PROMISING EMPOWERMENT: HOW TOSTAN ENGAGES COMMUNITIES IN PARTICIPATORY DEVELOPMENT IN RURAL SENEGAL

by

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A THESIS

Presented to the Department of International Studies
and the Graduate School of the University of Oregon
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Arts

September 2009

"Promising Empowerment: How Tostan Engages Communities in Participatory Development in Rural Senegal," a thesis prepared by Elizabeth Marie Cauble in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in the Department of International Studies. This thesis has been approved and accepted by:

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25 August 2009
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An Abstract of the Thesis of

Elizabeth Marie Cauble for the degree of Master of Arts

in the Department of International Studies to be taken September 2009

Title: PROMISING EMPOWERMENT: HOW TOSTAN ENGAGES COMMUNITIES IN PARTICIPATORY DEVELOPMENT IN RURAL SENEGAL

Approved: _____
Dr. Dennis Galvan

This thesis explores the empowerment effects of informal education programs run by the highly acclaimed non-governmental organization (NGO) Tostan in Senegal, West Africa. My interviews with 25 women in six rural communities in Senegal reveal that participants in Tostan training programs experience multiple forms and degrees of empowerment. The respondents in this study report sometimes feeling empowered in terms of education, access to resources, individualization and participation. In light of the literature on empowerment, my respondents remain only partially empowered, constrained by existing sociopolitical relations and economic dependency. My research also considers whether there are structural limits to empowerment when an outside NGO comes into a community for a relatively short time to promote change better produced indigenously.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to give a special thanks to my advisor and committee chair, Professor Dennis Galvan for his enduring patience, understanding, support, and mentorship. I would also like to thank my committee members, Professor Anne Williams and Professor Stephen Wooten for supporting this project. I am also grateful for the opportunity to live and work in Senegal, a country that feels like a second home to me. I would not have been able to travel and conduct this research without the generous financial support from the Center for the Study of Women in Society, the African Studies Program, and the Thurber Award. Thanks to all who contribute to these generous grant programs. Additional thanks are given to the NGO Tostan for allowing me to study and participate in the important work they do. Most importantly, thanks to all the women who participated in this study and shared so much. You are the true inspiration and I thank you for giving me a glimpse into your lives.

My family deserves the deepest gratitude. My achievements are the result of their unconditional love and support. My Mom, for instilling in me a love of learning, for encouraging me to embrace independence, and for teaching me how to be a good mom. My Dad, for giving me my sense of adventure, for showing me the true meaning of integrity, and for making me feel important. Oliver, my sweet boy, for bringing me more joy than I could have ever imagined and inspiring my worldview. I thank and love all of you.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Study

Is empowerment the answer for the millions of people who struggle each day to survive, subsist, and flourish? Or is it just another development 'buzzword' that is used to attract donors and convince them (and ourselves) that we can lead people in poverty to help themselves, not by offering food, or money, or favorable global trade conditions, but by letting them know that they can do better?

This thesis explores the empowerment effects of informal education programs run by the highly acclaimed non-governmental organization (NGO) Tostan in Senegal, West Africa. My interviews with 25 women in six rural communities in Senegal reveal that participants in Tostan training programs experience multiple forms and degrees of empowerment. The respondents in this study report sometimes feeling empowered in terms of education, access to resources, individualization and participation. In light of the literature on empowerment, my respondents remain only partially empowered, constrained by existing sociopolitical relations and economic dependency. My research also considers whether there are structural limits to empowerment when an outside NGO comes into a community for a relatively short time to promote change better produced indigenously.

At its core, this thesis is particularly concerned with the current state of development both as a system and an ideology. The concept of empowerment is fairly recent in development thinking and it is particularly intriguing within a development framework for several reasons. First, it is a concept that lacks clear definition. Second, applying empowerment as an operational device is challenging and problematic for many 'developers' and 'recipients' of aid because empowerment implies shifts and changes in power from all actors in the development process. Third, empowerment is difficult to measure because it is so multidimensional.

In 2002, following the lead of numerous grassroots organizations and NGO's that had recently begun to include the concept of empowerment in their program design and implementation, The World Bank published an Empowerment Sourcebook to "bring together thinking and practice" of empowerment. This marks the centrality of empowerment in current development trends as both a top-down and bottom-up holistic approach that promises to bring about institutional reform and durable and meaningful change. In order to more clearly understand how and why empowerment is receiving such widespread consideration, it is useful to trace its inception in the development field.

