “social empowerment” component and covers the topics of democracy and human rights, the problem solving process, hygiene and prevention, and health. It takes approximately two years for communities to complete the Kobi sessions. After the Kobi, participants continue to the Aawde, the “literacy and economic empowerment” component of the program. In the Aawde participants learn to read and write in the local language, basic math, and project management. Topics from the Kobi are reinforced during the Aawde sessions using participants’ new literacy skills. The Aawde takes approximately one year to complete.

The placement and structure of each of the CEP modules has evolved and changed since Tostan became an NGO in 1991. Originally, the program started with the health sessions, but in 1999/2000 the content of the CEP was reordered to start with human rights. This change was made to recognize the primacy of human rights in the CEP. Since the major revisions at the end of the 1990s, the content of the educational program has remained relatively unchanged. Tostan’s programming team is currently in the process of reviewing and revising the curriculum, but a new version was not on the ground at the time of my research.

To implement the CEP, Tostan has a facilitator in each of its centers. A facilitator lives in the community for the duration of the CEP, which allows him or her to integrate into all aspects of community life, not just the life in the classroom. All CEP sessions are conducted in the local language. Tostan uses facilitators from the local area to minimize cultural and linguistic barriers in the classroom.

In the CEP sessions, there are two groups that meet three times a week in each community—one group of adults, one group of adolescents. The Tostan website explains that “implementing the program for both adults and adolescents in the same community is important for encouraging intergenerational dialogue and making sure that youth have the skills needed to participate and sustain community development” (Tostan, 2007a). When Tostan first enters a community, the

facilitator holds a meeting, introduces the program, and allows the community to decide if it wants to participate in the Tostan program. According to the Tostan website, the community selects which members will participate in the Tostan program. There are no applications or admission requirements, only a willingness and desire to participate in the sessions. Each of the two groups—one for adults, one for adolescents—generally has between 25 and 50 participants, but there are no limits on the class size. Communities range in size from a few hundred to a few thousand inhabitants, so the percentage of participants in each community varies widely across the region. The vast majority of participants are female, but there is no gender restriction and men are welcome to join the sessions. This gender imbalance may be a result of women's higher levels of interest since they traditionally have limited access to formal education. Tostan's CEP is conducted in the local language, not the colonial languages, so it opens doors to education previously closed to many women.

When Tostan opens new centers, it intentionally opens a group of nearby centers at the same time. Tostan chooses communities "that are interconnected because of family ties, use of the same well or market, or affiliation with a particular religious leader in the area" because choosing communities "that are part of an already established social network means that the villagers will meet often at religious and social ceremonies or at the well or weekly market" (Tostan, 2007a). If communities are participating in the CEP at the same time, they can discuss the ideas and concepts they are learning in the classroom as a wider community. This use of social networks becomes particularly important for community-led outreach.

The CEP creates a forum for participants to learn, discuss, and debate a variety of topics. Sharing knowledge with a core group of participants in the CEP is central to Tostan's strategy. Another aspect of Tostan's program is the establishment and support of CMCs, which increase Tostan's impact outside of the classroom and ensure the continued application of knowledge after CEP sessions end.

Community Management Committees

Part of Tostan's mission is to "bring about *sustainable* development" in the communities where it works (Tostan, 2009). This type of sustainable development is not referring to environmental practices, but to Tostan's goal of creating changes in the knowledge, attitudes, and behavior of communities that last long after the program leaves. The creation of local CMCs is central to

ensuring the success of the program both during the CEP sessions and after they end. In each Tostan center, the community democratically elects a 17-member CMC. Members of the CMC can be part of the CEP sessions, but it is not a requirement and many CMCs include community leaders that do not take part in the sessions. The role of the committee is to “manage and coordinate activities of the class and ensure collaboration between the class and other community members” (Tostan, 2007b). The CMC exists to apply the knowledge learned in the classroom to community life. Examples of CMC activities are the organization of community clean-ups, vaccination drives, and ensuring high school enrollment. CMCs receive training from Tostan on management, leadership, and the creation of action plans. In many cases, “CMCs register as official community-based organizations in their respective countries” (Tostan, 2007b), which gives them official recognition and leverage to accomplish their development goals. At the end of the CEP, Tostan often gives CMCs microcredit funds to manage to support future community development projects. When the CEP sessions end in a community, the CMC continues to exist—ensuring the continued progress in communities through community-led development.

Community-Led Outreach

In addition to the CEP and CMCs, Tostan uses community-led outreach to increase the reach of its program. As noted earlier, Tostan intentionally chooses communities that are part of the same social network to facilitate the effect of its outreach programs. Throughout the year, Tostan communities share what they have learned in the classroom both within their community and with neighboring communities. Examples of this spread of knowledge are inter-village meetings, youth caravans, and public declarations, which allow Tostan communities to connect to each other and to other communities in the area. Some of these events, like inter-village meetings, are forums for communities in the region to discuss and debate the topics from the CEP sessions. Other events, like public declarations, are opportunities for communities to share decisions they have made. In the Gambian context, decisions are made through group consensus, not by individuals. If one community decides to abandon FGC or to prioritize the education of girls, it is imperative that they discuss that decision with the surrounding communities. This method both shares information with non-Tostan communities and solidifies changes and decisions made in individual communities.

The Gambia and the Upper River Region

Tostan has been working in the Upper River Region (URR) of The Gambia since 2006. Since I lived and worked in The Gambia for six months providing administrative and technical support, I had the opportunity to learn about the culture and region before beginning my research. The Gambian context provided an ideal backdrop for this research since the Tostan program is a relatively recent addition to the landscape and there is a high prevalence of FGC in the country. Approximately 78 percent of the country's women have undergone some form of FGC and in the URR that number increases to close to 100 percent (Gambia Bureau of Statistics, 2007).

The Gambia is the smallest country in continental Africa. It is a narrow strip of land that follows the course of the Gambian River, which splits the country into two roughly equal halves. With the exception of a small strip of Atlantic coastline, it is completely enclosed by neighbouring Senegal. These odd boundaries are due to the colonial history of the area—the French colonized Senegal and the British controlled The Gambia. The URR is the far eastern section of the country, with Basse Santa Su as the regional capital.

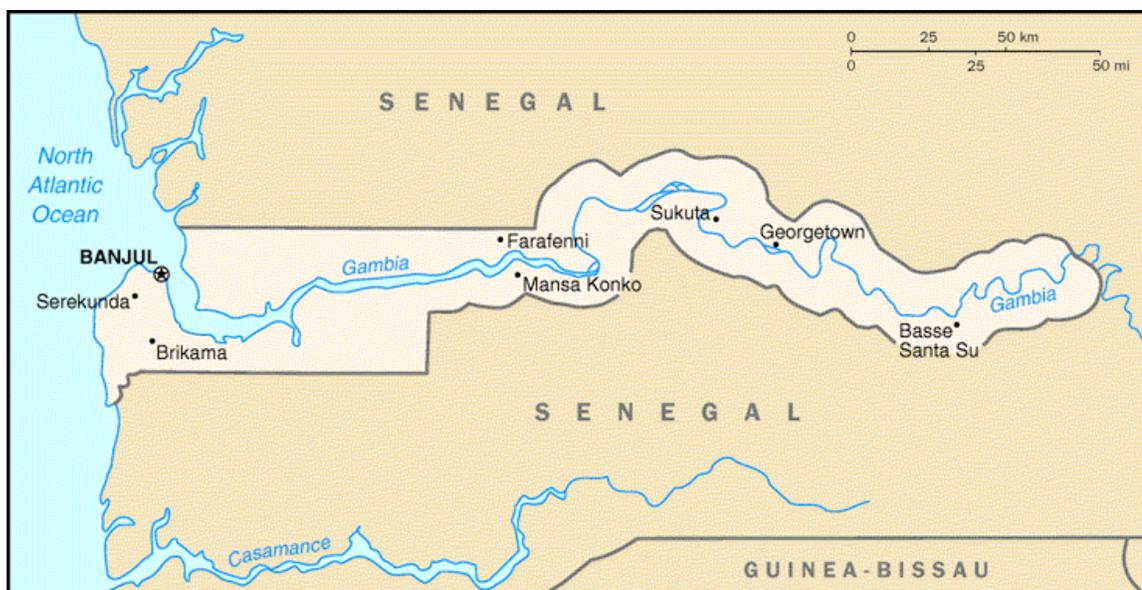


Figure 1: Map of The Gambia
Source: (CIA, 2010)

The country's current leader—Yahya Jammeh—came to power in a bloodless coup in 1994. Under his leadership, The Gambian government has prioritized education and health care by building new schools and clinics and encouraging families to educate their girls as well as their

boys (Davies, 2005). Even with renewed commitment to those sectors, the country still has some of the worst social and economic indicators in the world. The most recent Human Development Index statistics rank the Gambia 168th out of 182 countries (United Nations, 2009). According to the UNICEF statistics, 69 percent of the population lives below the poverty line and 60 percent of rural populations are categorized as extremely poor (UNICEF, 2010).

Travelling east along the Gambian river away from the urbanized west, these measurements of health and social well being steadily decrease and poverty increases. The URR, where I conducted research for this essay, is considered the least developed region in the country due to its poor economic and social indicators. There are three primary ethnic groups in the URR: Mandinka, Fula, and Sarahule (Gambia Bureau of Statistics, 2007). At the time of my research, Tostan's program was working with 40 Fula and 40 Mandinka communities with plans to expand to the Sarahule population when funding becomes available.

The Mandinka and Fula are two of The Gambia's five major ethnic groups; the other ethnic groups are the Wolof, Jola, and Sarahule. The Mandinka are the largest ethnic group in The Gambia, at 42 percent of the population. The Fula are 19 percent of the country's population, but they comprise a higher portion of the population in the URR. Both groups are predominantly Muslim, which is expected since the country is 94 percent Muslim (CIA, 2010). According to a Tostan facilitator, the Fula were traditionally herdsman and the Mandinka were crop farmers. The Mandinka speak Mandinka, and the Fula speak the Fula language.

From my experience interacting with both groups, the Fula and the Mandinka have similar values, but express those values through different music, dance, and ceremonies. It is not uncommon for individuals from one group to marry into another group. Mandinka and Fula communities are not isolated geographically. When driving through the URR it is common to pass a Mandinka community, then a Fula community, and then a Sarahule community before seeing another Mandinka community. The proximity of different groups in The Gambia has led to a high level of bilingual and multilingualism in the region. In The Gambia the Fula and Mandinka have a "joking" relationship with each other where people from one group tease people from the other, even if they do not know the person well. Elements of this joking/teasing culture come through later in this essay during the curriculum review.

Essay Outline

This essay is a case study that explores why Tostan's program has led to FGC abandonment in The Gambia. In the next section I provide background information, context, and a review of the literature related to the practice of FGC in general and in The Gambia. The review continues with a discussion of abandonment theories and efforts at the local, national, and international level, which establishes the merits and past success of Tostan's approach. Following this background section I describe the details of my research, why I chose to use a case study, and how each source of evidence will contribute to the findings. In the discussion, those results are further explored and analyzed, looking specifically at how the multiple streams political theory can contribute to an understanding of the success of Tostan and provide suggestions for national policy formation. Finally, a conclusion reviews what has been learned from this study, its limitations, and areas for further research in the field. By the end of this essay, I will have shown that Tostan's approach to abandonment is successful because it uses a holistic, respectful approach that incorporates community values.

A Note on Terminology

Before beginning a discussion of the practice, I would like to say a few words on the terminology of FGC. Female genital cutting (FGC) is alternately known as female circumcision (FC) or female genital mutilation (FGM). The practice was originally called FC, which is the same terminology communities themselves use. Near the end of the 1970s, the terminology shifted from FC to FGM to emphasize both the difference between the practice and male circumcision and the severity of the ritual. When the UN began using the term FGM on the recommendation of the WHO, its dominance over the previous term "female circumcision" was solidified (UNICEF, 2005, Rahman and Toubia, 2000). Recently, there has been a shift among researchers and some abandonment advocates to using the term FGC instead of FGM. "Cutting" offers a more neutral stance and does not carry the negative connotations of the word "mutilation." The term mutilation implies that the women are intentionally hurting their daughters, a label and insinuation communities understandably resist (Gruenbaum, 2001, Rahman and Toubia 2000). In my experience, communities use the term FC, abandonment advocates use FGM, and researchers use FGC or a hybrid—FGM/C. Rosemarie Skaine (2005) summarizes the difficulties of labeling the practice when she quotes scholar Kathleen Sheldon, "'Mutilation' is clearly political,

'circumcision' inaccurate, FG 'surgeries' makes it sound medical... I have opted for 'cutting'" (p. 7). I, too, have chosen to use the term FGC throughout this essay.

BACKGROUND ON FGC AND ABANDONMENT EFFORTS

This essay seeks to understand why Tostan’s program is an effective tool for FGC abandonment. Before assessing *why* FGC abandonment is an outcome of Tostan’s program, it is necessary to understand more about the practice of FGC—its various forms, prevalence, health risks, reasons it is practiced—both in general and in The Gambia. With this basic information about FGC, I discuss the right-to-health and the human rights approaches to FGC abandonment and the reason for the trend away from the former and towards the latter. Tostan’s approach uses a human rights framework to facilitate public declarations of abandonment. In a field where it is challenging to measure success, these public declarations have received recognition at the national and international level as a tangible step toward complete abandonment. At the same time NGOs like Tostan are working to promote abandonment at the community level, national governments and international organizations are passing legislation and holding conventions to eradicate FGC. An understanding of all three approaches—right-to-health, human rights, and national policies—places the work of Tostan in global context of FGC abandonment.

Types of Female Genital Cutting, Prevalence, and Associated Health Risks

Types of FGC

There are four types of FGC, as classified by the WHO: clitoridectomy (Type I), excision (Type II), infibulation (Type III), and “other” (Type IV) (WHO 2010). Type I, or clitoridectomy, involves the partial or complete removal of the clitoris. Type II, excision, is the “partial or total removal of the clitoris and the labia minora, with or without removal of the labia majora.” Infibulation, Type III, involves the most extensive procedure of the four types. Infibulation creates a “seal” that narrows the vaginal opening by “cutting and repositioning the inner or outer labia.” It does not necessarily involve a clitoridectomy, but it can. Type IV is a catchall category for other alternations to the female genitalia that do not clearly fall into one of the other three types.

In The Gambia, the most common form of FGC is Type II, but the type varies across ethnic communities (U.S. Dept of State, 2001). The Foundation for Research on Women’s Health, Productivity, and the Environment (BAFFROW)—a national NGO—provides the only information available on which ethnic groups practice which types of FGC in The Gambia.

According to BAFFROW, the largest group in The Gambia—the Mandinka—practice Type II on girls age 10-15. The Fula practice “vaginal sealing” on girls from infancy until age 18. Vaginal sealing is similar to Type III, but is classified as Type IV. It relies on blood clotting to form a seal instead of using stitches (U.S. Dept of State, 2001). Unfortunately, more recent and detailed information on the type of FGC practiced in The Gambia is not available.

Prevalence

It is difficult to know the precise number of girls who have undergone FGC. The WHO estimates that somewhere between 100 and 140 million women across the globe have been cut (WHO, 2010). The practice is concentrated in a band of 28 countries that extends across sub-Saharan and northeast Africa, with varying degrees of prevalence both between and within practicing countries. The practice is also found in parts of Asia and the Middle East and has spread to North America and Europe through immigrations (WHO, 2010). The age girls undergo FGC varies from infancy to adulthood (WHO, 2010), but it generally occurs between the ages of four and twelve (Skaine, 2005; Mackie, 2000; Rahman and Toubia, 2000).

Exact and consistent prevalence rates are difficult to find because rates are gathered from different studies, all of which do not use the same methodology, and therefore the estimates are just that—estimates. The most comprehensive sources of prevalence rates are the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) funded Demographic Health Surveys (DHS) and the UNICEF and World Bank funded Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) (UNICEF, 2005b). Until 2006, there was no data on FGC in The Gambia from either source. There is still no DHS data, but there is MICS data was published in 2006 by the Gambian Bureau of Statistics.

According to the MICS data, 78 percent of women age 15-49 in The Gambia have undergone some form of FGC (Gambian Bureau of Statistics, 2006). The distribution of prevalence is not even across the country. Near the capital, Banjul, there are a high percentage of people from the Wolof ethnic group. Traditionally, the Wolof do not practice FGC, which helps explain why only 44 percent of women have undergone FGC in the capital region. In contrast, 99 percent of women have been cut in the URR capital of Basse. When examined by ethnic group, the Mandinka had the highest prevalence rate at 97 percent and the Fula have the third highest rate at 88 percent after the Jola (Gambian Bureau of Statistics, 2006).

Health Risks

The WHO lists many health risks of FGC, which are divided into short and long-term consequences. The short-term consequences include “severe pain, shock, hemorrhage (bleeding), tetanus or sepsis (bacterial infection), urine retention, open sores in the genital region and injury to nearby genital tissue.” The long-term consequences include:

recurrent bladder and urinary tract infections, cysts, infertility, an increased risk of childbirth complications and newborn deaths, the need for later surgeries. For example, the FGM procedure that seals or narrows a vaginal opening (type 3 above) needs to be cut open later to allow for sexual intercourse and childbirth. Sometimes it is stitched again several times, including after childbirth, hence the woman goes through repeated opening and closing procedures, further increasing and repeated both immediate and long-term risks. (WHO, 2010)

The consequences listed above do not occur in every case of FGC; the more severe types of FGC, such as infibulation and excision, experience these consequences at a higher rate. The likelihood of these health risks change under different environmental conditions. For example, when a cutter uses the same tools to cut multiple girls the risk of infection and transmission of diseases, including HIV/AIDS, increases (Skaine, 2005, Rahman and Toubia, 2000). In The Gambia, the current rates of HIV/AIDS are very low at less than five percent (Population Reference Bureau, 2008). Even though HIV/AIDS may not be a pressing concern in The Gambia, it is a major problem in other countries that practice FGC. Another potential factor in determining health outcomes is the cutter’s knowledge and level of training. Traditional cutters with little or no formal medical training perform most procedures in West Africa (UNICEF, 2005b; Skaine, 2005).

The health risks listed above describe the physical problems associated with the practice, both in the long and short-term. In addition to these physical risks, there are also less studied psychological risks. According to the WHO, the practice may cause lasting psychological effects for the women who undergo FGC (WHO, 2010, Rahman and Toubia, 2000). More research needs to be done on all health risks, but the mental and psychological risks of the practice are particularly understudied.

Not all scholars agree on the severity, risk, and likelihood of the WHO’s list of health consequences. Carla Obermeyer (1999) discusses how knowledge surrounding FGC is often distorted, exaggerated, or based on anecdotal evidence and the health consequences of the

practice are misinterpreted. Most of the health consequences occur with Type III (infibulation), but scholars and abandonment advocates do not always make this distinction. Instead, “noteworthy case studies on infibulation are generalized to describe the health risks of all forms of genital cutting” (Shell-Duncan, 2001: 1016). These generalizations effectively shock Western audiences, but they do not necessarily accurately portray the reality of the situation. Obermeyer (1999) summarizes this problem in the conclusion of her study of current FGC literature: “The powerful discourse that depicts female genital surgeries as inevitably causing death and serious ill health is not sufficiently supported by the evidence, which includes no incontrovertible data on mortality, and suggests that severe complications are relatively infrequent” (p. 97). In response to this assertion, Gerry Mackie (2003) argues that regardless of the exact numbers of complications, it is clear that “most FGC is a proper matter of concern because it is the irreversible reduction of a human capacity in the absence of meaningful consent” (p. 135). When studying FGC, it is essential to recognize the potential health risks, but also to recognize the importance of evaluating the risk in context and not to paint the picture with broad strokes.

Reasons for the Practice and its Origins

Scholars have found it difficult to pinpoint the origins of FGC. However, they have determined that it existed before both Islam and Christianity. The earliest written record of the practice was found on a papyrus scroll in 163 B.C.E. (Skaine, 2005). Some research points toward southern Egypt or northern Sudan as the place of origin, but there is no consensus or certainty (Skaine, 2005, Rahman and Toubia, 2000).

To create effective FGC abandonment strategies, organizations need to understand the reasons behind FGC’s existence. The reasons individuals and communities practice FGC is as varied as the individuals themselves. In their book on the subject, Rahman and Toubia (2000) have classified motivations for the practice into four general categories: (1) rite of passage, (2) control of women’s sexuality, (3) cultural and/or religious practice, and (4) social conformity.

Rite of Passage

In some communities, the practice of FGC acts as a rite of passage into womanhood and the community of adults. The ritual surrounding FGC can last for days or weeks. During that time the girls are taught by the women in their community what it means to be a woman in the society. It is an opportunity to pass down knowledge and information while initiating them into the adult

community. The ritual is not only important for the girls who are cut, but also for their families.

A Program for Appropriate Technology and Health (PATH) (2005) report describes the importance of the rite for the entire family of the girls being cut in the Kenyan context:

Traditionally, girls receive elaborate social recognitions and support at the time of FGM, not only for coming-of-age, but also for facing the physical pain without complaint. Young girls anticipate and enjoy the attention, new clothes, exotic food, gifts, and peer companionship that are part of the rite of passage. Circumcised girls are viewed as role models...Mothers also look forward to this event because it represents the culmination of multiple achievements...For fathers, the rite of passage associated with FGM is a time to show off their daughters and their wealth, and to negotiate with prospective in-laws for bride price. For grandparents, it is a time to reflect on the family's progress and status, to hand-down ancestral teachings, and to feel proud that the new generation is following in their footsteps. (p. 73)

While FGC is frequently referenced as part of an initiation ritual, in many cases FGC is performed on young girls and is not part of a larger community ceremony or rite of passage. Some scholars believe that “only rarely does it have the trappings of an initiation rite” (Mackie, 1996: 1003). As we will see in the description of abandonment approaches, knowing the local context and role of FGC in the communities targeted for abandonment is a key aspect of those programs' success. Without the correct information, NGOs may waste resources using ineffective and culturally inappropriate methods.

In a study focused on FGC in The Gambia and Senegal (Hernlund, 2000), the authors found that FGC was not generally considered a rite of passage in the area. Historically, cutting was part of an initiation rite, but in contemporary society it is performed on younger girls with “little or no teaching or celebration” (Hernlund, 2000: 242). Even though it is not a rite of passage, some activist groups in the country have attempted to create a new initiation ritual that involves “ritual without cutting” (Hernlund, 2000). These attempts have not proved to be widely successful since they focus on the practice as a rite of passage when the communities themselves do not share that view.

Control of Women's Sexuality

A second explanation for the practice of FGC is its use in controlling women's sexuality, preserving their virginity before marriage, and ensuring their fidelity in marriage. This association between FGC and control of women's bodies is particularly strong in Northeastern Africa where there is a tradition of “strong female honour and modesty code” (Mackie and

LeJeune, 2009: 5). The practice of infibulations is dominant in that same region in Africa. Since infibulations leaves only a small opening for menstrual fluid and urine, it creates a more extreme barrier to intercourse outside of marriage and it is not unusual for infibulated girls to have to be cut open on their wedding night in order to consummate their marriages (Rahman and Toubia, 2000). Even in the cases of Type I or Type II FGC, the removal of the clitoris is thought to lessen women's sexual desires to ensure she will remain a virgin before marriage.

Religious Practice

Even though FGC predates both Islam and Christianity, people who practice FGC commonly justify it with religion and consider it a requirement for girls to be spiritually pure (UNICEF 2006a and Rahman and Toubia, 2000). While the practice is most commonly associated with Islam, the practice is not limited to Muslims; Christians and practitioners of indigenous religions also practice FGC (WHO, 2010 and Gruenbaum, 2001). Mackie and LeJeune (2009) describe the role of religion in FGC:

There are both Christian and Muslim communities who practice FGM/C, often believing that the practice is required by the holy book. Yet, nearby communities of the same religion may not engage in FGM/C, and worldwide most Christians and most Muslims do not follow the practice. Religious obligation is an important factor in the decision to practice FGM/C, but it is typically just one of several elements. (p. 7)

The Koran does not specifically address FGC, but the practice is referenced in the Hadiths, which are sayings and actions attributed to the Prophet. In one of the Hadiths, the Prophet is said to have told a woman who was performing FGC to “reduce, but not destroy”—instructions that do not provide a clear answer to his followers. Some Muslims interpret his statement to mean that he was not in favor of the practice and was trying to protect girls being cut, while others consider it an endorsement (Gruenbaum, 2001).

Since the Gambian population is 94 percent Muslim (CIA, 2010), there is a potential religious rationalization for FGC. From my experience in The Gambia I found that many community members and leaders did associate the practice with Islam. Although I observed a relationship between Islam and FGC, there is currently no research that explores this relationship between Islam and FGC in the Gambian context.

Social Convention and Marriageability

A fourth reason for the FGC's existence is its role as a social convention, where FGC is a requirement for marriage and acceptance in the community. When life—often literally—depends on community support, a requirement to officially join the community holds great importance. In this context, FGC is often associated with “marriageability.” If a girl is not cut, she will not find a husband because men and the communities consider it a requirement for marriage (Mackie, 2000; Mackie, 1996). In societies based around traditional roles and the family unit, not being married is a high offense, which increases the importance of any ritual that ensures the suitability of entrance into both institutions (Skaine, 2005, Rahman and Toubia, 2000). Marriageability and FGC as a social convention are key concepts to understanding Tostan's abandonment strategy and will be further explored in the discussion of public declarations.

In a recent study of FGC in The Gambia, Ylva Hernlund and Bettina Shell-Duncan (2007) suggest that marriageability may not be a primary reason for the practice in the Gambian context. Intermarriage across ethnic groups is common in The Gambia and it is not unusual for two individuals to marry where one individual comes from an ethnic group that practices FGC and the other partner comes from a group that does not practice FGC. If a family chooses not to cut its daughters, its girls would still be able to find a husband by marrying into an ethnic group that does not practice FGC (Hernlund and Shell-Duncan, 2007). If a woman who is not cut marries into a group that practices FGC, she may feel pressure from her new family to be cut, especially from the women in her family. The conclusion of the study states that pressure from other women is the most compelling reason why the Gambian women studied practiced FGC, not FGC as a rite of passage or requirement for marriage. While the conclusion of this study focuses on pressure from other women, it does not address the patriarchy's role in creating that pressure. If men did not view FGC as an expectation for marriage, being cut would not be an element of being a “good” woman and if FGC were no longer necessary to conform to men's expectations, women might not pressure other to be cut.

Although the literature distinguishes between the control of women's sexuality and marriageability as two separate justifications, this distinction is tenuous at best. A woman's purity, fidelity, and sexual restraint are characteristics that make her “marriageable.” Both concepts are closely tied to the influence of patriarchy and the male conception of the ideal woman, but classifying the justification for FGC as marriageability or a social convention better

hides the patriarchy's central role. The creation of this final category may make the discussion of FGC more palatable for Western audiences, but it ignores how the control of women's sexuality is a way to make women marriageable in the eyes of men.

These four justifications for FGC—rite of passage, control of women's sexuality, religious practice, and social convention—shed light on potential reasons why communities practice FGC. Like many aspects of the practice, the primary justification for communities varies based on their location and tradition. When participants from five DHS country studies were asked why they practiced FGC, the most frequent response was “custom and tradition” and “good tradition” (UNICEF, 2005). These options may have acted as a “catch-all” for more specific responses since “tradition” and “custom” may be interpreted in different ways. Even though DHS data has been collected in most of the countries that practice FGC, the question of why individuals practice FGC was only asked in five countries, which makes it difficult to make a definitive judgment on the central reason for FGC existence. There is likely no one justification, but rather combinations of justifications based on the location, ethnic group, and traditions of a particular community.

Approaches to Abandonment

Over the past half-century, the international development community began focusing on ways to promote the abandonment of FGC. These efforts occurred at both the community and the national level. At the community level, NGOs pursued abandonment using a “right-to-health” approach that emphasized the negative health consequences of FGC. In the 1990s, the more holistic human rights focus began to replace the previously dominant right-to-health model. An example of a human rights strategy is the public declaration model used by Tostan. In addition to the grassroots efforts of local NGOs, in many countries governments are taking steps to promote abandonment through laws or adherence to international agreements.

Right-to-Health Approach

While movements to abandon FGC are not new, in the past few decades they have gained worldwide attention. Until the 1990s, these movements primarily focused on the health risks of the practice. These “right-to-health” anti-FGC campaigns emphasize the fact that “female genital cutting exposes women to unnecessary, and often severe, medical risks” (Shell-Duncan, 2001: 1013). In these campaigns, advocates discuss the short-term, long-term, and obstetric risks of the

practice. The philosophy behind this approach is that once people understand the dangers of the practice, they will voluntarily abandon FGC. The application of this approach can occur in a variety of ways, including using films, pictures, and lectures to describe the health risks and complications. The defining factor of this approach is that the reason communities should stop practicing FGC is because it is harmful to the health of the women and girls who undergo it. There are two important criticisms of this approach that have caused the international community to move toward the human rights approach: the exaggeration of risks and the medicalization of the practice.

The first criticism of the right-to-health approach is the use of exaggeration and “scare tactics” to achieve its ends. Some of the health consequences occur in much higher rates in the more severe forms (Type III) of FGC. While Type III is the dominant form of FGC in some areas—for example, in Somalia—in other areas Type III is rarely or never practiced. These less severe forms have lower complication rates and decreased health risks. Unfortunately, some right-to-health campaigns describe the consequences of Type III FGC to communities that do not practice Type III. Because the information presented does not correspond to the experiences of the community, individuals lose trust in the campaign and reject its efforts to promote abandonment. The use of exaggeration and “scare tactics” are not universal in health-based campaigns, but their use in any situation damages the reputation and credibility of abandonment campaigns. In order to succeed, the campaigns need to provide accurate information that resonates with the experience of the people who practice FGC.

A second criticism of the right-to-health approach is the unintended consequence of medicalization of the practice. Like exaggeration, medicalization does not occur in all areas that use a right-to-health approach. Medicalization occurs when individuals make changes in the practice of FGC to lessen the health risks, but do not abandon the practice. For example, cutters may begin to use a new razor blade for each child to reduce the risk of infection and HIV transmission or families may take their daughters to medical professionals and have the procedure done in a clinical setting instead of in the community by traditional cutters. The movement to making FGC “safer” is not supported by the WHO. The WHO strongly opposes all forms of medicalization and has a zero-tolerance policy on FGC. This policy is reflected in the 1982 statement declaring it unethical for “any health officials in any setting—including hospitals or other health establishments” to perform FGC (WHO, 1982). The WHO considers it a violation of

the ethical code “do no harm.” Opponents of medicalization “believe medicalization will institutionalize the procedure and undermine efforts to eliminate it” (Skaine, 2005: 32). Medicalization is not a component of the right-to-health approach, but it is a potential outcome of programs that use negative health consequences as the primary reason FGC should be abandoned.

A focus only on the health risks of the practice is seen by some as a roadblock to abandonment, but other scholars argue that it could be a step toward that goal. Bettina Shell-Duncan (2001) compares the medicalization of FGC to other harm-reduction strategies in public health, such as needle exchange programs for intravenous drug users. The public health concept of harm reduction “considers a wide range of alternatives, and promotes the alternative that is culturally acceptable and bears the least amount of harm” (p. 1310). Shell-Duncan argues that medicalization is not ideal, but if examined pragmatically, it can be seen as a valuable step on the road to abandonment or at least a way to mitigate the health effects if the practice stays in place. Even though it is not condoned by the WHO or most abandonment advocates, it may decrease the health risks for girls who undergo the practice in communities that are not prepared to completely abandon the practice but that are open to amending the practice to increase its safety.

In The Gambia, there are three NGOs who work to promote FGC abandonment: the Gambia Committee Against Traditional Practices (GAMCOTRAP), the Foundation for Research on Women’s Health, Productivity and the Environment (BAFFROW), and Tostan. These organizations are all working to achieve the same goal, but have different methods and theories that inform their programs. Both GAMCOTRAP and BAFFROW use a right-to-health approach that emphasizes the health risks of the practice. GAMCOTRAP uses one-day workshops and films to educate people about the negative health effects of FGC. BAFFROW also does short-term educational interventions focused on the health consequences. In addition to focusing on the health risks, BAFFROW also provides alternative sources of income for cutters to give them an economic incentive to stop the practice (United States Department of State, 2001). Ylva Hernlund and Bettina Shell-Duncan (2007) summarize the results of health-based education in the Gambian context: “Though health-based interventions have succeeded in breaking the culture of silence surrounding the practice of FGC, they have not resulted in large-scale behavior change” (p. 49).

The first efforts to promote FGC abandonment, both in general and in The Gambia, focused on teaching the health risks and consequences of the practice without teaching the underlying human

rights issues. This technique fell out of favor in the 1990s primarily due to the unintended response of medicalization in some communities. This approach has also been criticized for instances where the risks were exaggerated or pertained to a form of FGC not practiced by the local community (Hernlund, 2000). For decades the right-to-health approach dominated FGC abandonment campaigns, but since the early 1990s the human rights based approach has become the leading framework for FGC abandonment advocates.

Human Rights Approach

Even though there is a harm-reduction aspect of medicalization, its development as an unintended consequence has spurred organizations seeking abandonment to change from a “right-to-health” to a “human rights” based approach (Shell-Duncan, 2007). The human rights argument emphasizes that since most of the girls who undergo FGC are not in a position to make the choice for themselves, their basic human rights are violated regardless of the health consequences. With most girls being cut between the ages of four and twelve, their bodies are irreparably changed without their consent. Advocates, both in Africa and in the West, take the view that, “[s]urgical procedures that have permanent effects on unconsenting subjects or on those too young to give appropriately informed consent, or who cannot give appropriately informed consent for other reasons, cannot simply be condoned” (Smith Oboler, 2001: 311). The human rights approach does not ignore the health risks; it discusses the health risks within the context of human rights violations and provides reasons for abandonment *outside* of the health consequences.

Two of the most prominent examples of this approach are the alternative rites of passage and public declarations. Alternative rites of passage create rituals that mimic the traditional ceremonies for FGC, only without the cutting. These alternative rites allow communities to maintain the positive aspects of the rite without cutting the girls. This strategy has been successful in Kenya where the central justification of FGC is its role as an initiation rite (PATH, 2005). Another example of an applied human rights approach is the use of public declarations. Tostan is not the only organization that uses public declarations in an effort to abandon FGC. In Ethiopia, Intrahealth International uses public declarations as a component of its abandonment strategy (Population Reference Bureau, 2006).

National Laws and International Agreements

The previous two approaches—right-to-health and human rights—are examples of public community-based strategies for FGC abandonment. Working directly with the communities may

be the best way to achieve long-term behavioral change, but it is not the only approach. Advocates for abandonment also work at the national and international level to promote their cause. Currently, 22 of the 28 countries in Africa that practice FGC have a law or decree that prohibits the practice; only The Gambia, Liberia, Nigeria, Sierre Leone, Somalia, and Yemen do not (Population Reference Bureau, 2010). The enforcement and sanctions for violation for these laws varies from country to country. For example, in Burkina Faso traditional cutters receive one to five months jail time and the possibility of a \$16-80 fine. For enforcement, the government in Burkina Faso created a national hotline that citizens can call if they know a girl who has been cut or who is likely to be cut (Rahman and Toubia, 2000).

In addition to national laws and decrees, there are also international agreements to abandon the practice. In 2003, the African Union adopted the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, better known as the Maputo Protocol. The protocol addresses a wide-range of women's issues. In Article 5, it guarantees protection from harmful traditional practices, including FGC (Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2006). The protocol went into effect in November 2005 after 15 countries had signed and ratified the agreement. As of 2010, 46 out of 53 countries in the African Union have signed the protocol and 27 have ratified it. The seven countries that have not signed the agreement are Botswana, Cape Verde, Egypt, Tunisia, Mauritania, Malawi, and Eritrea—none of which are among the six FGC practicing countries that do not have a law to prohibit the practice. The Gambia signed the agreement in 2003 and ratified it in 2005 (African Union, 2010).