Development intervention has been widely criticized as a system or industry that has, for the most part, failed to live up to its goals (Escobar 1984, 1995; Esteva 1992; Ferguson 1990; Sachs 1992). A variety of statistical and visible evidence have revealed situations of increased poverty, inequality, displacement and environmental degradation in many areas of the world, particularly in developing countries (Simmons 1995). Drawing from such data, many policymakers, academics and development practitioners

argue that development, as a whole, is not working. Concerns about development are revealed in the increasing numbers of publications dedicated to highlighting the shortcomings of development. With billions of dollars allocated each year and thousands of practitioners, analysts and policymakers seeking to find effective ways to alleviate global poverty and suffering it is puzzling to many why development is seemingly so elusive and aid effectiveness uncertain. The attempt to address this failure has resulted in a widespread reexamination of development and its ability to reduce poverty and induce positive change.

Escobar, for example, has argued that 'development' is not much more than an 'industry' that is geared toward satisfying developers' rather than recipients' interests. He blames development, especially during the time of the Cold War, for constructing almost all aspects of social reality in the third world (Escobar, 1995, p. 44). He claims that the professionalization of development in the post WWII reconstruction period eventually expanded to include the third world. As a result, research data needed to be collected and utilized in order to support "academic programs, conferences, consultancy services, and local extension services and so on." In addition, poverty, illiteracy and hunger "became the basis for an industry for planners, experts and civil servants (Escobar, 1995, p. 46). As a result, the production of knowledge and the planning of development by western institutions is something from which third world countries and even the development industry itself, find difficult to escape. Much like Said's theory of Orientalism (Said, 1978, p. 3), Escobar frames development as a 'discourse'. Discourse, he argues, has the power to influence reality because the idea of development is framed

by the Western imagination that seeks to " subordinate, contain and assimilate the Third World as Other (Escobar, 1995, p. 157). In this sense, aid is set up to fail in order that 'developers' maintain a position of power and control. In *The Anti-Politics Machine,* Ferguson has applied similar critiques to the development industry and describes the 'development apparatus' in Lesotho as a machine for reinforcing and expanding bureaucratic state power (Ferguson, 1990).[1]

Critiques of development are convincing but it is also important to note that development is often understood in two very different ways with their respective meanings often being used interchangeably. For instance, development in the sense that it is an 'industry', involves a set of institutions, policies, and practices with a specific history rooted in post WWII decolonization. The activities and planning administered by organizations such as the World Bank, United Nations, bilateral donors, and NGO's are presented as 'development'. However, development can also be described as an ideal or goal toward which institutions, communities, and individuals can claim that they are working toward. It implies improvement, progress, and positive change. Development, as such, is highly relative and it is this relativity that is changing the way various actors in the development industry administer and conceptualize aid.

According to Crewe and Harrison, labeling development as a discourse is dangerous because it makes it possible for all things to become labeled as a discourse and

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[1] Ferguson draws an analogy between the 'development apparatus' and Foucault's writings on the prison. Foucault argued that the prison had failed to reduce crime but had succeeded in producing delinquency: "so successful has the prison been that, after a century and a half of 'failures', the prison still exists, producing the same results, and there is the greatest reluctance to dispense with it" (cited in Ferguson 1990:20)

diminishes its use as an analytical tool. They argue that, "the conceptualization of development as an idea and essentially a 'good thing' becomes subsumed beneath the presupposition that it is synonymous with the development industry, and that this industry is the single most significant powerful entity to be deconstructed (Crewe and Harrison, 2000, p. 18)." More likely than not, the majority of development professionals are preoccupied with the positive ideological aspects of development and are making an honest attempt to promote positive change. Empowerment, in this sense, is a useful concept for both 'developers' and 'recipients' because it is also bringing new meaning into what, exactly, is considered improvement, progress, and positive change and who determines and validates these qualities.