A second agreement that indirectly addresses FGC is the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). States that have signed CEDAW are required to investigate, prosecute, and punish all forms of gender-based violence. Advocates of FGC abandonment argue that FGC falls under the label of gender-based violence and therefore any state that has signed CEDAW has outlawed the practice. Twenty-six of the twenty-eight African countries that practice FGC have signed CEDAW, including The Gambia (Amnesty International, 2005).

These national laws and international agreements play an important role by raising the issue of FGC in the national and global community, but by themselves may not be effective. Some scholars say these laws are an integral piece of the abandonment puzzle, while others state that “legislation against FGC is a poor tool for effecting behavior change” (Hernlund and Shell-

Duncan, 2007). The underlying question in this debate is whether or not legislation can create behavioral changes in culturally embedded practices.

In The Gambia there is currently no law prohibiting FGC. In 1999, President Jammeh declared that he would not allow a law that prohibits FGC because it is a part of the country's culture. Since that statement, President Jammeh has supported NGO efforts to promote abandonment in The Gambia. The government's policies have been inconsistent and often send mixed messages. In 1997, the Director of Information and broadcasting ordered a ban on radio and television programs that supported abandonment; one week later, the Vice President said the country's policy was to "discourage such harmful practices as FGM" (Skaine, 2005: 240 and United States Department of State, 2001). As recently as May 2009, President Jammeh criticized a religious leader in the country for "preaching against the culture of female circumcision" (Senegambia News Team, 2009). The government's public statements on FGC have been contradictory in the past. Currently, the government is partnering with Tostan and UNICEF to implement the CEP in The Gambia.

An Economic Strategy: Compensation for Cutters

A less widely used abandonment strategy is financially compensating cutters to quit performing FGC by retraining them and giving them the skills to make a living in another field (Mackie 2000). The idea behind this strategy is straightforward: if you effectively reduce supply, the demand will not be able to access the service. The flaw in this theory is that it is nearly impossible to completely eliminate supply. Simply because cutters have alternative training does not mean they will stop cutting. Even if the current cutters do stop, other people in the community can take up cutting if there is still a demand. If demand is not reduced, compensating cutters will not lead to the abandonment of FGC. While compensation will not work as an isolated strategy, it could be a supplement to other strategies to combat the issue from multiple sides. Retraining cutters after educating the community of the harmful effects of FGC, both from the health and human-rights perspective, may improve the effectiveness of current strategies.

Public Declarations

Tostan uses one of the most widely recognized abandonment strategies today: the public declaration. These declarations are based on Gerry Mackie's (1996) "convention theory." According to the theory, a social convention is an aspect of the culture that people participate in because it is expected by their community. These conventions can change over time based on the

expectations of the community. This theory states that in communities where FGC (or other harmful traditional practices like footbinding in China) is an expectation for marriage, individuals are in a “belief trap” that forces them to continue the FGC because of its role as a custom and marriageability requirement—even individuals who want to abandon the practice. The convention theory assumes that the primary justification for FGC is social conformity and its relationship to marriageability.

The convention theory uses a game-theory based on Thomas Schelling’s (1960) rationality model to explain the practice of FGC. In game theory, individuals make decisions about the practice using rationality: “choosing what one wants more over what one wants less, whether self-regarding or other-regarding, given beliefs and constraints” (Mackie, 1996: 1006). The rational choice may not appear rational to an outside observer. For example, from a Western perspective, the rational choice would be for families to not cut their daughters because they see greater harm coming from cutting their daughters than from not cutting their daughters. In many African communities, the rational choice is for families to cut their daughters because greater harm comes from not cutting their daughters since their daughters may be excluded from marriage if they are not cut. In the case of FGC, the “rational” choice for families is to cut their daughters because parents want to do what is best for their children, which in this case is for them to find a spouse. In societies that practice FGC, marriage and having children are key aspects to living a “successful” life and being cut is an expectation for marriage. Mackie (1996) explains the self-reinforcing nature of this situation:

However the custom originated, as soon as women believed that men would not marry an un mutilated woman, and men believed that an un mutilated woman would not be a faithful partner in marriage, and so forth, expectations were mutually concordant and a self-enforcing convention was locked in. A woman would not choose nonmarriage and not to have her own children; a man would not choose an unfaithful partner and not to have his own children.” (p. 1008)

The convention theory also explains why communities are usually either entirely practicing or entirely non-practicing. If FGC is a requirement for marriage, then nearly everyone in the community will cut their daughters, which leads to communities and regions with close to one hundred percent prevalence rates.

Applying the convention theory to FGC, Mackie (1996) predicts that abandonment will occur in one generation and in the form of public pledges. There are two “thresholds” in the abandonment

process according to the social convention theory. First, an initial group of individuals need to decide to abandon. Once that group decides, it is “immediately in the interest of this core group to recruit other families in the community to abandon cutting” (UNICEF, 2007: 13) so that group can increase the marriage options of its daughters. As recruitment continues and more individuals decide to abandon, there will be a “tipping point” where “a shift to the new convention becomes irreversible for most of the population” (p. 13). The public declaration acts as a “moment of social recognition...where the ending of the practice is witnessed [and] most people are assured that most other people are ending the practice” (p. 13).

One year after Mackie’s article on the topic, Tostan facilitated the first public declaration to abandon FGC in Malicounda Bambara, Senegal in 1997. After completing the Tostan CEP, the women of Malicounda Bambara approached Tostan and asked for their support to abandon FGC. It was not an intended outcome of the CEP, but when the women learned about the health consequences and human rights violations of the practice, they decided they wanted to voluntarily abandon the practice. In 1997, the community of Malicounda Bambara declared their abandonment of FGC in front of a group of journalists. Initially, their decision to abandon was not well received by the network of communities in their area who had not come to a similar conclusion. Instead of returning to the practice, leaders in Malicounda Bambara organized a team of people to travel from community to community to discuss FGC and their reasons for abandonment. After almost a year of discussion, the other communities in the network decided to join Malicounda Bambara in their decision to abandon FGC. The experience of Malicounda Bambara reveals the necessity of an entire network of communities abandoning FGC together. Since that first declaration, there have been more than 4,579 communities in 5 countries that have declared their abandonment (Tostan, 2010).

Public declarations, as hosted by Tostan, involve anywhere from 13 to 200 communities coming together to announce their decision to abandon FGC at a weekend long event. On Saturday, participants explain their reasons for abandonment to the press and answer questions from the media. On Sunday, the actual declaration occurs. The event includes dancing, singing, testimonies from participants and community members, and remarks from local leaders and authorities, all of which culminates in the reading of the declaration pledge.

The public declaration is based on the idea that an individual cannot choose on his or her own to abandon FGC—he or she needs the support of the entire community or network of communities

because “even if each individual in the relevant group thinks that it would be better to abandon the practice, no one individual acting on her own can succeed” (Mackie, 2000: 255).

Abandonment requires a convention shift in the entire community, not a few individual decisions. It is the third component of a tripartite strategy of abandonment: “basic education, public discussion, and public abandonment” (Mackie, 2000: 279).

The public declarations create both an environment of community support through consensus and a sense of accountability. The Donors Working Group on Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (2008) explains the role of a declaration: “It is necessary that enough people make their agreement to stop the practice known to others so that those who wish to abandon FGM/C can be assured that they have support from others in the community will be able to marry their daughters, and will not face shame or exclusion” (p. 5). When a group of communities publically announces its abandonment, it not only frees individuals to choose to abandon, but it also becomes more difficult for an individual community or person to change their mind since other communities are aware of their decision to abandon.

Tostan’s public declaration strategy based on Gerry Mackie’s theory has proven successful in Senegal and other African countries. A 2008 evaluation of the Tostan program in Senegal found that in that eight years after the program finished, the practice of FGC dropped 70 percent in Tostan communities compared to a 40 percent in communities that had not been exposed to the Tostan program (UNICEF, 2008). This UNICEF study shows promising results, but there is still a need for more studies to determine effectiveness of public declarations. When the 2010 DHS report is published, there should be a significant drop in the prevalence of FGC in Senegal because 75 percent of practicing communities have participated in a declaration to abandon FGC (Tostan, 2010). The new numbers will give an indication of how committed and authentic communities are in their decision to abandon FGC.

Peter Easton and his colleagues (2003) conducted an in depth study of Tostan in Senegal, Sudan, and Mali. This study details the early years of Tostan’s experience of FGC abandonment, from the first declaration to its spread throughout Senegal. Easton et al. (2003) credit Tostan’s success to its participatory, non-judgmental, inclusive, community-centered approach. They predict Tostan’s strategy will continue to evolve and facilitate more declarations in the future. The centrality of human rights is summarized when the authors state that, “An environment of

attention to human rights—and to women’s rights and health concerns in particular—seems to constitute the most favorable setting for locally initiated abandonment of the practice” (p. 453).

When interpreting the results of any study measuring FGC prevalence, readers have to be aware of potential bias from community members trying to give the “correct” response (Askew, 2005). Since participants have completed the program that discussed the dangers and problems of FGC, they may answer that they have abandoned the practice even if they have not. This issue should be taken into account when reading any study that discusses FGC abandonment and prevalence rates.

Summary

Since FGC has come to the attention of the Western world, NGOs, international institutions, and national governments have tried different ways to promote abandonment. Over the past few decades the dominant theory has shifted from the right-to-health to the human rights approach. The right-to-health approach promotes abandonment using the negative health consequences as the dominant reason communities should abandon the practice. The human rights approach evolved in response to criticisms of approaches based only on the health risks, especially the medicalization of the practice in some areas. The human rights approach does not ignore or avoid including the health risks in its campaigns, but it places those risks in a human rights framework. According to the human rights approach, the *primary* reason FGC should be abandoned is because it is a violation of human rights.

Tostan’s strategy of FGC abandonment uses a human rights approach that discusses both the practice’s violation of rights and health risks. As part of its strategy, Tostan facilitates public declarations for communities that express a commitment and desire to abandon FGC. Public declarations are based on the convention theory that links FGC to marriageability and social acceptance. With this approach, Tostan has facilitated public declarations of abandonment in five countries, including The Gambia, and has been recognized as a leader in the field.

Determining the “success” of an abandonment campaign is difficult to measure. Shell-Duncan and Hernlund (2000) state that “identifying the most effective and appropriate strategies for eliminating female genital cutting is among the most bitterly contested issues surrounding this practice” (p. 24). Individuals may be inclined to give the perceived “correct” response and measurement tools rely on the truth and accuracy of respondents (Askew, 2005). Public

declarations provide a tangible outcome to see FGC abandonment, although the declarations themselves do not reveal the authenticity or long-term commitment of the declaring communities. Results from a recent UNICEF evaluation of Senegalese communities are encouraging and show that the majority of communities who declare their abandonment uphold their commitment (UNICEF, 2008). Since Tostan's Gambian program is a recent addition to the country's landscape, there are no long-term evaluations of declaring communities. Even without a long-term evaluation, the Gambian government released a statement earlier this year stating that Tostan has the best approach to abandonment in the country (Tostan, 2010). Tostan's success is recognized by the communities, governments, and the international community. In the remainder of this essay, I attempt to understand why the Tostan approach is successful in the Gambian context.

METHODS

Case Study Methodology

Given both my research question—Why is Tostan’s program an effective method of FGC abandonment?—and the setting in which I worked (The Gambia) I chose to do a case study. This methodology allowed for an in-depth look at a single entity—in this case, Tostan—from multiple perspectives. Colin Robson (1993) defines a case study as, “a strategy for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context using multiple sources of evidence” (p. 5). For my research, the NGO Tostan served as the “case.”

Robson’s definition of a case study emphasizes the need for *multiple* sources of evidence. Having this variety of sources was important to my research because it let me learn about the organization from the perspective of participants and staff in addition to classroom observation and document review. During my six months with Tostan, I collected data in three ways: participant and staff interviews, classroom observation, and curriculum document review. I collected these data while I was interning as the Assistant to the National Coordinator of The Gambia at Tostan from September 2009 to March 2010.

Curriculum Document Review

To understand why Tostan’s strategy is an effective tool for FGC abandonment, I needed to first understand the details of Tostan’s educational program. Tostan’s overall educational program—the Community Empowerment Program (CEP)—is divided into two sections: the Kobi and the Aawde. For my research, I reviewed only the Kobi section of the program because it is the most relevant to FGC abandonment. The Kobi curriculum covers the first two years of the CEP and includes the topics of democracy, human rights, problem solving, hygiene, and health.

My review of the Kobi curriculum provided the basis for the rest of my research. According to Michael Quinn Patton (2002), document review is a valuable tool for two reasons: its role as a basic information source on the program and its use in generating questions for interviews and observations. In this case study, the Kobi curriculum review effectively established the intended environment of CEP sessions, which are the primary point of contact between Tostan and the

communities. I was also able to better understand the material presented and the method of presentation before beginning the observation and interview elements of my research.

When I reviewed the curriculum, I read and took notes on all of the Kobi sessions, paying particular attention to the ones that directly addressed FGC. After more than a decade of use, the curriculum is currently undergoing review and there will likely be an updated version by the end of the year. All of my research is based on the current curriculum since the revised version is not yet complete.

Tostan provided two documents for the Kobi curriculum. The first document was written in English and covered the topics of human rights, democracy, and problem solving. The second document was written in French and covered the topics of hygiene and health. When facilitators conduct the sessions, they are translated into the local language—French and English are never used in sessions. In the results section, anytime I directly quote from the French curriculum I provide both the original French and my own English translation.

Classroom Observation

The second aspect of my research was classroom observation. I observed a CEP session to see the environment in the sessions firsthand. Classroom observation allowed me to compare the application of CEP sessions to the CEP as outlined in the curriculum. In addition, through participant observation I was able to “understand [the] program or treatment to an extent not entirely possible using only the insights of others obtained through interviews” (Patton, 2002: 25).

I attended a Tostan class at the beginning of February. At the time of the observation, only the Fula communities were still actively holding CEP sessions since the Mandinka communities finished the three-year program in December 2009. I hired a translator to attend the class, translate, and answer my questions during the session. I did not take notes during the class in order to be as unobtrusive as possible. Immediately following the class I wrote down my observations on the way the material was presented, the classroom atmosphere, the types of questions and responses from the facilitator and participants, and the way participants engaged with each other and the facilitator.

For the majority of the class I sat in the back and observed, but there were times when I actively participated in the class. For example, I danced with the women at the start of the class. I felt that having a willingness to learn and share in their traditions is an important part of their gaining trust and showing respect for their culture. On the spectrum between onlooker and participant I leaned more toward an onlooker, but when it felt appropriate, I did not hesitate to actively engage and participate in the class.

Participant and Staff Interviews

In addition to document review and classroom observation, I used semi-structured interviews with participants and staff. These interviews gave me the opportunity to learn about Tostan's program from the experiences of people intimately involved with its implementation. Semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to "seek both clarification and elaboration on the answers given" which "enables the interviewer to have more latitude to probe beyond the answers" (May, 1993: 93). This less structured format provides subjects the opportunity to respond "on their own terms" (May, 1993: 93). Through these interviews I wanted to learn about the process of abandonment in communities at different points in the Tostan program. I also wanted to hear from people experiencing the program and implementing the program to see how their experiences and perceptions differed based on their position and location.

In total I interviewed twelve program participants and six staff members. I conducted both the participant and staff interviews in early February 2010, five months after my arrival in West Africa. I did not immediately begin the interview process in order to have time to learn about the culture, program, and region.

I found program participants through a purposive sample—interviewing female participants of varying ages, ethnic groups, and location. Table 1.1 below lists the code, approximate age, marital status (Y if married, N if not married), and ethnic group of each of the twelve program participants. I interviewed participants from three different communities, two Fula and one Mandinka. The first Fula community, Mansajang, is located on the outskirts of the regional capital, Basse. Sare Koke was the second Fula community and is in a rural setting, situated approximately one hour by public transportation from Basse. At the time of the interviews both Fula communities were beginning the Aawde module on literacy and management. The Fula participants are coded as either "Fula, M" for Fula participants from Mansajang and "Fula, SK"

for Fula participants from Sare Koke. The third community where I conducted interviews was a Mandinka community, Kundam. This community had finished the three-year CEP five weeks before my interviews. Like Sare Koke, it is a rural community approximately an hour ride from the regional capital. The map below shows the URR of The Gambia and marks the location of the three communities where I interviewed participants and the regional capital—Basse Santa Su.



Figure 2: Map of the Upper River Region
Adapted from Google Maps

Table 1: Program Participant Interview Information

Participant Code	Age	Marital Status	Number of Children	Ethnic Group
F1	43	Married, 24 years	6	Fula, M
F2	35	Married, 17 years	6	Fula, M
F3	39	Married, 28 years	5	Fula, M
F4	37	Married, 22 years	1	Fula, M
M1	20	Married	0	Mandinka
M2	20	Married, 5 years	3	Mandinka
M3	40+	Married, 30 years	5	Mandinka
M4	50	Married, 30 years	Many	Mandinka
f1	~35	Married	?	Fula, SK
f2	~40	Married	?	Fula, SK
f3	38	Married	?	Fula, SK
f4	45	Married	?	Fula, SK

When I did my first two sets of participant interviews, I asked every participant the number of years they were married and the number of children they had. In my final set of interviews, I failed to get the specific number of children and years married. The question marks above indicate that participants did have children, but that I did not obtain the exact number.

Since the interviews were semi-structured, I used a standard set of questions (see below) to guide the interview, but I supplemented these questions with follow-ups and probes based on participant responses. Each interview covered three major topics: participant's involvement with Tostan, community life, and FGC. I concluded each interview with basic demographic questions.

Participant Interview Outline

Involvement with Tostan

- How did you become involved with the organization Tostan?
- Describe your involvement with this organization.
- What was most/least useful about the program?