It is from within the development industry itself, in response to continual criticism of development processes that attempts are made to make agencies more effective. The current preference for participatory approaches can be seen as exemplifying this view, as can the willingness to employ anthropologists and other social scientists to ease the development process and make it more effective (Gardner and Lewis, 1996). Moreover, from a policy standpoint, an empowering approach to development and poverty reduction is rooted in the notion that aid 'recipients' are invaluable partners and agents for effective change and development. In *Development as Freedom,* Sen argues that people "need not be seen primarily as passive recipients of the benefits of cunning development programs" and that they should be treated as agents who " can effectively shape their own destiny and help each other (Sen, 1999, p.11). In this sense, agency is viewed as the key to holding the power to create positive and lasting changes in one's own life and

community. Similarly, empowerment makes use of agency but also emphasizes the idea that individual agents are also always situated in social contexts that shape how much control they actually have over their own lives.

This study is intended to inform the current thinking on empowerment as a useful development practice. Tostan is an ideal NGO from which to base this assessment because of their commitment to both community-led development and organizational learning. Tostan promotes activities and develops tools that aim to foster individual and collective empowerment. It is therefore necessary and valuable to hear how Tostan participants experience empowerment, especially since perceptions of empowerment are highly personal. The respondents in this study provided clear insight into not only what empowerment felt like to them but also which situations contributed most deeply to their experiences of feeling empowered. While the respondents cited numerous actual, perceived, and hopeful feelings of empowerment the majority of comments fell into the following four groups: education, individualization, participatory process, and access to resources. These key areas will be explored in chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7.

The literature on empowerment theory, policy and practice provides a framework from which to analyze the qualitative data provided by the respondents. It demonstrates that empowerment is a complex process that, despite what the respondent's claim they feel, can position individuals either high or low on the empowerment spectrum in sometimes surprising and counter-intuitive ways. This is significant because framing empowerment analytically contributes to a better understanding of what it means to be

empowered and is a useful way to monitor and evaluate programs that approach empowerment as a development practice.

In light of Escobar's theory of development as a discourse, it is necessary that Tostan also be examined critically. This is important for several reasons: 1) it determines the extent to which Tostan is embedded in the development discourse[2], 2) it determines the extent to which NGO driven development can be community-led, and 3) it determines the extent to which Tostan, as an outside source, is willing to be a part of the empowerment process. These factors are a critical assessment tool that should be considered by Tostan and other NGOs aspiring to commit to the same goals and practices.

Research Design and Methodology

This study is predominantly based on data gathered in rural villages in Senegal, West Africa during a 12-week period from June to September 2004. I spent the first five weeks of this study at the Tostan headquarters in Dakar, the capital city of Senegal. During this period, I was able to study the theoretical and pedagogical components of Tostan's program as well as prepare for fieldwork. At this time, Tostan only had one its field offices open located in the dry northeast region of Matam. The other field offices were temporarily closed during the rainy season, as most of the Tostan participants were busy tending to their crops. The Matam region was also quite suitable for this particular study because it was an area that had actively resisted Tostan presence, making it

[2] This is not to attempt to essentialize the dominant power of the development industry (see Gasper, 1996) and seek ways to label Tostan as 'developmentalist'. Rather, it is used as a tool to help extricate Tostan from development discourse, by revealing areas where this discourse may limit the effectiveness of its empowerment tools and processes.

particularly compelling to conduct an assessment of empowerment. Additionally, it was only in 2001 that Tostan was allowed to implement its program in this area thereby allowing an opportunity to consider Tostan's impact in its early stages.

Rowland's Model for Empowerment Assessment

After careful consideration and research on empowerment, I chose to model my study and design my interviews from recommendations made by Jo Rowlands in *Questioning Empowerment: Working With Women in Honduras.* Rowland's conceptualization of empowerment resonated with my own holistic view that treats empowerment as a process that requires personal, collective, and institutional change. She does not view empowerment as an end product but rather a dynamic and changing process that varies according to circumstance. She argues that despite this variety, there is still a common 'core' to the empowerment process that can be examined through identifying the experiences that result in increases in self-confidence, self-esteem and a sense of agency. Rowland's claims that although the empowerment process is often rooted or ignited in a collective experience or an outside change agent such as an NGO, it is the individual sense of empowerment that is the true indicator of progress.

Participant Observation

The core of this study is based on interviews that interrogate the psychological, individual, structural and social effects of Tostan's empowerment program. Many of these effects are highly personal and perhaps difficult to share, particularly with a

foreigner. Surely, many experiences were kept private that may have revealed a clearer picture of each respondents' empowered state. I am also aware that my status as a westerner may have, for the respondents, represented a potential tie to some form of aid. In this sense, they may have wanted to provide me with the 'correct' answers. The fact that I did not speak Pulaar only added to the potential barriers created by my foreign-ness.

There were however, several factors that may have worked to bridge this gap and establish a certain degree of ease and trust between the respondents and myself. First, three years prior to this study, I had completed three years in a rural Senegalese village as a Peace Corps volunteer. During my Peace Corps service I became accustomed to village life and learned how to prepare several Senegalese dishes, carry water, pound millet, greet people properly and speak Wolof. As a result, I felt very at ease in the villages where I conducted interviews and this may have softened any tension between the respondents and myself. Second, my two-year old son accompanied me throughout my fieldwork and my status as a mother was something many of the respondents seemed to relate to. Also, the fact that my son's father is Senegalese, may have indicated that I held a connection to Senegal. Third, I often spoke Wolof to my translator and any other village members who could speak Wolof. This demonstrated that I had, in fact, spent some time in Senegal and was invested enough to at least learn one of the Senegalese languages.

I did not spend enough time in each of these villages to adequately observe day-to-day life. I was considered a guest in each village and, as such, was generally offered

special treatment. Even if I were to include in my analysis observations such as sanitation or treatment of children, these behaviors may have only been exhibited for my benefit and might not accurately represent actual village life.

Designing the Interview Questions

Based on Rowland's recommendation, the interview questions in this study were designed to analyze the 'core' characteristics of empowerment as well as to identify any encouraging or inhibiting factors in the empowerment process.[3] I developed a set of 30 questions[4] to be asked in personal interviews (Appendix A). The first 15 questions applied to the 'core' aspects of empowerment, while the second 15 questions applied to extenuating factors. In addition, I developed five open-ended questions to be asked in a group setting. I chose to hold short 30-minute group interviews that were open to all members of the community in order to observe group dynamics, a key indicator in empowerment assessment[5].

Locating Villages and Respondents

Prior to arriving at the Tostan field office in the Matam region, I made arrangements with one of the Tostan facilitators to identify five villages that had

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[4] Some of the questions that I classify as one question were actually several questions designed to address a particular topic in different ways. For example, I asked: In what aspect(s) of your life do you experience self-confidence? Where is it lacking? Why?

[5] In particular, I was looking for collective empowerment indicators such as how many in the group participated in the discussion, who participated and the level of respect within the group.

participated in the Tostan program and shared similar attributes[6]. This facilitator also acted as my translator throughout the interview process and accompanied me to the Matam office. He did not normally work in the Matam region, which I felt was beneficial in terms of his ability to remain objective. I chose him because he was particularly fluent in French and was a native speaker of Pulaar, the local language in the villages where I chose to conduct interviews. I did not have a working knowledge of Pulaar and relied on him to translate from French into Pulaar and from Pulaar into French. This was not an ideal situation and I recognize that a certain nuances in communication may have led to subtle miscommunication. I attempted to circumvent this problem by asking questions that addressed the same topic in slightly different ways.

Upon arriving at the field office, my translator and I visited the different villages that he had identified. I spoke to the village chief, local Imam, and president of the Community Management Committee (CMC)[7] and asked if any of the Tostan participants were willing to participate in my study. I requested six respondents from each village who had participated in the Tostan program. I then notified the village chief and the local Imam when I would be back to conduct the interviews. One of the Tostan villages opted not to participate in the study because they were preoccupied with the recent death of their local Imam. In three of the villages, I decided to limit the number of interviews to

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[6] By attributes, I am referring to population, ethnicity, environment, language and economic activity.

[7] In Senegal, it is customary to ask the village chief and Imam, the religious leader, permission to enter the village. The CMC is the management committee set up by each participating Tostan community.

five because of time constraints. All in all, I was able to conduct 21 individual interviews and four group interviews in four villages (Table 1.1).

I also decided that I wanted to conduct interviews in two villages that had not participated in the Tostan program in order to note differences between communities that had not received Tostan intervention and those that had. One of the villages had been on the waiting list to receive Tostan training and they were interested bringing the Tostan program to their community. The other village had, at one time, been approached by Tostan to receive Tostan training but rejected the offer. When I spoke to the village chief of this village, he said that he was open to my study but that their community did not want Tostan intervention because they feared it was too controversial.[8] I requested six female respondents from each of these communities, however, only two from each village were willing to participate in the study. I requested female respondents because all of the respondents from the Tostan villages were women and I wanted to compare their experience to non-Tostan participating women. I also conducted two group interviews.