- Have you incorporated what you learned in the program in your life? If so, how?
- In your view, what impact has the organization had on the life of the village (both positive and negative)?

Community Life

- First, what do you see as the positive aspects of life in the village?
- What do you see as some of the challenges facing this village?
- What does it mean to be a woman in your community?
- Is religion an important part of life in your village?
 - Is it important to you personally?

FGC

- Do you feel there is pressure in your village to cut the daughters?
- Do you feel that pressure?
- Are attitudes surrounding the practice changing? If so, how? If so, what do you believe precipitated that change?
- Should the national government be involved in the decision-making process on the issue of FGC?
- If so, what should the government's role be?

Demographics

- What is your age/marital status/number of children?

Since I am not fluent in Mandinka or Fula, I had a local individual translate my questions and participant responses. In two of the communities, the translators were not associated with the Tostan program. I hired translators based on the recommendations of the Tostan National Coordinator in The Gambia. In the third community, I was unable to locate an unaffiliated translator, so the Tostan facilitator translated instead. This situation may have affected the information the participants gave, which will be further discussed in the limitations section.

In addition to the twelve participant interviews, I conducted six staff interviews. Five of the six staff interviews were conducted in Basse, with the final interview occurring at the international office in Dakar. I choose staff participants to incorporate perspectives from every level of the organization—community, regional, national, and international. Five of the six interviews were with employees who worked in the Gambian program; the sixth interview was with an employee at the international level to provide a broader perspective of the organization. Table 1.2 lists the

code, position, ethnic group, years with Tostan, and sex for each of the six staff members interviewed.

Table 2: Staff Participant Interview Information

Staff Code	Position	Years at Tostan	Level within Tostan	Ethnic Background and Country	Sex
S1	Facilitator	3	Community	Fula, The Gambia	F
S2	National Coordinator	10	National	Jola, Senegal	M
S3	Assistant Nat'l Coordinator	10	National	Mandinka, Senegal	M
S4	Facilitator	3	Community	Mandinka, The Gambia	M
S5	Supervisor	3	Regional	Fula, The Gambia	M
S6	MERL Coordinator	5	International	Caucasian, United States	M

As with the participant interviews, I had a basic set of questions for each of the six staff members. Each interviewed covered the topics of the staff member's involvement with Tostan, perception of the program's development and effectiveness, and the program's approach to FGC. Questions varied slightly based on the position and expertise of the individual interviewed, but generally followed the structure of the outline included below.

Staff Interview Outline

Involvement with Tostan

- How did you first become involved with Tostan?
- What is your position at Tostan?
- How long have you been working at Tostan?
- What are the responsibilities/duties of your position?

Development of the Program

- When Tostan has completed a two-year program in a community, how does it evaluate success?
- In your opinion, what aspects of the program design make it successful?
- Are there any parts of the program that you think should be changed? If so, what are they?
- What are the challenges of the program?
- Since you've been an employee of Tostan, has the structure of its educational program changed? If yes, how so? If yes, why were those changes made?

Approach to FGC and Abandonment

- How does Tostan approach the topic of cutting in communities?
- In The Gambia, which cultural factors are most important to understanding the practice of cutting?
- What kind of support is given after a public declaration abandoning the practice?
- In your opinion, what kind of action should the government take on this issue?

Before beginning any interviews with participants and staff, I presented the purpose, risks, and benefits of the study, and the rights of study participants. Staff interviewees read and signed a hard copy of the informed consent documents in either French or English—whichever they preferred. Since most program participants are illiterate, the translator presented the material orally and obtained verbal consent from participants. The translator served as a witness in those cases. These procedures complied with the Oregon State University Institutional Research Board's regulations for obtaining informed consent.

Analysis Methodology for Interviews

With no confidence intervals or strict guidelines, qualitative analysis relies on a more intuitive process than quantitative analysis. For my analysis, I followed the methods of Miles and Huberman (1994) that involves finding the themes through an iterative process of reading the material—staff and participant interviews in my case. Since the staff and participants brought such different perspectives and experiences to the table, I did not analyze their interviews together so I could find separate themes and then compare the two. I will present findings of the interview analysis in the following results section along with the results of the curriculum review and classroom observation.

Methodology Limitations

My choice of methodology has strengths as well as limitations. The limitations include the limited time spent in each community and the use of a different translator in each community. I chose to interview a total of twelve participants, four participants in three different communities in the URR. Interviewing participants from different communities allowed more variety in my sample; with this format I interviewed participants from different ethnic backgrounds, different points in the CEP program, and different community settings. Ideally, I would have spent several months in each community to gain a deeper trust and relationship with participants. Given both financial and time constraints, I only spent one day in each community. This brief amount of time spent in each community may have affected the type of information participants were willing to share during their interviews. I was an “outsider” coming to discuss a sensitive, cultural topic and participants may not have felt they could be completely honest and open with their opinions. This limitation was less of a consideration during the staff interviews. Leading up to the interviews I had spent time working, traveling, eating, and cooking with them; I was accepted as “one of the gang.” With the exception of the Fula facilitator, I had extensive conversations with the staff about the Tostan program, our families, and everything in between during months preceding the formal interviews.

A second limitation is the use of different translators in each of the three communities, one of whom was a Tostan staff member. Before entering the community, I attempted to locate a community member who spoke English and who was not affiliated with the Tostan program. In the third community—Sare Koke—I was unable to find an unaffiliated translator. I decided to proceed with the interviews using the Tostan facilitator as a translator. Since the participants have an on-going relationship with the facilitator through the CEP sessions, her role as the translator may have inhibited the participants from fully sharing their opinions on the program. Aside from the issues of bias, having three separate translators results in three different kinds of translation. No two (or three) translators translate the same, especially since these were not professionally trained translators, just bilingual individuals. When comparing across communities, it is important to remember that translation is an art and the choice of how and what to translate affects the end result. Even with these limitations, distinct themes emerged from both sets of interviews, which I present in the following section.

RESULTS

In this section I will explore how the program has led to abandonment in the form of public declarations from three perspectives—document review, interviews, and observation. Each method provides unique insight into the Tostan program and the approach and perception of its FGC abandonment strategy. The document review and staff interviews reveal how the organization perceives and approaches the issue of FGC, classroom observations show the program in action, and participant interviews describe participants' experiences in the program. In the discussion that follows this section, I will explore the relevance and implications of the results to answer the question of *why* the Tostan program is an effective tool of FGC abandonment.

Curriculum Review

In the first module in the CEP—the Kobi—there are 98 sessions where participants meet with their facilitator to discuss a variety of topics in the areas of democracy, human rights, problem solving, hygiene, and health. I focus my curriculum review on the Kobi sessions, not on the Aawde sessions of literacy and management since they are less directly connected to FGC and its abandonment. Out of the 98 Kobi sessions, there are only two that directly address the topic of FGC (sessions 85 and 86) and one that uses FGC abandonment as an example of problem resolution (session 47). The curriculum describes the questions, activities, and teaching methods for each session. In practice, each facilitator brings their own style to the sessions, but the curriculum provides the basic information, stories, themes, and presentation suggestions.

The most striking aspect of the curriculum as a whole is its participatory and interactive approach. It is not simply a list of facts or lectures; it encourages participants to be involved in the process through skits, group activities, discussion, songs, and dance. The facilitator introduces the topic, but the session is learner-directed. Participants bring their experiences, thoughts, and ideas to the material so the same session at different centers are not identical; each center's sessions reflect the diversity of their participants' interests and experiences and the unique situation of each community.

Trust, Respect, and Dialogue in CEP Sessions

The success of the Tostan program depends on establishing a foundation of trust in the classroom. Without trust, participants will not actively engage in the activities or share the details of their personal experiences. From the very first session, participants are encouraged to share their experiences and perspectives to enrich the classroom environment. When the sessions begin, the facilitator asks participants to share their expectations of the program. Encouraging participants to share their expectations, opinions, and experiences creates an environment where their voices and opinions matter—not just the voice and opinion of the facilitator. Even the use of the word “facilitator” reveals a different attitude about his or her role in the classroom, which is explicitly stated by the facilitator in the first session: “In this program, it is important for us to exchange ideas. I am here to facilitate the discussion; this is why I am called a ‘facilitator.’”

From the very beginning, the facilitator explains that each individual brings a unique point of view, personality, and set of experiences to the session that can enrich the classroom environment. In addition to stating this point, it is shown through interactive games. One example of these participatory activities occurs in the second session. The facilitator uses a ball to represent dialogue. At first, the ball is thrown from the facilitator to a participant, back to the facilitator, back to a participant, etc. Then, participants are asked to show what dialogue would look like between class members and participants throw the ball directly to each other instead of going through the facilitator each time. This activity emphasizes the importance for discussion between participants, not just between the facilitator and participants. The value of exchanging ideas and respecting different points of view is introduced early in the CEP and it continues to be reinforced throughout the program.

FGC Specific Sessions

FGC is directly addressed in three sessions—once in the problem solving section and twice in the health section. The first mention of FGC abandonment occurs in session 47 near the end of the problem solving section. One community’s abandonment of FGC is used as an example of the problem solving process in action. In the community of Medina Cherif, the women want to find ways to improve the health of their children. As a group, they decided that even though “female circumcision had been a tradition in the community for a long time, the women decided that their daughters had a right to health, to be protected against all forms of violence, and to physical integrity.” The women set out to convince the rest of the community to abandon FGC through

meetings with political and religious leaders, educating individual families, performing plays depicting their experiences, and community-wide meetings to discuss FGC. After many months of discussion, the community collectively decided to participate in a public declaration to abandon FGC with other communities from the region. At the end of the session, there is a copy of the declaration of abandonment used at the public declaration.

Session 47 and its depiction of Medina Cherif is the first time the topic of FGC is introduced in the curriculum. FGC is not the focus of session 47 and there are other examples of the problem solving process in that session. The depiction of one community's abandonment of FGC through public declarations may "plant the seed" in participants' minds that a public declaration is a potential outcome of the program. The presentation of Medina Cherif does not explicitly state that communities should abandon, but it does show abandonment as an example of a community improving the health of its women and children.

The sessions that are entirely focused on FGC do not occur until sessions 85 and 86, which is near the end of the Kobi sequence. The discussion of FGC falls after human rights, problem solving, hygiene, and most of the health sessions. Knowledge of those topics can inform the discussion of FGC and allows participants to examine the issue from multiple perspectives. The late placement of the FGC within the module also ensures the facilitator has adequate time to create the foundation of trust and respect discussed earlier.

The sessions on FGC address two topics: health consequences and the law. A detailed overview of the first session on FGC gives insight into Tostan's approach to the topic. The session does not begin with a litany of health consequences, but with the facilitator telling the following story:

Póolel était une fillette de huit ans. Un jour, sa tante vint la chercher, accompagnée d'une exciseuse. Póolel, ainsi que ses camarades du même âge, pensa qu'elle allait enfin devenir une « vraie » femme en passant par l'accomplissement de cette pratique ancestrale. Malheureusement, après la cérémonie de l'excision, Póolel commença à saigner abondamment. Sa mère et sa tante, très inquiètes, l'amenèrent au centre de santé le plus proche. Lorsqu'elles arrivèrent, le docteur essaya de sauver Póolel mais il était trop tard. Elle avait perdu trop de sang. Ils l'évacuèrent en ambulance vers l'hôpital mais à l'arrivée, elle était morte. De retour au village, sa mère et sa tante durent annoncer à tous la terrible nouvelle.

Poollel was an eight-year-old girl. One day her aunt came to get her, accompanied by a traditional cutter. Poollel, just like her peers, thought that she was finally going to become a "true" woman by going through this traditional practice. Unfortunately, after the cutting

ceremony Poolel started to lose blood. Her mom and her aunt were worried and brought her to the closest health clinic. When they arrived, the doctor tried to save Poolel, but it was too late. She had lost too much blood. An ambulance took her to the hospital, but she had died by the time it arrived. Upon their return to the village, her mother and aunt had to tell to everyone the terrible news.

After hearing the story, participants retell it through a skit of their own creation, in which participants can bring their own interpretation to the story. Two notable elements of this tale are the portrayal of extreme health consequences and the presentation of FGC as a practice that makes girls into “true” women. Depending on the location of the center and the type of FGC practiced, this portrayal may or may not accurately reflect the experience of participants. Since this curriculum is used in Tostan centers across eight countries, the discussion that follows the story is essential so participants can evaluate the implications relevant to their specific context. This discussion is guided by the following questions, with my English translation in bold:

- Que pensez-vous de cette histoire? **What do you think of this story?**
- Connaissez-vous des femmes qui ont été excisées? Que pensent-elles de cette pratique? **Do you know women who have been cut? What do they think of this practice?**
- Pourquoi les petites filles sont-elles excisées? **Why are young girls cut?**
- D’après vous, est-ce une pratique nécessaire? **In your opinion, is this a necessary practice?**
- Quels sont les droits de la personne qui sont violés lorsque l’on recourt à cette « tradition »? **What human rights are violated when you participate in this “tradition”?**
- Feriez-vous exciser vos propres filles? Pourquoi? **Are you going to cut your daughters? Why?**
- Tous les Musulmans pratiquent-ils l’excision? Est-ce une obligation religieuse? **Do all Muslims practice FGC? Is it a religious obligation?**
- Comment les femmes de Médina Chérif ont-elles mis fin à cette « tradition » au sein de leur communauté? **How did the women of Medina Cherif end this “tradition” in their community?**

With the exception of one question, all of the above discussion questions take an open-ended approach that does not lead the participants toward a particular answer. The only exception is the

question: “Which human rights are violated when you participate in this ‘tradition’?” which assumes a violation of rights instead of asking participants a more neutral, “Does the practice of FGC violate human rights, and if so, which ones?” It is essential to allow participants to discuss their experiences because the reasons for the practice of FGC and the frequency of consequences vary greatly across the eight countries where Tostan operates. In the Gambian context, FGC as an entry into womanhood is not widely expressed as a reason for the practice, as seen both in previous studies and in the participant interviews. Even though the skit does not directly match the local experience of FGC in Gambian communities, it opens the door for participants to discuss FGC as it exists in their lives.

It is only after the story, participant-created skits, and open-ended discussion that the facilitator describes the details of the practice and their health consequences. The program does not focus on the most extreme form of FGC, but discusses the female anatomy and three types of FGC as classified by the WHO. The health consequences are divided into long and short-term effects. Notably, the long-term effects are also divided into two groups: the long-term effects of Type I and II and the long-term effects of Type III. This strategy avoids exaggerating the health consequences of the less severe forms, which could reduce the credibility of the program if the consequences do not correspond to the experience of participants. One criticism of the right-to-health approach to FGC abandonment is the potential for exaggeration and the loss of trust in the community. By carefully separating the health consequences into different categories, Tostan presents the health risks without misleading the communities by placing all of the risks into one category.

The first FGC session concludes by asking women to share their own stories or the stories of people they know. Since the topic of FGC is considered taboo in The Gambia, it may be the first time participants have openly discussed their experiences. To elicit genuine responses, facilitators must have successfully created an atmosphere of trust and respect among all participants.

Session 86 discusses the health consequences and human rights violations of FGC, not its abandonment. The topic of FGC abandonment is addressed in session 87, which explores the connection between the law, human rights, and FGC. Participants discuss the role of the government and its responsibility to protect the rights of its citizens. As an example of a

government taking action to protect those rights, the session describes Senegal's 1999 law that made FGC illegal in the country. Currently, there is no such law in The Gambia.

One section of the material for session 87 highlights a respectful approach to the topic of FGC, first French, then in my English translation:

Si les mères demandent que leurs filles soient excisées, c'est pour que celles-ci deviennent des membres respectées de la société et trouvent un époux...Elles n'ont pas conscience qu'elles mutilent leurs filles à vie.

If mothers insist that their girls get cut, it's so the girls become respected members of society and find a husband...They are not aware that they are hurting their daughters for the rest of their lives.

At no point in the curriculum are women who have cut their daughters criticized or blamed. Instead, the facilitator neutrally presents information on the risks of FGC and its violation of human rights. Both sessions are guided by open discussion so participants can bring their experiences to engage with the material and make it relevant to their situation.

At the conclusion of session 87, participants are asked to discuss how they can take the information they have learned about the practice and share it with people outside of the Tostan sessions. Participants brainstorm how to best explain the dangers and violations of FGC to various audiences—children, family members, community leaders, and community members. Participants are not told that they should abandon the practice, only that the discussion of FGC's health risks and human rights violations should not end at the conclusion of the session, but should continue in their families, communities, and region so communities can make an informed decision about the practice's role in the future.

Overall, the curriculum has a participatory approach that seeks to include all participants and their varying perspectives. Even though the sessions devoted to FGC are based on participant contributions and discussion, they present it as a tradition that is a violation of human rights and causes health consequences and therefore, should be abandoned. The curriculum review shows how Tostan intends for the program to be implemented; the following classroom observation shows how the written version translates in practice.

Classroom Observation

In February 2010, I visited a class in a Tostan session in the Fula community of Mansajang. At the time of my observation, the Mandinka program had finished the CEP and the Fula communities had completed the Kobi, so I attended an Aawde session on literacy and management. The Aawde sessions follow a more traditional method to teach literacy and do not utilize the skits, songs, and poems of the Kobi curriculum. Since the class I attended taught literacy, not FGC, I chose to focus my observations on the interaction between participants, interactions between the facilitator and participants, and the engagement of participants—not on the actual content of the class.

The session I attended had between 30 and 40 adult participants, all of whom were women. Tostan sessions are open to both men and women, but there is an overrepresentation of women in all of the Gambian centers. The facilitator said that there was normally one older male who attended the classes, but he was ill on the day I attended. The facilitator also shared that most men are not interested in the sessions because they see it as a “women’s” program that focuses on the specific needs of women in the community. Even though men are not participating in the same rates as women, their support is necessary for their wives and daughters to participate. In the patriarchal society of The Gambia, if the men in the community did not support the program, they would not allow their daughters or wives to attend the sessions. Men may not be physically present in the CEP sessions but their opinion about the program is essential for its success in any community.

During the session I observed the classroom atmosphere, the relationship between the facilitator and participants, the relationship between participants, and the general level of engagement. From my observations, I noticed (1) an informal atmosphere that allowed participants to bring the daily elements of their lives and culture into the classroom and (2) a familiarity and trust in the participant-facilitator and participant-participant relationship.

Accommodating Classroom Atmosphere

As a Westerner, a striking aspect of the class was the informal atmosphere that accommodated the needs and realities of participants’ lives. My experience in the session reminded me more of large family gathering than a traditional classroom. Participants incorporated their culture, parenting, and religion into the learning experience. The session began with an expression of the

traditional culture—an impromptu song and dance where the class called individuals into the circle to dance in the center of the group. The demands of everyday life were not left at the door, but welcomed into the session. Mothers attended the class with young children who they breastfed and cared for without leaving the discussion. If one woman went to the front of the class to answer a question or participate in an activity, another woman or the facilitator would hold her child. In addition to parenting, the class also accommodated the religious needs of participants. I attended a class on Friday, which is the Islamic holy day. Families eat lunch later on Fridays to accommodate the men who go to the mosque in the afternoon. Since the women are responsible for preparing lunch every day, the session started almost an hour late. An hour or two into the session, several participants took turns using a prayer mat in the corner of the room to perform the third of Islam's five daily prayers. The session did not stop for prayers, but no one appeared distracted by the women who chose to pray. The class size continually fluctuated throughout the session as people came late and left early, depending on their circumstances. As an observer from the United States, I found the atmosphere distracting, but neither the facilitator nor the participants appeared to be fazed by the interruptions. In spite of, or perhaps because of the informal atmosphere, the level of classroom engagement was high—participants volunteering answers, participating in group activities, asking questions, and helping other participants who were struggling.

Familiarity and Trust with Facilitator and Between Participants

Participants appeared to have a great deal of respect for the facilitator, but the relationship still maintained an air of friendship. It was clear that the participants listened when the facilitator spoke, but there was frequent joking and teasing from both parties. Throughout the session the facilitator encouraged participation from all members of the session. When participants seemed reluctant to volunteer answers or opinions, she directly called on them to encourage and engage them in the material. The facilitator appeared to be more than an authority figure and often responded to participants' concerns as a friend would—with humor and understanding—instead of exerting her power. I was not able to see the development of the facilitator's relationship with the participants over the previous two years; I only saw a snapshot of their relationship during a single session. From what I saw, she appeared to strike a balance between authority and friendship that allowed her to relate to participants without losing control of the classroom.

In many ways the participants' interactions with each other mirrored their interactions with the facilitator. Participants used friendly banter and joking to encourage each other throughout the session. If someone did not know an answer, participants would all laugh together, but it was not mean-spirited and students were quick to help one another as the laughter subsided. I saw this use of laughter and jokes throughout my stay in West Africa, not just in the CEP session. If one student finished her work before others, she would help others until the entire class was ready to move onto the next topic. Once again, I only saw a small portion of participants' experiences in the CEP, but to my eyes their level of comfort with each other appeared high.

From my observation, I saw that the informal and participatory nature of the curriculum was replicated in the classroom. The informal atmosphere in the session allowed participants to bring their lives, values, and beliefs into the session so they could fully engage with the material. The facilitator involved all members of the class and participants encouraged one another. Both the curriculum review and the classroom observation show the informal and participatory nature of the Tostan program and highlight the importance of a respect for the culture and the development of trust over time.

Staff Interviews

The curriculum review showed both the intentions of the program and how it incorporates an understanding of culture in the material; the classroom observation showed the curriculum in application. The staff interviews will add the perspective of the people who implement, monitor, and evaluate the program. Four themes emerged from my analysis of the six employee interviews: the importance of a holistic educational program, the respectful approach toward FGC, the need for public declarations, and the role of the national government in FGC abandonment.

Holistic Approach Based in Human Rights

Tostan's educational program is not focused only on FGC abandonment; it is a holistic program that includes information on many topics, including human rights, democracy, problem solving, hygiene, health, literacy, and management. The curriculum review showed that FGC is only discussed in 3 of the 98 Kobi sessions. During my interviews with employees, I was frequently reminded of the small number of sessions devoted directly to FGC. No one denied the

importance of FGC abandonment, but employees made it clear that the purpose of Tostan is to empower communities to solve problems and take control of their development.

While FGC is only explicitly discussed in three sessions, the entire CEP is essential for communities to abandon FGC. The National Coordinator of Tostan Gambia explains his perspective on Tostan's holistic program as it relates to FGC abandonment:

Tostan est une organisation holistique, qui a un programme spécifique une méthode d'approche particulière. Tostan quand on vient s'installer dans un village, d'abord nous ne parlons pas d'excision ; nous parlons de droits humains. Nous pensons quand tu viens pour dire à quelqu'un, « On a violé les droits il faut laisser ce n'est pas bon ! » Mais cette personne pour laquelle tu dis et qu'il ne comprends pas le pourquoi la lutte... Voilà pourquoi quand Tostan vient on commence ce qu'on fait c'est l'apprentissage de droits humains... Parce que nous voyons que toutes les souffrances qui traversent le monde aujourd'hui c'est la méconnaissance des droits humains.

Tostan is a holistic organization that has a specific program and a particular methodological approach. When Tostan enters a village, we don't talk about FGC right away. We talk about human rights. We think that when you go in and say to someone, "You are violating human rights and you have to stop [FGC]!", it's not good. The person you're talking to does not understand the reason behind the fight [to abandon FGC]... So that's why Tostan starts by teaching human rights, because we know that all of the suffering in the world today comes from a poor understanding of human rights.

The National Coordinator's comments emphasize that participants need to understand human rights before Tostan broaches the topic of FGC. The Director of Monitoring, Evaluation, Research, and Learning (MERL) at the international office adds to the Coordinator's comments in his explanation of a holistic approach:

There's a lot to be said for a holistic approach. Because it's not simply... that it's laudable that you are working on so many different things and trying to address every part of the community. I get the sense sometimes from people when I meet them that they're like, "you're holistic, that's wonderful, that's so great that you are touching on all these subjects." ... Yes, it's true that we touch on this and all that, but there's something even more significant about it... I don't believe you can target one thing in a behavior change program, and target one behavior and say, "we're going to end this, or we're going to change this" and get any traction at the community level if that, or even some proximate things—health—is the only thing you're talking about. Because you need to have some of those mundane things that people find engaging and interesting and important to keep them there. So yes, maybe a lot of times we want to end FGC, but more often than not they're not coming for the FGC class, they're coming for the literacy class and they're coming to learn about how to make oral rehydration solution and they're coming to know that they have the right to education... [H]olistic is more than just, "Hey great, you've got everything, the whole kitchen sink in this soup, and it's probably going to taste really great!"

The holistic nature of the program is key to the CEP's successful approach to FGC abandonment. FGC abandonment begins from the first session when participants learn about human rights because each session equips participants to make informed decisions. The CEP provides a framework for participants to understand the practice in the human rights sessions, a process to understand and evaluate the issue in the democracy and problem solving sessions, and a basic knowledge of the health of the human body in the hygiene and health sessions. The CEP would not be a successful tool of abandonment if the FGC sessions were presented in isolation from the rest of the program; each component of the curriculum is essential. Each session builds upon previous sessions to give participants the knowledge and tools to abandon FGC, but each session also has value in and of itself.

Respectful Approach to FGC Abandonment

Another theme that emerged from the employee interviews is the importance of a respectful approach to FGC discussion and abandonment. Tostan shows this respect in two ways: (1) through a culturally sensitive use of language and presentation of FGC and (2) the absence of pressure on communities to abandon FGC.

Language Choice and Presentation

In a culture where even the closest of confidants do not openly discuss FGC, the use of culturally sensitive language is essential to facilitate open discussion in both CEP sessions and the community. Without appropriate language and terms, Tostan risks alienating communities before they hear the content of the message. A Mandinka facilitator explains the importance of language when he discusses FGC in CEP sessions:

The language is one of the most sensitive issues... You could speak you don't think you are offending, but the people listening to them will feel very offended... Tostan has a way, a very polite way of speaking. We can speak on FGC from now, up to six o'clock... You the listener will know from the sense that I am talking about FGC, but I will not mention FGC.

As the facilitator stated, as an outsider in language and culture I would be unable to skillfully negotiate the language of FGC. Since Tostan recruits facilitators from the regions where it works, facilitators understand the nuances of the language and how to discuss FGC without offending participants.

In addition to the use of culturally sensitive and appropriate language, the Tostan program shows respect through its understanding of FGC as a social convention. Tostan employees at all levels

recognize that FGC is a social convention and that the communities who practice FGC should not be demonized or blamed. The Director of MERL describes this respectful understanding of FGC and its role in facilitating abandonment:

I think there's, there are a lot of things that come together to make [abandonment] successful, but the first one is that is again the respectful approach, never talking about it in a shocking or harmful way. Approaching it, field staff approaching it with the understanding that it's a social convention and it's often not the, not something they should blame on the cutter or blame on the mother or blame on whoever it is that took the girl to be cut, but that they understand...it's a custom and it's something you just didn't question.

The National Coordinator in The Gambia echoed the MERL Director's statement and emphasized that Tostan does not impose ideas on communities, but works within the culture to promote an open and inclusive discussion:

Il faut venir dans le cadre d'une discussion saine, dans le respect de tradition, dans la respect de les personnes, le respect de leur culture, discutez avec lui.

You have to approach it as a healthy discussion, with a respect for tradition, with a respect for people, with the respect of their culture, you discuss with them.

Employees understand the need for respect when discussing FGC in communities. Culturally appropriate and sensitive language allows for an open discussion of the practice. Once facilitators successfully broach the topic of FGC, they continue to show respect by not condemning the people or communities who practice FGC, but by presenting it as a social convention where no one is blamed.

Patience with the FGC Abandonment Process

A second element of Tostan's respectful approach is the lack of pressure on communities to abandon FGC. While many communities participate in public declarations of abandonment after they complete the CEP, it is neither a requirement nor an expectation to participate in the Tostan program. The program does not criticize communities' choices or demand that people abandon FGC. Instead of pressuring communities, Tostan provides information on FGC and creates a forum for participants to discuss the practice and make decisions about the practice at their own pace.

The employees' descriptions of Tostan's respectful approach reminded me of a frequently used Wolof proverb: "Slowly, slowly you catch the monkey in the bush." Rushing or forcing decisions is not an effective way to solve problems in the West African context. A Fula

facilitator describes her experience of going “slowly, slowly” when discussing FGC abandonment:

Tostan, since we started it we do it lesson by lesson. One day we do this lesson, after, the following day we do another one. So we were able to, taught them what is the bad effects of it [sic]. So we say that we cannot force you to leave it, but you know what is good for you, what is good for your health.

The Assistant Coordinator in The Gambia and former facilitator echoed the concept that FGC requires patience, not force. The Tostan program allows participants to make decisions about FGC on their own terms and timeline using information gained from all CEP sessions:

Tostan ne vienne pas dire a quelqu'un abandon l'excision...Mais, on apprend, petit a petit, il y a un processus qui est possible, dans ce processus la, c'est les participants, qui est dans la classe de Tostan qui commencent a se poser des questions. Mais, Tostan ne vienne pas pour dire, « Abandon ca !» Ce n'est pas bon. Donc, au moment, des moment que les gens commencent a se poser des questions, c'est a ce moment ou il y a la prise de conscience, pas, ce n'est pas Tostan qui leur dit prendre la décision, mais il y a une prise de conscience collective.

Tostan doesn't come in and tell people to abandon FGC...But, they learn, little-by-little. There is a process that is possible. Through this process, the participants in the Tostan classes start questioning it. But Tostan doesn't come and tell them, “Abandon it!” That's not good. The moment that they start questioning, that's the moment when they become aware. Not, it's not Tostan that tells them to make the decision, but it's a collective awareness.

The Assistant Coordinator's comment is particularly revealing because it shows Tostan's belief that abandonment results from a participant-driven process, not a lecture or demand from Tostan. The MERL Director elaborates on Tostan's respectful approach to FGC:

It's my belief that people change behaviors when they are presented with credible information about a certain practice or healthy behavior or practice and are shown respect in the process and are given the option in a non-direct way to discuss it and work through it if they are ready, and that would lead to behavioral change.

Before public declarations in The Gambia, Tostan meets with the participating communities. A Fula supervisor describes his impression of the communities during the preparations for the declaration:

For those villages we had a social mobilization team which went and assessed them before they come finally to the public. We told them it is a voluntary thing; it is not a force. So if you feel that you are not ready, we can still give you time. We can allow those that are ready to go and declare, it is not a force. So they say that definitely they have learned from their

sessions and they feel it is not a force. They volunteered and they want to declare. So we believe them that, it is difficult to know, but we believe that what they say is from the...bottom of their hearts.

Tostan employees understand that authentic abandonment cannot be forced. Rather than pressure communities to abandon, Tostan's respectful approach creates an environment that gives communities the tools and opportunity to make the decision themselves. A Mandinka facilitator summarizes the program's approach when he stated that "Tostan wants to go according to the principles and the traditions and the values of our society." Those values include the need to make decisions as a community, respect for the roles of men and women in their society, and an involvement of the political and religious leadership.

Role of Public Declarations

In the eyes of Tostan employees, the public declaration is an integral step to widespread abandonment in the West African context. It is not enough for individuals or communities to abandon FGC privately; lasting results require communities to collectively announce their abandonment in a public forum. According to employees, public declarations serve two purposes: bringing the community together behind the decision and sharing that decision with local leaders and other communities who have not decided whether or not to abandon FGC.

Because women outnumber men in Tostan's CEP sessions, they are often the first group in the community to decide to abandon FGC. Those women have to involve all members of their community in the decision-making process before they participate in a public declaration, which takes the issue of FGC outside of the CEP sessions and into the wider forum of the community. A Fula supervisor describes the need for the agreement on FGC across the community before a declaration can occur:

[T]o be frank with you, if this thing is to be abandoned, though it is performed by the women, they also seek approval from the men at times. So they have to involve their husbands and make sure that their husbands also take interest in this...There are some others—authorities in the village and some other cultural leaders, who they need their support to make sure that everything can be uniform.

After the entire community agrees to abandon FGC, the public declaration provides an opportunity to share that decision with the wider region. The public declaration is also a way to bring the discussion of FGC abandonment to communities and groups who are unsure of their

position. The Director of MERL at the international office explains his perception of the chain reactions that can come from public declarations:

So you can have people that have come to believe through the Tostan program that FGC is a practice that should be abandoned, so they are a group or core, a core group of convinced people that you know, like many people we know are very convinced of something and they're going to see it through and they're going to try and actively convince other people to follow them. But you also have a group of people who come to the declaration not fully convinced, but at the declaration, seeing their peer groups participating in this event are reinforced in their belief that it should be ended. So then they really, really engage at that time. And then there are I think people who hear about it later that were unaware kind of that it was an option to abandon and because they hear about it, this thing happening, they are then [aware that it is an option]. Basically it is an ongoing chain from early adopters if you will, to the main group of people that are at the declaration they hear about it, know it's okay now, and feel that they can abandon.

Employees see value in declarations not only for their role in bringing sectors of the community together in their decision to abandon FGC, but also for their ability to influence and encourage people outside of the Tostan program through a public event. The ability of declarations to reach communities outside of Tostan's centers works toward reaching the "tipping point" described in the convention theory.

Role of the National Government in FGC Abandonment

The final point of interest the staff interviews is their perspective on the role of the national government in the FGC abandonment process. The laws and decisions national governments make about FGC affect NGOs like Tostan who work on the ground. It is logical to expect that a national law banning FGC would complement and support the work of organizations in the field, but Tostan employees did not support this logic in their interviews. In fact, when asked the appropriate role of the national government, no employee thought a law would be a desirable step for the Gambian government to take at this point in the abandonment process. According to the staff, abandonment has to come from the communities themselves; it cannot be imposed from above.

A Fula facilitator described her view of why a law in The Gambia would not be an effective tool to promote abandonment:

Most [Gambians] are not aware about [FGC]. So the government themselves says they cannot impose [a law] right now unless we tell them what does it bring to our communities or to the country.

This facilitator recognizes that most Gambians have not had the opportunity to openly discuss FGC in their communities in a non-judgmental environment with information on both the health consequences and human rights violations of the practice. Being “aware” in this context does not mean that Gambians do not know the practice exists, but that they do not know all of its consequences. Communities have to personally understand and embrace reasons to leave FGC—a law alone will not convince people to abandon the social convention. If a law were to be imposed, the people would not understand why the government was interfering in one of their traditions.

When dealing with a culturally embedded tradition, a law is not an effective tool of behavior change. In fact, it could have the opposite effect. The MERL Director explains why Tostan is hesitant to support national laws abandoning the practice:

[The law is] intended to protect girls from being cut. But in practice, a law, a criminal law, is there to say somebody is bad for having committed some act. So they have to arrest somebody and they have to put this poor woman in prison and they have to call her a criminal. And in the end, they are stigmatizing that person by calling them out in the community. And in the cases I’ve heard where a law was applied...as far as I know the only thing that really did was make people upset in the community.

Instead of passing a law, employees suggest the government continue to work with NGOs like Tostan to raise awareness at the grassroots level. A Mandinka facilitator explains an appropriate role of the national government in FGC abandonment:

Main role of the national government is...to make sure that the ground is level for the development workers in the fight against FGC...That is, they should allow us to do this work and allow us to use the medias and allow us to get access to medias. If they do that, then there should not be like the government to impose a law on the people. That should not come. Because even if the government does that, people will do [FGC] without the consent of the authorities.

The National Coordinator in The Gambia offers a final voice to the discussion of why a law is not the best tool for abandonment in The Gambia:

Donc le gouvernement ne veut pas mettre au devant une loi pour que les gens abandonnent par la loi. Non, on préfère que les gens abandonner par conviction, par connaissance.

The government does not want to put forth a law so people abandon because of the law. No, it’s better if people abandon because of their convictions and their knowledge.