Table 1.1. Number of respondents in individual interviews per village and duration of Tostan participation.

VILLAGE	TOSTAN PARTICIPATION	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS
A	Yes, 30 months, complete	6

[8] There is further discussion on the controversy of Tostan in the Matam region in chapter 3.

Table 1.1. (continued).

B	Yes, 30 months, complete	5
C	Yes, 30 months, complete	5
D	Yes, 20 months, in progress[9]	5
E	No, but wants Tostan	2
F	No, doesn't want Tostan	2

All of the individual respondents in this study were women ranging in ages from 18 to 52. I wanted to interview individuals who had participated directly in the Tostan program because I wanted to also assess their interaction with Tostan as part of the empowerment process. Although Tostan opens up its program to men and women, in this region it is almost uniformly women who participate. This likely limits a balanced assessment of empowerment but, for the purposes of this study, I was ultimately more concerned with individual empowerment. Several men did participate in the group interviews.

Individual Interviews

Each of the interviews were conducted in the privacy of a room or hut with myself, my translator, and the respondent. All of the sessions were openly recorded and the tape recorder was placed on the mat in between the respondent and myself. I asked the questions in French and spoke directly to the respondent, waited for my translator to ask the same question in Pulaar, then waited for my translator to translate each response into French. I realize that filtering the interviews through such a translation process likely

[9] Although this community had not completed the Tostan program, I decided to use it in this study in order to gain insight as to whether or not the completion of the program led to any enhanced or diminished empowerment effects.

interrupted the flow of the interview as well as making my outsider status glaringly obvious. I did, however, make deliberate attempts to minimize this awkwardness. For instance, I sat directly across from the respondent and asked my translator to sit to the side. I wanted to make it clear that the respondent was speaking to me and not my translator. I also asked the translator to avoid making eye contact with the respondent or myself and encouraged each respondent to direct their answers toward me. I also considered the fact that my translator was a man and that this could influence a respondents decision to talk about certain sensitive topics. I did not, however, sense that this was typically the case in the Tostan villages, as many of the respondents opened up about personal and gender specific issues. I attribute this to the Tostan training they had received where participants were encouraged to engage in dialogue with men about sensitive or taboo issues, such as female genital cutting (FGC) and polygamy. It did, however, seem to create more discomfort with the respondents in the non-Tostan villages where speaking openly in front of men about women's issues remained more taboo.

The individual interviews were designed to help pinpoint specific moments of feeling empowered or disempowered, particularly in relation to Tostan training. However, it is likely that many of the women did not reveal key moments because they were not asked the right questions. This is difficult to know and from a practical standpoint it was more important to keep the interview questions as uniform as possible. I asked every respondent the same 30 questions, but I did ask some of the respondent's additional questions if I needed clarification. For instance, one respondent stated that she felt limited by jealousy in her community, so I asked her to be more specific and explain

the ways in which jealously limited her. The interviews were designed to last about two hours, however, each interview averaged about three hours. This is because I underestimated the time it would take to translate every comment and some respondents had more to say than others. The shortest interview was two hours and the longest interview lasted 5.5 hours. The first 10 minutes were spent taking down statistical information, such as age, number of children, marriage status, level of education, and participation in village committees and projects. The remainder of the time was spent asking questions from the questionnaire. I generally conducted one to two interviews a day and spent between three and six days in each village.

Data Analysis

Respondents in this study are coded with a pseudonym in order to protect their identity. In addition, the specific village names and locations are not revealed. Each village is given the marker A,B,C,D,E, and F.

Each week, I listened to the recordings of my interviews and worked with my translator to transcribe them from French into English. I wanted to make sure he worked with me to clarify any words that were not clear to me on the tapes. I used these data to code the frequency counts of major themes in the individual interviews (Table 1.2). The first four themes-- empowerment as education, empowerment as participation, empowerment as access to resources, and empowerment as individualization—are given special attention in chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7. The last two themes—empowerment as

emigration and empowerment as religion—are discussed within the context of the first four themes.

Table 1.2. Frequency counts for major themes raised in interviews.