In their interviews, each employee expressed wariness and doubt about the efficacy of a national law to abandon FGC. In addition to their perspective on the role of the national government, the employee interviews provide further insight into Tostan's abandonment program. Employees emphasized the holistic, respectful approach to abandonment that culminates in public declarations.

Participant Interviews

So far, I have examined Tostan's program from multiple perspectives, but these perspectives have not included the voices of the participants themselves. Participant interviews give voice to their experiences with the Tostan CEP, FGC abandonment, and life in the URR. At the time of the interviews, the Mandinka community of Kundam had completed the CEP and participated in a public declaration of FGC abandonment in December 2009. The Fula communities of Sare Koke and Mansajang had just begun the third and final year of the CEP a few weeks prior to my interviews and neither had participated in a public declaration.

I faced two major challenges when interviewing the participants that may have affected the information I collected. First, I was unable to spend time with the participants prior to the interviews. I was only in each community for one day, which did not allow me to develop trust and form a relationship with participants. A second challenge with the participant interviews was the language barrier. As I described in the methods, I used a translator during the interviews. This use of a translator made it difficult to analyze the nuances of the language use and word choice since all responses were filtered through a third party.

The above challenges made it difficult to discover substantive themes from the interviews, but I was able to make several observations. After multiple readings of the transcripts, I made the following observations: the holistic nature of the Tostan program, the community value of unity and group decision-making both in general and in the FGC abandonment process, an emphasis on the health consequences of FGC over human rights violations, and a desire for national government involvement through law to prohibit FGC, but only after widespread agreement in the country.

Holistic Nature of the Tostan Program

The first observation from the participant interviews is the CEP as a holistic program. I first noted this characteristic of the program during the curriculum review, which revealed the variety

of topics covered by the CEP and how it did not only focus on one issue. The holistic nature of the program was then reinforced by the staff interviews where the employees continually emphasized that the CEP is not an FGC abandonment program but a holistic program that equips participants with the tools they need to develop their communities. The holistic nature of the CEP reappeared during the participant interviews, but it was not as overt as it was in the staff interviews. Participants did not directly say, “the CEP is a holistic program,” but the holistic nature of the program came through their many descriptions of what they were taking away from the Tostan program.

Over the course of the interviews the question that consistently received the longest and most animated responses was, “How has the community/your family changed since Tostan’s arrival?” Despite the interest in FGC from foreign donors, participants rarely mentioned FGC unless they were directly asked. The changes participants cited included elements from a variety of topics covered in the CEP. Below are some examples of changes that participants attribute to the CEP:

Before, if I was depressed or offended I didn’t know my rights to fight back. I would just stay in my room and cry. But now I know what to do to solve my own problems whenever I have them. (35-year-old Fula woman)

We generate fundraising, so as to, making sure that we can sell it and put the money together [so we can sponsor] our children who are going to school. (50-year-old Mandinka woman)

Since Tostan came...If it is time for eating we don’t share the same bowl to wash our hands. We use a kettle with water and soap and give it to our children to wash their hands with soap and water before eating. (40-year-old Fula woman)

Since I’ve come to Tostan, I’ve gained understanding. I know how to cope with people. (30-year-old Mandinka woman)

I learned about how to earn my own living. (40-year-old Mandinka woman)

During the rainy season we try to clean...so we will be free from mosquitoes and be free from malaria...Tostan taught us that being in the rainy season, going to places where dirty water is not good. Since we stopped, we see health in us. (45-year old Mandinka woman)

It is through Tostan I know how to stop like having children, not to stop, but to reduce. Before, one year I have one, second year I had another one. But now, I used to go and make family planning so my children will be far away from one another. (45-year-old Fula woman)

The above statements show the diversity of how participants’ lives are affected by the CEP.

These quotations cover the topics of rights, health, cleanliness, and business savvy and are only a

sampling of the many responses given by participants. A few participants mentioned FGC, but the majority listed changes that impact the way they live their everyday lives—cooking, cleaning, visiting the health center, prenatal care, etc. The variety and diversity of responses show that participants are benefiting from the holistic CEP curriculum—not just one session or topic. Participants do not all mention the same changes because they each take something different from the CEP sessions. Even though participants do not directly say, “the Tostan program is holistic,” their varied responses show that the participants are absorbing information from all aspects of the CEP. The participant interviews reinforce what I found in the curriculum review and the staff interviews—that the Tostan program is holistic and is not focused only on FGC in its design or application.

Value of Unity in Communities

Unity in the Community

The importance of a respectful approach was recognized in the curriculum review, observation, and staff interviews. In order to know if Tostan incorporates elements of the culture in a respectful way, it is necessary to know which values are important to participants. During the interviews, participants most frequently referenced the value of unity in the community. Every participant either directly referenced unity or evoked the concept through descriptions of completing tasks together, making decisions in a group, sharing information in an inclusive setting, etc.

The importance of unity was mentioned by each of the participants, but it came as a response to a variety of questions. When I asked: “What are the best aspects of life in your community?” the most frequent response was a description of the unity in communities. For example, a 35-year-old Fula woman said: “It’s the unity and democracy. If anything happens, there are always the elders to take positive action.” A 39-year-old Fula woman also emphasized the value of unity when she responded that the best aspect of life in her community is that “[t]here is unity...your neighbors are always willing to go and help you.”

When I asked participants: “What are the biggest challenges in your community?” some participants answered that there was a lack of unity or deflected the question by stating that there were no challenges. An example of this deflection occurred when a 35-year-old Fula woman said: “There are no challenges because people are very much united.” Her answer recognizes the

importance of unity since according to her, the reason the community has no challenges is because of its unity. While hers was not the only response that declared a community to be problem free, the most frequent responses to this question included poor access to potable water, difficulty acquiring sufficient food, and other health issues. The fact that some participants were unwilling to share the challenges in their community may be evidence of the insufficient trust between participants and myself that I discussed earlier. The participants may have wanted to present only the positive side of their community to me since I was an outsider.

Two other questions that revealed participants' value of unity and group decision-making were the questions: "What is the most important thing you have learned from the Tostan program?" and "How has your community changed since the arrival of Tostan?" A 37-year-old Fula woman responded:

Before, there was little unity, but now everyone is united, regardless of what tribe you belong to. So if there is anything, like you are having a wedding ceremony, everybody can contribute to help you with your proceedings.

This concept of solidarity and unity resurfaced throughout the interviews when participants expressed the need to complete tasks together and make decisions as a group. Participants consistently referenced the importance of group decision-making over self-interest. An example of this community-focused concept comes from a middle aged Fula participant describing how her community makes decisions:

If [people in the village] should do something... whatever they should do, they make decisions together. All of them come together, they make decisions together and do that thing together.

Another example comes from a 43-year-old Fula woman describing how to best make changes in the community: "It is important to come and listen to what is happening and to encourage others so that we will all come in and do it together." A final example comes from a 38-year-old Fula woman. This participant comes from a neighboring community to attend the CEP sessions and she laments the fact that it is difficult to make any changes without the support of the community. She comes to the Tostan center with two other people from her village, but she says that, "for us, three alone cannot change our village." These comments show that participants value unity in the community and that it is difficult to make progress without making decisions as a community.

Participants also recognized religion as another unifying force in the community. When asked the role of religion in the community, participants consistently responded that it was important because it unified the community. There are Christians and practitioners of indigenous religions in The Gambia, but the overwhelming majority of people are Muslim. Participants emphasized that it is the act of belonging to a religion—regardless of whether it was Christianity, Islam, or an indigenous tradition—that creates a sense of unity in the communities. A 43-year-old Fula woman expressed her view of religion as a requirement for acceptance in the community: “[Religion is] very, very important. Because when you are part of the community, you have to be part of a religion.” When another participant was asked what it was like for someone who is not religious, she responded that, “Everybody has religion. Some are Muslims and some are Christian also.” It did not seem to matter what religion a family followed as long as they were religious. A 20-year-old Mandinka woman stated that “religion makes the whole community, it makes us one family.” All participants recognized the important role of religion in their communities and many identified its central role as unifying the community.

The values of unity and accomplishing tasks together are supported in the CEP through Tostan’s use of participatory, discussion-based curriculum. These values are particularly relevant to participants’ perceptions of FGC abandonment in their communities.

Unity in the Decision to Abandon FGC

The above analysis revealed the value of community unity and group decision-making. These values were also evident in participants’ descriptions of their road to FGC abandonment. After discussing FGC in the Tostan CEP sessions, participants then shared that information with community members who do not attend the CEP sessions. A 28-year-old Fula woman describes this inclusive process:

We are telling our neighbors of the dangers. You know some of us are not in the sessions here, so they don’t know. But for the few of us coming, we already know the dangers and we share that with other people.

This desire to share and discuss information from the CEP sessions with other community members serves as another example of the importance of making decisions as a group and including the entire community in the process. A 40-year old woman from a different Fula community describes a similar process to rally the support of the women in her community to abandon FGC:

Since we learned that it is not good for the children—circumcision is not good for a girl child—we called on all women...So we sat down and chatted and talked about this FGM. And we know that it is true that it is not good for the children. We stopped it. We chatted, and stopped.

The use of the term “FGM” in the previous quote highlights one of the challenges of conducting interviews in a language I do not speak—the accuracy of translations. I sincerely doubt that the participant used the equivalent of the term FGM in Fula; I would guess she used a more neutral term for the practice of FGC closer to the word “circumcision.” Since I do not speak Fula, I have to rely on the translations of my translator, which may or may not reflect all the nuances of the language.

There was a general agreement that FGC is not a good practice, but that its role as a cultural tradition makes it difficult to abandon. Participants agreed that the best way to abandon the practice is through community consensus. A 43-year-old Fula participant stated that FGC abandonment “will not be easy...tradition, to kill it is not easy” and that her community was still “absorbing information” and discussing the practice. She continued to say that:

Everyone knows the aspects of it, the good and the bad...I cannot force, you cannot force, no one else can force. It's only when you think about it and we come together to make our decisions.

When I first read through the participant interviews, I was struck by how frequently participants referred to unity and group decision-making. The importance of these values came through in a variety of questions, not only in questions that related to FGC abandonment. The participants' responses revealed how important unity and group decision-making are to all aspects of community life, including the decision to abandon FGC. Once participants have the information, they need to share it with people outside of the CEP sessions to bring the discussion into the wider community. Without this involvement from the wider community, there cannot be a decision to abandon FGC or to participate in a public declaration.

Focus on the Health Consequences

When the employees discussed the topic of FGC, they generally talked about it in the context of human rights. In contrast, when participants discussed FGC, they referred more frequently to the practice's health consequences than its role in human rights violations. When I directly asked participants about FGC, participants cited the transmission of diseases, bleeding, and difficulty in

childbirth, but only one participant discussed FGC as a human rights violation. Below are excerpts from participant interviews about the topic of FGC:

We came to realize that before, if someone in labor who went through the practice she always finds it much more difficult than the one who doesn't [go through the practice]. (47-year-old Fula participant)

Because sometimes, the girl child bleeds and then some of them get diseases. (40-year old Fula participant)

Circumcision leads to death and leads to unhealth. It gives them diseases and sometimes it kills some of the girls because they will be bleeding, bleeding, until they die. (38-year old Fula woman)

It damages human health, which is why we have stopped it. (20-year old Mandinka woman)

These comments are examples that show the general language and terms used by participants to describe FGC. Unlike in the employee interviews where staff emphasized the holistic and human rights based approach to FGC, participants focused on the health risks and consequences. This discrepancy may be because participants are concerned with the more tangible health consequences than a theoretical violation of rights, but it could also be that they were better able to describe health consequences than the more abstract ideas of human rights.

National Law to Abandon FGC

I asked both participants and staff what they thought the role of the national government should be in the abandonment process. The employees showed a preference for the government to *not* be involved in abandonment through legislation. On the other hand, participants were not opposed to a law that prohibits FGC, but they said it should not be implemented until the entire country learns about the consequences of the practice. When I first asked what participants thought the role of the national government should be, participants responded with the following:

Government should be involved because if anybody falls victim, they will be taken to the hospital and the hospitals belong to the government, so government should lend a helping hand in persuading the people. (39-year-old Fula woman)

Yes, the government should come and tell them to abandon circumcision because it is not good. It is good for the government to be involved and tell the people to stop it. (40-year-old Fula woman)

What the government should do, is to, how to call it, make law, and then call all the alkalos [chiefs] of the villages, all the people, the head people in The Gambia, and let them talk about it. For them to stop it, and then make law. (38-year-old Fula woman)

The government should call the leaders in the government. People like police, armies, and like the commissioners, the deputies, the chairmans, the alkalís—all, for them to chat and make a, make a law about this when they make a decision. (45-year-old Fula woman)

They should all sit together and come to one agreement and then put it as a rule. Where by the villages who did not get Tostan, go to that place, sensitize the whole country. When they have sensitized the whole country, then put it as a rule, a law. (40-year-old Mandinka woman)

The national government should take steps, so as to include everybody not to do it by sensitizing villages whereby there was no Tostan. (50-year-old Mandinka woman)

Participants did not want a law that punishes people who do not understand the health consequences and human rights violations of the practice. The majority of participants expressed the view that communities need to learn about the health consequences and human rights violations before a law goes into effect. The following three examples express this idea in their own words:

Government should...go to the next villages where there was no Tostan before setting up their rule. (A 20-year old Mandinka woman)

Every village in The Gambia should be sensitized about FGC. If that is done, then they can make it a law. (Another 20-year old Mandinka woman)

The government should provide youth groups who make drama that has to do with abolition of [FGC] to sensitize people in the communities. (A 28-year old Fula woman)

These statements show that participants were not opposed to government involvement of FGC, but they do not support passing a law before all citizens have the opportunity to learn about the consequences of FGC.

In this situation, the way a question is phrased or presented can lead a participant to a particular answer. Throughout the interviews, I did my best to ask the questions as neutrally as possible to avoid leading the participants in one direction or the other. When I first asked the question about national government involvement I asked, “What role should the national government play in the FGC abandonment process?” In general, participants responded with a short answer stating that the government should be involved, but did not specify how the government should be involved. I continued the interview by pressing for more details and asking exactly how the government should be involved in the abandonment process. If participants responded by saying there should be a law, I followed up by asking how the law should be enforced. It was at this point that participants expressed their preference for a law only after the country had agreed to abandon

FGC. Since this was my first time conducting interviews, there was a learning curve for me as a researcher. Toward the end of my interviews I did a better job remaining neutral, but at the start of the interviews I often caught myself asking questions in a way that led the participants to one answer over another. These human errors in the research may have affected the participant responses.

These participant interviews complement the other results by including the voices of women who participate in the CEP program in the discussion of why Tostan's abandonment approach is effective. The interviews highlighted the holistic nature of the CEP, the importance of a group decision-making process at the community level in general and in FGC abandonment, the emphasis on FGC's health consequences over its human rights violations, and the role of the national government in the abandonment process.

Summary of the Results

Every set of data—curriculum review, classroom observation, staff interviews, and participant interviews—revealed a different perspective on why Tostan's program has successfully led to FGC abandonment in thousands of communities in Africa and 48 communities in The Gambia. The results show that Tostan's program is successful because it establishes trust with communities, has a holistic approach and curriculum, and works with the values of the communities to involve the entire community in the decision-making process.

The participatory CEP curriculum works to establish trust at the community level. Before addressing the sensitive issue of FGC, facilitators and participants work together through less controversial sessions to establish trust. With this trust, facilitators create an environment where participants feel comfortable openly discussing the topic of FGC. This trust is built and maintained on a respect for the values of the communities.

In addition to trust, the holistic structure of the program creates opportunities to discuss and understand FGC abandonment from different perspectives. The staff interviews, curriculum review, and participant interviews revealed the importance of a holistic educational program. A holistic program is useful because it provides a variety of tools for communities to understand FGC and because it shows communities that the program is relevant to their lives and is not driven by FGC abandonment. The breadth of topics covered in the CEP includes FGC abandonment as one of many goals, not the driving force of the program.

Data from all four types of evidence suggest that Tostan's success is a result of the respectful, holistic approach built on a foundation of trust with the communities. I will further explore these results in the discussion.

DISCUSSION

In the beginning of this essay, I discussed three different ways to think about FGC abandonment—the right-to-health approach, the human rights approach, and national policies. One NGO in particular, Tostan, has gained recognition for its successful approach facilitating FGC abandonment (Tostan, 2010; UNICEF, 2008). According to the MERL Director, Tostan evaluates success by “looking at the participants to see if they have acquired the new knowledge they were learning in the class and if they are putting it into practice in the community.” Tostan evaluates participants’ knowledge acquisition and implementation by comparing results of an evaluation tool at the beginning and end of the program cycle. The international community is most concerned with Tostan’s success at facilitating FGC abandonment. Since Tostan’s arrival in The Gambia in 2006 there have been three public declarations to abandon FGC in the country. These declarations occurred in June, October, and December 2009 and involved 48 Mandinka communities—all of the Mandinka CEP centers and 8 “adopted” communities. No Fula communities participated since the Fula communities started the CEP a year after the Mandinka communities and had not discussed the topic of FGC at the time of these declarations. The Tostan Gambia employees anticipate that the Fula communities will participate in public declarations of abandonment in 2010 or 2011. The three public declarations indicate the early success of the program facilitating FGC abandonment, but the long-term commitment to these declarations is unknown.

Tostan’s approach uses a human rights framework to discuss both the health consequences of the practice and its violation of human rights. My understanding of the results of this case study is that Tostan’s program succeeds due to the holistic, respectful approach that incorporates community values and does not pressure communities to abandon FGC. Tostan works with national governments, but it does not actively support legislation to ban FGC in the countries where it operates. After a discussion of Tostan’s approach I use the multiple streams policy framework and innovation and diffusion policy models to explore the potential development of a national law in The Gambia.

Holistic Program

The hallmark of Tostan's educational program is its holistic approach, not only related to FGC but throughout the entire curriculum. The curriculum addresses a wide range of issues that give community members tools to become actors in their own development.

Tostan's FGC abandonment strategy is holistic because it does not neatly fall into either the right-to-health approach or the human rights approach but uses elements of both. Tostan wants its participants to have the facts about the procedure so they can make an informed decision about the practice, but it also wants them to put the practice in the context of human rights.

Funding FGC abandonment campaigns is a priority for donors, but Tostan has not dropped its holistic program in favor of one that isolates FGC. The organization believes its success at abandonment is due to the holistic nature of the program—without previous discussion of human rights, democracy, hygiene, and health, participants would not be equipped to abandon the practice. As stated by one of the employees, it is counterproductive to isolate FGC and only educate people about that one issue. In an FGC specific campaign, people may decide to abandon for a short period of time, but the change will not be sustainable if the decision to abandon does not adequately address the underlying causes behind the practice.

Respectful Approach

Tostan discusses FGC using culturally appropriate language and respect. At no point does Tostan tell participants to abandon FGC or any other practice; instead, Tostan equips participants with the knowledge they need to make an informed decision on their own. During implementation of the program, and especially surrounding the topic of FGC, Tostan works with the community. Since it uses facilitators from the region, there is not a strong feeling of “us” vs. “them,” but rather of one member of the community discussing the topic with another.

Staff members emphasized the use of non-controversial language. Shocking films, pictures, and videos are not used. The goal of the Tostan program is for communities to decide to abandon FGC not from an emotional reaction, but through thoughtful reasoning. Participants recognize this commitment to respect and remain open to the discussion. This respectful approach is not limited to FGC but extends throughout the entire CEP.

The FGC sessions occur near the end of the Kobi module, which gives facilitators time to build a relationship of trust, communication, and respect before broaching the topic of FGC. Tostan's decision to place the FGC sessions near the end of the Kobi is an example of the organization's patient approach. FGC abandonment is not the driving force behind the organization; it is one of many CEP outcomes. This patient approach is also an example of the program's integration with community values—a third reason for Tostan's success at FGC abandonment.

Integration with Community Values

Instead of working in opposition to community values, Tostan works with them in two ways: (1) involving the wider community and the religious leaders and (2) being patient as communities work through the abandonment process. If Tostan did not work with these community values, it would not gain traction at the community level.

Program participants expressed the value of unity in their communities. Tostan's discussion of FGC does not end in the CEP sessions, but continues in the form of community-wide discussions and meetings that involve all members of the community. Both of the facilitators interviewed stated that the initial presentation of FGC was not well-received by participants, but progress toward abandonment occurred by involving community leaders and community members outside of the classroom. The program's inclusion of the wider community recognizes importance and value of making inclusive, group decisions. Public declarations of abandonment could not happen if Tostan only focused on members of the CEP sessions; successful abandonment requires involvement from the entire community in the decision-making process.

Another value expressed by participants is the importance of religion as a unifying factor in the community. Tostan works with the religious community by including its leaders in the abandonment process through frequent community meetings and inter-village meetings. This inclusion is another example of Tostan working with the community's values, not against them.

A final value is the importance of patience when approaching the topic of FGC. Changes of great magnitude do not happen instantaneously; they require months (or years) of discussion, evaluation, and eventually, consensus. Tostan's goal is not to facilitate abandonment at the expense of the rest of its educational program. Tostan's goal is to give communities the information they need to make the decisions that are best for them. If the community decides FGC abandonment is the appropriate step, then Tostan will support that decision, but Tostan does

not evaluate its success based solely on the number of communities who abandon FGC. Not all Tostan communities eventually decide to abandon. For example, in the conservative Fouta region of Senegal, Tostan has facilitated very few public declarations. Even though communities are not abandoning FGC, they are still benefiting from the program through improved health practices, increased problem solving skills, a better understanding of human rights, and basic literacy skills. Tostan understands that the Fouta is more conservative and that it is unlikely that communities will decide to declare in the three years that Tostan facilitates the CEP. Even if they do not decide to abandon FGC at the end of the three years, they may still decide to do so at a later point. In summary, the results of this case study suggest that Tostan's success at FGC abandonment results from its holistic, respectful approach that works with community values.

POLICY THEORY APPLICATION

Policy theories, frameworks, and models provide lenses through which individuals can analyze a specific policy or political situation. Paul Sabatier's *Theories of the Policy Process* describes the most widely used and accepted policy theories. Although scholars often favor one theory over another, it is important to use multiple perspectives because it “forces the analyst to clarify differences in assumptions across frameworks...encourage[s] the development of competing hypotheses...[and] gradually clarif[ies] the conditions under which one perspective is more useful than another” (Sabatier, 2006: 6). In this essay, I will apply the multiple streams framework and the diffusion and innovation models of policy analysis to discuss the possibility of a national law to prohibit FGC in The Gambia.

Out of the 28 countries where FGC is primarily practiced, only 6 do not have a law or provision that bans FGC; The Gambia is one of the 6 (Population Reference Bureau, 2010). Even though both the multiple streams framework (Kingdon, 1984) and the diffusion and innovation models (Berry and Berry, 1990) of policy analysis were developed with the Western political model in mind, they are still useful tools for understanding why The Gambia has not yet passed a law banning FGC and the potential for a law to develop in the future.

Multiple Streams Framework

With roots in the “garbage can” model of organizational choice developed by Cohen, March, and Olsen (1972), the multiple streams framework explains how seemingly irrational outcomes occur in the policy process. These outcomes occur when “choice is conceptualized as a garbage can into which participants...dump largely unrelated problems and solutions” and this situation “gives the process highly dynamic and interactive qualities” (Zahariadis, 2007: 66). Essentially, there are many actors and forces that affect the policy process, which makes it difficult to predict outcomes without a framework to understand the relationships and interactions between these various elements.

The multiple streams framework attempts to explain how outcomes come out of the interactions of problems, actors, and solutions. This framework views “choice as the collective output formulated by the push and pull of several factors” (Zahariadis, 2007: 66). This “push and pull” of policy development is guided by the three streams in the policy process: problem, politics, and

policy streams and how these streams align to create a policy output. Each stream “contains the various individuals, groups, agencies, and institutions that are involved in the policy-making process” (Birkland, 2005: 225). After a brief overview of each stream, I will go into more detail about the streams and their application to the possibility of a law to prohibit FGC in The Gambia. The problem stream contains the issues that citizens and policy makers want to see addressed. The politics stream includes the political environment and other influences that affect the climate of the policy process. The third stream is the policy stream, which consists of the different ideas and solutions to address a specific problem. When the three streams align, there is a “policy window” that opens. Policy entrepreneurs can act on the window to produce a policy output. If there is not a coupling of streams at a specific moment in time, there will be no policy output. According to Kingdon (1984), these “[p]olicy windows open infrequently, and do not stay open long” (p. 175). The following figure is a simplified version of Zahariadis’ (2007) visual representation of how the three streams come together to make a policy output.

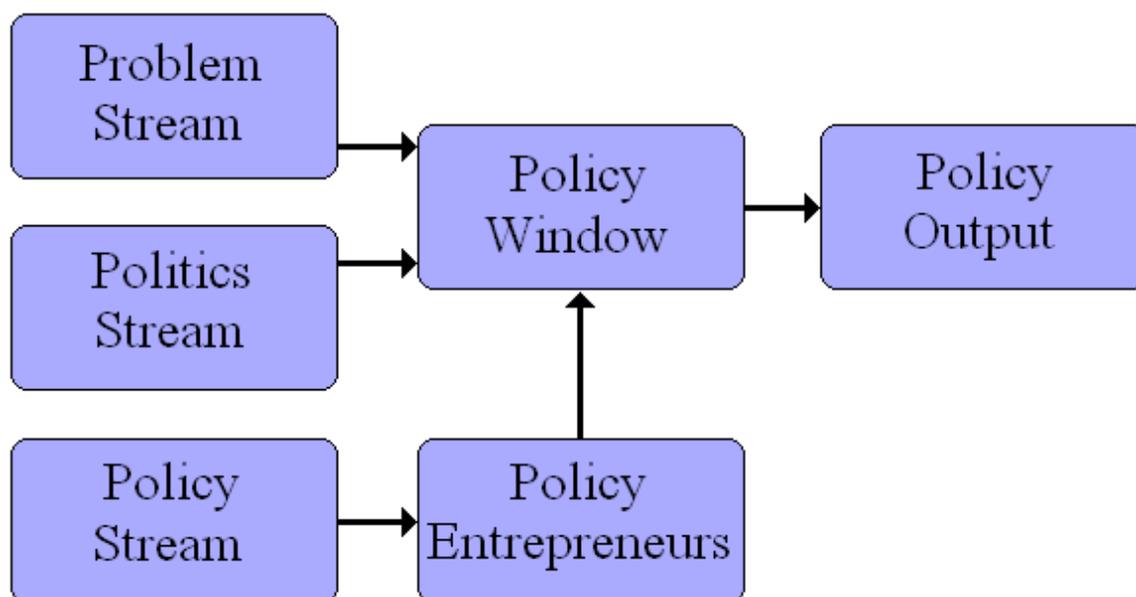


Figure 3: Multiple Streams Policy Diagram
Source: Adapted from Zahariadis (2007)

Problem Stream

According to Zahariadis’ (2007) review of the multiple streams framework, “the problem stream consists of various conditions that policy makers and citizens want addressed” (p. 70). In the context of this research, the problem is FGC as a violation of human rights. For an active

problem stream to exist, someone with power has to prioritize the problem. This vocalization of the problem occurs when the population—or at least vocal, influential members of the population—decides they want a problem to be solved (Zahariadis, 2007). Kingdon (1984) makes an important distinction between a problem and a condition: “Conditions become defined as problems when we come to believe that we should do something about them” (p. 115). This distinction is particularly relevant in the case of FGC in The Gambia because some actors define FGC as a problem, while others see it only as a condition. In The Gambia, it appears that the population and the Gambian government define FGC as a condition, while international actors define it as a problem. This division makes the problem stream active from the perspective of some actors and inactive from the perspective of others.

The Gambian population and government appear to categorize FGC as a condition, not a problem. FGC is currently entrenched in the Gambian culture where approximately 78 percent of the female population undergoes some form of FGC (Gambian Bureau of Statistics, 2007). When asked whether they intend to cut their daughters, 92 percent of Gambian women who had been cut answered yes (Gambian Bureau of Statistics, 2007). At first glance, these statistics suggest the general population does not view FGC as a problem that needs to be solved, but instead as a condition or way of life in the culture. Another explanation for these statistics is that the population views FGC as a problem, but that people do not feel they have the power to stop the practice. This explanation refers back to the social convention theory, which suggests that individuals cannot successfully abandon FGC; entire networks of communities have to abandon the practice (Mackie, 1999). Regardless of the reason for the high prevalence and intention to continue the practice, it appears that the population perceives FGC as a condition rather than a problem. This perception could change if programs like Tostan’s expand to new communities and open a respectful discussion of FGC.

Even though the population may not currently view FGC as a problem, there are influential people who do, most notably foreign donors. In a country that depends on foreign aid, the opinion and priorities of organizations like UNICEF affect the policy process, for better or for worse. In the case of The Gambia, the priorities of the population often come in second to the priorities of NGOs and international organizations that can offer much needed money and resources for development. When organizations like UNFPA and UNICEF prioritize FGC abandonment, the issue of FGC is categorized as a problem instead of a condition.

The central question in this policy stream is who decides whether FGC is a problem or a condition? If the general population decides, then FGC is a condition and therefore the problem stream is not active. If the international community decides, then FGC is a problem, which activates the problem stream. Since it is difficult to have power without money, I would argue that the international community has the power to define the problem that the population does not. The FGC problem stream is “active” in The Gambia for international donors and agencies seeking abandonment, but not for the general population. In The Gambia, the international actors have the power and money to define FGC as a problem, even if the rest of the country does not yet agree.

Politics Stream

The politics stream is a combination of the “public mood, pressure group campaigns, election results, partisan or ideological distributions in Congress, and changes of administration” (Kingdon, 1984). The elements of the political stream reveal that this framework was developed in the United States for a Western democracy. Although the application of these elements looks different in The Gambia than in the United States, there is a politics stream for FGC and an examination of these factors helps determine whether it is active or inactive.

The first element of the politics stream is the national or public mood. In the United States politicians closely follow public opinion polls and the national mood can affect what issues make it onto the agenda (Birkland, 2005). In contrast, The Gambia has a more authoritarian regime that may not monitor public opinion as closely as the United States. In The Gambia, neither the statistics on the intention of families to cut their daughters (UNICEF, 2007) nor the remarks of participants during their interviews indicate that the mood regarding FGC is in favor of abandonment at the national level. If the success of Tostan at achieving FGC abandonment at the community level through public declarations is any indicator, the mood could quickly change as Tostan, or other likeminded organizations, expand their programs in the country. Even if the national mood were to change, it may not influence the government to change its policy. In The Gambia, public opinion is a weak factor when determining whether or not the politics stream is active.

The second element of the politics stream is pressure from interest groups. Interest groups do not exist in The Gambia in the same way they do in the United States due to more limited freedom of press (Freedom House, 2008). Freedom House, an international watchdog agency states that

there are several independent newspapers, but “many of these private entities are subject to official pressure for publishing criticism of the government and public officials, while most businesses avoid advertising with them for fear of government reprisals” (Freedom House, 2008). With limited freedoms and access, it is less likely that groups will be able to effectively lobby the national government. Since citizen groups have less access to the government, international NGOs take their place in the politics stream in the Gambian context. Currently there are both local and international NGOs and development organizations whose programs actively seek FGC abandonment. Tostan’s program is an example of a grassroots organization that facilitates FGC abandonment at the community level, but Tostan does not pressure the national government to implement a policy. The pressure to encourage FGC abandonment comes not from grassroots organizations like Tostan, but from the larger international development community. For example, in 2008 eight UN agencies joined with the World Health Organization and the Economic Commission for Africa to release a statement on the best way to eliminate FGC (WHO, 2008). These organizations wield a lot of power in the global south and can effectively pressure governments to cooperate with its goals. Given the power of these organizations coupled with their prioritization of eliminating FGC, the pressure-group aspect of this stream is working to activate the politics stream. One element alone cannot activate a stream; all elements must be considered before making a final determination as to whether the stream is active or inactive.

The next aspects of the politics stream are the partisan make-up of the legislature, election results, and administrative changes. Unlike in countries with powerful legislative branches, Gambian policy is largely in the hands of one man—the president. President Yahya Jammeh has been in power since 1994. Although he has to be elected every five years, the elections are more of a formality since limited freedom of the press prevents the opposition from mounting a serious challenge (Freedom House, 2008). As I discussed in the earlier background section, the government has changed its stance of FGC multiple times. The government is currently working to support NGOs like Tostan who work at the community-level, but there is no movement at the national level to pass legislation banning FGC. If the government is going to change its position, it will likely come from international pressure, not from within the country. International groups are the ones with the money, power, and influence to pressure the Gambian government. Even though there is international pressure, the government has not acquiesced and passed a national law. The administrative aspect of the politics streams is currently inactive since the president has

decided to act only at the local level through NGOs and to avoid addressing the controversial issue of FGC at the national level.

Another consideration in the politics stream is the role of gender in the political arena. The Gambia is a patriarchal society where men are in the positions of political power and women are regulated to the domestic sphere. During my interviews I asked women to define the role of men and women in their community, and almost all women placed men in the decision-making role and themselves in charge the domestic duties. Having fewer women in positions of political power affects which issues become part of the national agenda. Without a strong female voice in the national arena, an issue like FGC may not receive the attention it would in a society where women had a stronger voice.

It is challenging to label the politics stream as either active or inactive. The influence and agendas of powerful international groups works to activate the stream, but the political elements in the country are inactive. At this point in time, I would argue that despite pressure from the international development community, the politics stream is inactive due to an unfavorable national mood, political climate, and patriarchal political system.

Policy Stream

The policy stream is the final of the three streams and in the case of The Gambia, the least complicated of the three. The policy stream is where policy proposals and ideas are debated and discussed (Zahariadis, 2007) and “contains the potential solutions to a problem” (Birkland, 2005: 225). This stream is important because it provides a forum for the feasibility of various proposals to be considered before they can become actual policy outputs (Kingdon, 1984). Even if the government and population acknowledge the existence of a problem, there cannot be a policy output unless someone has thought of a possible solution. In The Gambia, the debate and discussion exist largely behind closed doors and the process is less open than it is in the United States or other Western democracies due to more limited freedoms (Freedom House, 2008).

On the topic of FGC, the policy stream evaluates different types of laws, particularly who would be punished and how the law would be enforced. Since there are already more than a dozen countries that have laws abandoning FGC, policy makers would not have to create an entirely new policy. Instead, they can observe what aspects of other laws would work in their country and what aspects would not. Policy makers could adapt current laws abandoning FGC to be

implemented in The Gambia. The policy stream of FGC abandonment in The Gambia is active because there are already solutions and laws available for the government to implement; they just have to be adapted to the Gambian context.

Policy Entrepreneurs, Windows, and Outputs

A policy window is created when “the three streams are coupled or joined together at critical moments in time” (Zahariadis, 2007: 73). This coupling occurs when people in power (either inside or outside of the government) define a problem, the political climate is ripe for action, and there is a solution available to address the problem. When the problem, politics, and policy streams align, there is a policy window. Policy entrepreneurs can then use that window to create a policy output. If one of the streams is not aligned with the other two, then there will be no policy window, and therefore no policy output. For example, if a problem is clearly defined (active problem stream) and a solution is available (active policy stream), but the political climate is unfavorable (inactive politics stream), then no there will not be an output.

When applied to The Gambia, this framework can help explain why there is currently no law banning FGC in the country. Currently the problem and policy streams are active, but the politics stream is inactive. There is the potential for movement in the politics stream in the future, which could open the elusive policy window. When the president determines that it is in his best interest either financially—to receive more international funding, or politically—to improve the standing of his country in the international community, he may decide to pursue the passage of legislation to abandon FGC. Programs like Tostan’s may facilitate this process because they raise awareness about the issue of FGC in a holistic and respectful manner. If the president sees FGC abandonment supported at the local level, he may be more willing to enact a law.