	1. Empowerment as Education		**2. Empowerment as Participation**		**3. Empowerment as Access to Resources**		**4. Empowerment as Individualization**	
Village	Total # of respondents who mention	Total # of mentions	Total # of respondents who mention	Total # of mentions	Total # of respondents who mention	Total # of mentions	Total # of respondents who mention	Total # of Mentions
A	6	67	6	71	6	54	6	36
B	5	48	5	48	5	39	5	30
C	5	58	5	78	5	52	5	46
D	5	51	5	40	5	39	5	38
E	2	21	2	8	2	13	2	7
F	2	9	1	2	2	12	1	2
Total	25	254	24	247	25	209	24	159

	5. Empowerment as Emigration		**6. Empowerment as Religion**	
Village	Total # of respondents who mention	Total # of mentions	Total # of respondents who mention	Total # of mentions
A	4	12	3	5
B	4	9	2	5
C	5	11	1	2
D	4	7	1	3
E	2	3	2	4
F	2	2	2	8
Total	21	44	11	27

Empowerment as emigration is included as a major theme because it was mentioned by most of the participants, but usually the mention of emigration was tied to one or more of the first four themes. For example, one respondent states, " I want my son to get a good education so he can travel abroad, make something of himself, and take care of his community here." This statement links emigration to education, individualization and access to resources.

Group Interviews

The group interviews were open to anybody who wanted to participate and generally lasted about one hour. I held the group interview the same day I arrived in a community and also used it as an opportunity to introduce myself and reason for visiting. I did not want to structure the meeting in terms of number of attendees and who attended because I wanted the feel of the interview to remain as informal and inviting as possible. However, I did let the village chief know before my arrival that I would be holding a group interview. This and my status as a guest, likely had an effect on how many and who was in attendance.

The main purpose of the group interview was to observe the interaction between men and women. An important aspect of collective empowerment and gender and development is a communities' ability to include men and women in group meetings and decision-making. The smallest group interview was a group of 20 (5 men and 15 women) and the largest group interview was with 46 (11 men and 36 women) (Table 1.3). I asked each group the same five questions: 1) What are you most proud of in your community? 2) How do you make decisions in your community? 3) How do you think you can achieve or maintain your goals as a community? 4) What do you think this community will look like ten years from now? 5) What are the most important things to teach your children?

In villages A, B, C, and D there were more women than men who participated and responded in the group interviews compared to villages E and F, where more men than

women attended and responded. This indicates that Tostan training likely influenced the numbers of women willing or allowed to attend and respond. This will be discussed further in chapter 6: Empowerment as Participatory Process.

Table 1.3. Participation in group interviews by village

VILLAGE	TOTAL NUMBER PRESENT		NUMBER PRESENT WHO RESPONDED	
	Total	**Male/Female**	**Total**	**Male/Female**
A	47	11/36	18	6/12
B	41	13/28	12	6/9
C	29	12/17	14	4/10
D	20	5/15	12	3/9
E	25	13/12	6	5/1
F	21	15/6	8	8/0

**shaded villages E and F did not participate in Tostan training*

There are a couple of notable limitations in this design. First, it is unclear if the village chief predetermined who would attend or not. It also did not take into consideration those who could not attend due to other obligations, disinterest, marginalization or absence. This means that it likely did not present an accurate depiction of community dynamics in its entirety. Second, the status and position of attendees was not noted. This makes it is unclear if the women who attended the interview in villages A, B, C, and D were Tostan participants or not. It would have been interesting to note if direct Tostan participation had any effect on female attendance. For example, if all the women who attended were Tostan participants, it could have pointed to a *power within the empowerment process* where non-Tostan women are marginalized. However, these limitations do not detract from the fact that more women participated in the Tostan villages.

Plan of Thesis

The following chapters will use this research to provide a clearer picture of empowerment and the possibility of its use as a development practice. Chapter 2 explores the literature in the fields of community psychology, anthropology, development studies, policy and other social sciences in order to provide a clearer understanding of the varied ways in which empowerment is understood and practiced in development. Chapter 3 provides a background of this particular case study and explores how empowerment is conceptualizes and applies empowerment as a development practice in this particular project. Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7 examine each of the major themes raised by the respondents in this study (empowerment as education, individualization, participatory process, and access to resources) in terms of how they feel empowered. Their statements are then evaluated in light of the current literature on empowerment and weighed against the structural implications of NGO intervention in a system of empowerment. Chapter 8 concludes with my recommendations derived from this study for approaching empowerment from a development standpoint.