Both Tostan staff and participants doubt the efficacy of a national policy because they believe the country needs to be informed about the human rights and health aspects of the practice *before* a law goes into effect. If a law banning FGC in The Gambia did pass, it would likely be a symbolic policy rather than a material one. According to Birkland, a symbolic policy “appeals to people’s values without any resources or actual effort behind them” (p. 149-150). It would be symbolic because the streams would not come together in The Gambia until there was widespread support from the people wanting a law to abandon FGC. As seen in the results, communities value making decisions together, rather than forcing people to change. If the national mood were to change, it would be because the communities themselves had already decided to abandon FGC.

If the decision had already been made, then there would be no political backlash for the policy, which could help activate the politics stream. The policy stream is active since there are multiple laws that abandon FGC in other countries that The Gambia can draw from for the creation of a national law. I predict that there will eventually be a law in The Gambia that bans FGC as a result of extensive pressure from the international community.

Innovation and Diffusion Models of Policy

The multiple streams framework is one of many policy approaches that offer a lens to analyze the possibility of a law to prohibit FGC in The Gambia. Other policy approaches that can be applied to this case study are the innovation and diffusion models. These models were originally separated into two distinct categories—one that studies the diffusion process of policy adoption and the other that studies how internal determinants influence policy adoption (Berry and Berry, 2006). In practice it is challenging to isolate one from the other since policy adoption is generally affected by both internal and external factors. Before applying this theory to FGC policy in The Gambia, I will give a general overview of each approach.

The diffusion model was originally developed by Rogers (1983) to describe the spread of policies from one state to another in the United States. Berry and Berry (2006) quote Rogers in their article on the diffusion model and describe these models as, “the process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system” (p. 225). Berry and Berry (2006) describe three factors that influence one state to adopt the policies of another state: states learn from each other, compete with each other, and strive to meet regional or national standards. All three factors lead states to adopt the successful policies of other states. Within the broad concept of policy diffusion there are several models that describe the specific process of adoption—for example there are national, regional, and leader-laggard models of diffusion (Berry and Berry, 2006). I am not going to describe these different models in detail because they are not relevant to the essay. The important concept to take away from the diffusions models is that policy adoption by one state or country can affect policy adoption by other states or countries.

The second set of models focus on the internal determinants of policy adoption. These models suggest that the “factors causing a state to adopt a new program or policy are political, economic, and social characteristics of the state” (Berry and Berry, 2006: 231). According to this approach

states do not adopt a policy simply because their neighboring state has adopted it; states adopt policies based on the internal characteristics of their state. Even if all other states have chosen to adopt a specific policy, one state may not follow due to the specific economic, political, or social climate of the state. Some states are more likely than others to adopt a specific policy, regardless of their proximity to other adopting states. Policy adoption is dependent not only on adoption by surrounding states or countries, but also on the specific situation of a state or country.

These two approaches are not meant to be exclusive, but should be used together to examine the policy adoption process. In the case of The Gambia, the combination of these approaches may help explain why the country is one of six who have not adopted a policy to prohibit FGC. Regionally, The Gambia is surrounded by other countries who have adopted laws against FGC including the only country it shares a border with—Senegal. All of the other West African countries have also passed laws, with the exception of Sierra Leone and Liberia (Population Reference Bureau, 2010). Using only the diffusion models, it seems unusual that The Gambia has not adopted a law since so many of its neighbors have. The additional perspective of the internal determinant models helps to explain this anomaly since according to these models the political, economic, and social characteristics of a country can also affect whether or not it adopts a policy. In the case of The Gambia I would argue that it is the particular political characteristics that prevent the government from passing a law to prohibit FGC. President Jammeh has a tight grip on power in the country. Despite pressure from the international community, he has decided not to act and support a law that prohibits the practice. If the political climate changes, I believe there will be a movement to join the other countries in the region and The Gambia will pass legislation that bans FGC in the country.

The application of the multiple streams framework and the innovation and diffusion models of policy are just two examples of how policy theories can aid in policy analysis. Every policy framework, theory, and model provides a specific lens to interpret a situation and can reveal different aspects of a particular situation. In the case of a national law to prohibit FGC in The Gambia, the multiple streams framework explains the lack of a law through an inactive politics stream. The innovation and diffusion models show that even though other countries have passed a law, The Gambia has not due to its internal determinants, in this case the political climate. Policy lenses are not mutually exclusive but can be used together to approach the same issue from different perspectives. Sometimes the approaches will come to the same conclusion and in other

cases they will shed light on different aspects of the situation. Both the multiple streams and innovation and diffusion models point toward an unfavorable political climate preventing the Gambian government from passing a law to ban FGC.

CONCLUSION

FGC has become a key issue for donors and the international development community. When people in the West first hear about the practice, they generally respond with shock and horror and a desire to see the practice ended. Tostan has become well known across the world for its success at promoting FGC abandonment. When the first public declaration of FGC abandonment was held in 1997, it took the organization by surprise—FGC abandonment was not a primary goal of the program. Since that initial declaration, close to 5,000 communities in Senegal, Guinea, Somalia, Burkina Faso, and The Gambia have publically declared their abandonment of FGC after completing Tostan's program.

The results of this case study show that Tostan's success stems in part from its holistic, respectful approach that incorporates community values. These results were gathered through curriculum review, classroom observation, and interviews with staff and participants. The curriculum review and classroom observation emphasized participatory and non-formal teaching methods. This classroom atmosphere includes participants in every aspect of the program and allows them to become active participants in the learning process, not passive observers. From the staff interviews, it can be seen that people within the organization value working within the cultural framework of the population they work with in a respectful way. Staff did not adhere to a specific abandonment ideology as much as an integration of several methods. By using a holistic educational program, employees believe the program will create lasting behavioral change. Finally, participants' experiences reveal the integration of community values into the educational program.

This case study outlines possible reasons for the success of an international NGO at the grassroots level in The Gambia. The application of the multiple streams policy framework and the innovation and diffusion policy models expands on comments from Tostan staff and participants about the desired role of the national government in FGC abandonment. Even though the international community generally supports laws banning FGC, Tostan participants and staff expressed little to no desire for a law in The Gambia in the immediate future. Participants rejected the idea of a law to abandon FGC if educational programs to inform communities about FGC did not precede the law. Staff rejected the idea of a law because they saw no viable policy stream to create a useful output. Other countries have implemented laws abandoning the practice,

and the politics, policy, and problem streams in The Gambia could create a policy window and output if the politics stream becomes activated. If that policy window does open, it will likely produce a symbolic policy, not a material one.

This case study describes an example of a successful abandonment NGO through the use of a holistic, respectful approach based on human rights. There is currently no national policy, nor does there appear to be a desire for such a policy from Tostan employees or participants. Even so, the application of policy theories and frameworks shows the potential for movement towards a law if the political climate changes.

Limitations

As with all research, there are limitations and challenges that come with the research design and particular circumstances of a study. Three limitations in this study are the amount of time spent with participants, the language barriers between participants and myself, and the uniqueness of the sample. I discussed the first two limitations in the methodology and results sections, so I will focus my attention here on the final limitation.

My study sample is unique because I only interviewed individuals directly involved in Tostan's program, either as an employee or as a participant in the CEP. Both of these groups have bought into Tostan's philosophy and approach since they either work for the organization or have chosen to regularly participate in the CEP sessions. This sample provides information about the thoughts and opinions of Tostan participants and employees, but it does not represent the opinions of community members who are not directly involved with Tostan. Other community members may not agree with participant or employee perspectives of FGC abandonment and the effect of Tostan's involvement in the community. Although the opinions of the community are important and would provide further insight into FGC abandonment in The Gambia, they were not examined in this case study.

Further Research

At the conclusion of a study there often seem to be as many questions as answers. Hopefully these questions can spur further research in the field to expand the knowledge and understanding of FGC abandonment. Areas for future research include a comparison of Tostan's programs in different countries, the long-term commitment of communities to FGC abandonment, and a study of future policies to determine the accuracy of my policy predictions.

There have already been several studies conducted on the Tostan program in Senegal, but over the past decade Tostan has rapidly expanded to other West and East African countries. More research is needed that compares the success of the program in each country to see if the program's incarnations in other countries are as successful as the original program in Senegal. Has the CEP adapted its curriculum to meet the changing contexts and needs of different populations? Is the CEP as effective in East Africa as it is in West Africa?

In addition to comparative research across countries, there needs to be more research on the long-term commitment of communities to FGC abandonment. Tostan has only been in The Gambia for four years, so the effects and changes resulting from the program ten or fifteen years after Tostan leaves communities are unknown. This research will become particularly salient if communities perceive an expectation to abandon FGC and feel inadvertent pressure to participate in public declarations but are not committed to FGC abandonment in the long-term.

Following the discussion of this case study's results, I presented two policy theories to help explain the potential for a national law to prohibit FGC in The Gambia and possible reasons why The Gambia has not yet instituted such a law. If a law is passed to prohibit FGC in The Gambia, further research could help determine what factors influenced the new legislation. Was it international pressure on the government to conform to international standards? Was it pressure from the Gambian population to recognize changes at the grassroots level? Was it a change in the political climate from a new administration? Interviews with key actors in the Gambian and international development arenas could help explain whether or not my application of the policy theories were accurate depictions of the situation in The Gambia.

This case study is a snapshot of one organization at a particular moment in time. It is challenging to summarize why the approach of an organization as complex as Tostan successfully facilitates FGC abandonment, but I hope this study shed some light on the answer and spurs further research in the field.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- African Union. (2010). *List of countries which have signed, ratified/acceded to the protocol to the African charter on human and people's rights on the rights of women in Africa*. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
- Amnesty International. (2005). *Female genital mutilation/cutting*. Retrieved 20 April 2010, from <http://www.amnestyusa.org/violence-against-women/stop-violence-against-women-svaw/female-genital-mutilation/page.do?id=1108226>.
- Askew, I. (2005). Methodological issues in measuring the impact of interventions against female genital cutting. *Culture, Health, and Sexuality*, 7(5), 463-477.
- Berry, F. S., & Berry, W. D. (2006). Innovation and diffusion models in policy research. In P. Sabatier (Ed.), *Theories of the policy process* (pp. 223-260). Boulder, CO: Westview.
- Birkland, T. A. (2005). *An introduction to the policy process: Theories, concepts, and models of public policy making*. Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe.
- Central Intelligence Agency. (2010). The Gambia. In *World Factbook*. Retrieved 10 April 2010, from <http://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ga.html>.
- Davies, D. (2005, August). The Gambia. *New Internationalist (London)*, 36.
- Donors Working Group on Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting. (2008). *Platform for action: Towards the abandonment of female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C)*. Retrieved 20 April 2010, from UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre: http://www.fgm-cdonor.org/publications/dwg_platform_action.pdf.
- Easton, P., Monkman, K., & Miles, R. (2003). Social policy from the bottom up: Abandoning FGC in sub-Saharan Africa. *Development in Practice*, 13(5), 445-458.
- Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development. (2006). *The Maputo protocol of the African Union: An instrument for the rights of women in Africa* (K. Lisy, E. Finke, & A.-R. Hoensbroech, Trans.).
- Freedom House. (2008). *The Gambia*. Retrieved 15 May 2010, from <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=251&country=7397>.
- Gambia Bureau of Statistics. (2007). *The Gambia multiple indicator cluster survey 2005/2006 report*. Bakau, The Gambia: UNICEF.
- Google Maps. (2010). Retrieved 20 May 2010, from <http://maps.google.com>.
- Gruenbaum, E. (2001). *The female circumcision controversy: An anthropological perspective*. Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press.
- Hernlund, Y. (2000). Cutting without ritual and ritual without cutting: Female "circumcision" and the re-ritualization of initiation in The Gambia. In B. Shell-Duncan & Y. Hernlund

- (Eds.), *Female "circumcision" in Africa* (pp. 235-252). Boulder, CO: Lynne Reinner Publishers.
- Hernlund, Y., & Shell-Duncan, B. (2007). Contingency, context, and change: Negotiating female genital cutting in The Gambia and Senegal. *Africa Today*, 53(4), 43-57.
- Kingdon, J. (1984). *Agendas, alternatives, and public policies (2nd ed.)*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company.
- Mackie, G. (1996). Ending footbinding and infibulation: A convention account. *American Sociological Review*, 61, 999-1017.
- Mackie, G. (2000). Female genital cutting: The beginning of the end. In B. Shell-Duncan & Y. Hernlund (Eds.), *Female "circumcision" in Africa* (pp. 253-282). Boulder, CO: Lynne Reinner Publishers.
- Mackie, G. (2003). Female genital cutting: A harmless practice? *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, 17(2), 135-158.
- Mackie, G., & LeJeune, J. (2009). Social dynamics of abandonment of harmful practices: A new look at the theory. In *Special series on social norms and harmful practices* (pp. 1-34). Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre.
- May, T. (1993). *Social research*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Obermeyer, C. M. (1999). Female Genital surgeries: The known, the unknown, and the unknowable. *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, 13(1), 79-106.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Population Reference Bureau. (2006). *Abandoning female genital mutilation/cutting: An in depth look at promising practices* (C. Feldman-Jacobs & S. Ryniak, Trans.) (pp. 1-68). Washington, D.C.
- Population Reference Bureau. (2008). *Demographic highlights*. Retrieved 31 May 2010, from http://www.prb.org/Datafinder/Geography/Summary.aspx?region=21®ion_type=2.
- Population Reference Bureau. (2010). *Female genital mutilation/cutting: Data and trends update 2010* (C. Feldman-Jacobs & D. Clifton, Trans.) (pp. 1-9). Washington, D.C.
- Program for Appropriate Technology and Health. (2005). *Girls at risk: Community approaches to the end of female genital mutilation and treating women injured by the practice* (A. Mohamud, K. Ringheim, S. Bloodworth, & K. Gryboski, Trans.) (pp. 69-85). PATH.
- Rahman, A., & Toubia, N. (2000). *Female genital mutilation: A practical guide to worldwide laws and policies*. New York: St Martin's Press.
- Robson, C. (1993). *Real world research*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.

- Rogers, E. M. (1983). *Diffusion of innovations*. New York: The Free Press.
- Sabatier, P. A. (2006). The need for better theories. In P. Sabatier (Ed.), *Theories of the policy process* (pp. 3-17). Boulder, CO: Westview.
- Senegambia News Team. (2009, 27 May). President Jammeh threatens Imam Bab Leigh, bans annual pilgrimage to Sheikh Omar Futiyou site in Gunjur. *Senegambia News (Serrekunda, The Gambia)*, pp. 1-2.
- Shell-Duncan, B. (2001). The medicalization of female "circumcision": Harm reduction or promotion of a dangerous practice? *Social Science and Medicine*, 52, 1013-1028.
- Shell-Duncan, B., & Hernlund, Y. (2000). Female "circumcision" in Africa: Dimensions of the practice and debates. In B. Shell-Duncan & Y. Hernlund (Eds.), *Female "circumcision" in Africa* (pp. 1-40). Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Shelling, T. C. (1960). *The strategy of conflict*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Skaine, R. (2005). *Female genital mutilation: Legal, cultural and medical issues*. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland and Company, Inc.
- Smith Oboler, R. (2001). Law and persuasion in the elimination of female genital modification. *Human Organizations*, 60(4), 311-318.
- Tostan. (2007). *The community empowerment program*. Retrieved from <http://www.tostan.org/web/page/552/sectionid/547/pagelevel/2/interior.asp>.
- Tostan. (2007). *The empowered communities network*. Retrieved 1 May 2010, from <http://www.tostan.org/web/page/654/sectionid/547/parentid/552/pagelevel/3/interior.asp>.
- Tostan. (2009). *Brochure (Washington, D.C.)*. Tostan: Community-led development.
- Tostan. (2010). *Abandoning female genital cutting (FGC)*. Retrieved 10 May 2010, from <http://www.tostan.org/web/page/586/sectionid/547/parentid/585/pagelevel/3/interior.asp>.
- UNFPA (2008). *Eliminating female genital mutilation: An interagency statement*. Retrieved 10 June 2010 from http://www.unfpa.org/webdav/site/global/shared/documents/publications/2008/eliminating_fgm.pdf.
- UNICEF. (2005). *Changing a harmful social convention: Female genital mutilation/cutting* (A. Lewnes, Ed.). Florence, Italy: Giuntina.
- UNICEF. (2005). *Female genital mutilation/cutting: A statistical exploration*. Division of Policy and Planning. Retrieved 14 May 2010, from http://www.unicef.org/publications/files/FGC-C_final_10_October.pdf.
- UNICEF. (2007). *Coordinated strategy to abandon female genital mutilation/cutting in one generation: A human rights-based approach to programming* (1-50). Retrieved 12 May 2010, from

http://www.childinfo.org/files/fgmc_coordinated_strategy_to_abandon_fgmc_in_one_generation_eng.pdf.

- UNICEF (Section of Statistics and Monitoring). (2008). *Long-term evaluation of the Tostan programme in Senegal: Kolda, Theis and Fatick regions*. New York.
- UNICEF. (2010). *Country statistics The Gambia*. Retrieved from http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/gambia_statistics.html.
- United Nations. (2009). *Human development report Gambia*. Retrieved from http://hdrstats.undp.org/es/countries/country_fact_sheets/cty_fs_GMB.html.
- United Nations. (2010). *Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women*. Retrieved 5 May 2010, from http://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=IV-8&chapter=4&lang=en.
- United States Department of State. (2001). *The Gambia: Report on female genital mutilation (FGM) or female genital cutting (FGC)*. Retrieved 20 April 2010, from <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/46d5787732.html>.
- World Health Organization. (1982). *Female circumcision: Statement of WHO position and activities*. Geneva.
- World Health Organization. (2010, Feb). *Female Genital Mutilation*. Retrieved 29 March 2010, from <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs241/en/index.html>.
- Zahariadis, N. (2007). The multiple streams framework: Structure, limitations, prospects. In P. Sabatier (Ed.), *Theories of the policy process* (pp. 65-92). Boulder, CO: Westview.