CHAPTER II

FRAMING EMPOWERMENT IN DEVELOPMENT POLICY AND PRACTICE

Defining Empowerment

Power and Empowerment

In development studies *empowerment* is commonly used to describe approaches and outcomes of development initiatives, yet it remains poorly theorized (Batilawa, 1994; Cooke and Kothari , 2001; Gujit and Shah, 1998; Wallerstein, 1992). In the 1970's and 1980's Foucault developed an extensive model of power, which he conceived to explain modern Western Europe (1975,1980). Drawing from his conceptualization of power, many second-wave and third world feminists began to use the idea of empowerment as a way of detecting gender differences in the control and distribution of resources (Harstock, 1983; Kabeer, 2001; Nussbaum, 2000; Rowlands, 1997; Stromquist, 2002). Their concept of empowerment is rooted in the idea that power is not concentrated; it cannot be viewed as a commodity that can be held, attained, divided, or distributed by individuals. Power, in this sense, is decentered and acts everywhere because it comes from everywhere. Power is also not considered an inherent quality within powerful individuals because it is dispersed throughout the complex systems of discourse, practices, and relationships that position some individuals as powerful and justify and

create their authority in relation to others (Clegg, 1989). From this perspective, power is not particularly stable because it can shift and change. It is precisely this instability that proponents of empowerment find promising in terms of development. The idea is that if the most disempowered individuals realize their contribution to power relations, they are in a better position to unleash their own capacity to engage power. From this perspective, women (or other disempowered individuals) are viewed, not as powerless, but as agents who hold the power to shift the inequalities that limit their capabilities (Chambers, 2006; Nussbaum, 2000; Sen, 1999). However, there is widespread concern that the concept of empowerment has not brought about any fundamental changes in development practice and that the rhetoric is used by organizations to justify lack of attention to the structural causes of disempowerment (Fiedrich et al., 2003)

Conceptualizing Empowerment: Women in Development

The promotion of social change through an empowerment process became a popular technique in the fields of community psychology, education, and feminism before it was commonly used in international development (Rappaport, 1984; Townsend et al., 1999). Beginning in the late 1970's and continuing into the late 1990's the idea of women in development (WID) was widely circulated in the development field. It was assumed that women would receive little benefit from male-initiated elite-led reforms and structural processes that promoted capitalist development and social modernization. Women, therefore, were given special attention because it was assumed that they could not only make a greater overall impact on social change but that they were, perhaps, more

invested in managing resources because of their focus on family. Whether inspired by Freirian consciousness raising or feminism, the concept of empowerment was brought into this arena because women were considered the most disempowered and disadvantaged group.

One of the appeals of empowerment as a development practice is that it was thought to be a process that could occur within existing structural frameworks. Early models focused mainly on the individual agency aspect of empowerment, rather than the structural aspect. The idea was that women could escape poverty and inequality merely on the basis of becoming empowered. Many of the initial empowerment programs were grounded in Amartya Sen's idea of capabilities. According to Sen, identifying capabilities (such as the ability to participate in political activities or receive healthcare) allows us to look beyond a person's utility and assess what they are actually capable of doing or being (Sen, 1993). Martha Nussbaum adapted Sen's Capabilities Approach as a measurement tool that could be used to assess women's empowerment and equality of opportunity. She used the capabilities to help create the UN's Human Development Index (HDI), a tool that is often used in policy work to assess human well-being outside of economic indicators.

Rowlands argues that in order to understand and assess the process of empowerment, it is important to recognize that power can take on different forms. She describes these forms of power as follows:

> **Power over:** controlling power which may be responded to with compliance, resistance or manipulation
> **Power to:** generative or productive power which creates new possibilities and actions without domination

> **Power with:** a sense of the whole being greater than the sum of the individuals, especially when a group tackles a problem together
> **Power from within:** the spiritual strength and uniqueness that resides in each one of us and makes us truly human. Its basis is self-acceptance and self-respect which extend, in turn, to respect for and acceptance of others as equals (Rowlands, pg. 13)

Moreover, these forms of power can exist and play out in the individual, relational, and collective processes of empowerment.

As the concept of empowerment began to become more mainstream, however, development theorists and analysts wanted to have a clearer understanding of what it meant to be empowered and how institutions could be empowering. It seemed, as Srilatha Batliwala notes, that there was an assumption that women were more capable of empowerment than men because men traditionally held a position of "power over." Women, on the other hand, were perceived as more capable of "power to"—a form of power both qualitatively different than "power over" and more in line with the feel good attributes ascribed to empowerment. Empowerment was viewed as distinct from power because it seemed more concerned with process than with subjugation, more focused on outcome than on domination, and implied a positive-sum world in which one woman's gain does not necessarily come at the expense of another man's (or woman's) loss.

Sarah Longwe provides an example of how focusing only on women and their agency is problematic. She points to a women's project in Zambia that aimed to enroll girls in school and argued that this, rather than being liberating and

empowering, actually contributed to the girls continued subordination because it reified their position in society (Longwe, 1998). Although having women in the conventional school system could, she argued, can increase their abilities and contribute to a sense of individual empowerment, it would take a radical transformation to change existing structures and build a more equal society. As a result of critiques of WID such as this, a new development paradigm began to emerge—one that didn't focus specifically on women.

Gender and Development

Mainstream development agencies such as the World Bank and USAID began to move beyond WID and focus on gender and development (GAD). According to Merilee Karl, "the empowerment of women is not just a women's issue but a gender issue which necessitates a re-examination of gender relations and which, ultimately, will require changes of men as well as women (Karl, p. 51)." The way that women's empowerment was promoted as a development concept was considered by some to be fatally limited because it was based on the advancement of the individual, without any societal perspective of the problem (Parpart et al., p. 5). A woman was considered 'empowered' when she was literate, educated, economically productive, and self-confident. It did not take into consideration the fact that she was still limited by patriarchal power structures. Although much of the focus was still on women, the GAD approach recognized that men also needed to be included. In this sense, NGO's began using empowerment in the 1990's to invoke the idea of an improvement of

productivity within existing structures and the possibility of transforming structures that contribute to inequality.

Rowlands and Kabeer contend that the process of empowerment should be understood as inherently individualistic in terms of achieving *power from within.* They also stress, however, the importance of acting collectively in order to achieve a politicized *power with* others, which brings about the *power to* bring about change and social transformation (Kabeer, 1994; Rowlands, 1997). Rowlands adds that beyond the personal and collective, relational—"developing the ability to negotiate and influence the nature of a relationship and decisions made within it"—is also important (p. 15). Nelly Stromquist emphasizes that empowerment is a socio-political concept that includes cognitive, psychological, economic and political components (Stromquist, p. 14). The psychological component includes the idea that if women believe in themselves, they can act at personal and social levels to improve their condition.

The idea of men's empowerment is sorely missing from the literature on gender and development. Mosedale points out that in order to be empowered one must have been disempowered (Mosedale, 2005). In terms of gender relations in patriarchal societies, men are rarely disempowered by women. From this standpoint, it remains unclear from what position men are expected to enter the empowerment process. If they are entering from a position of *power over*, what are the procedures, if any, for relinquishing control? Yet, the idea remains that GAD oriented projects are able to produce empowerment that "rather than being concentrated in the hands of a few, it is

redistributed among the many; rather than being hierarchical, vertical, dominating, and exploitative, it is reciprocal, lateral, accountable, and facilitating; rather than *power over* others, it describes power *with* others (Kresby, pg. 2051)."

Conceptualizing and Measuring Empowerment

Agency and Structure

An agency approach to empowerment, such as that proposed by Rowlands and Kabeer, leads to an emphasis on education and capacity-building, while a structural approach addresses power inequalities affecting entire social groups. Clearly, both are important. More recently, there has been an increased recognition of the need for an explicit consideration of structural inequalities that affect entire social groups rather than a focus only on individual characteristics (Mayroux, 2003). This focus is often combined with a rights-based approach. Mayroux explains how transforming structures for empowerment can complement an agency approach to empowerment. For example, in a situation of *power over* where an individual has an increased role in decision making and bargaining power, a rights-based structure can increase the capacity for empowerment because it encourages equal rights of others and challenges inequalities and unfair privileges. Another example is when an agency approach to develop *power with* by encouraging participation of the less powerful is complemented with a supportive organization of those with power to challenge injustice, inequality, discrimination and stigma (Mayroux, p.16).

Process vs. Outcomes

Empowerment is understood and operationalized by organizations as a process, an outcome and sometimes both. An emphasis on process leads to a focus on organizational capacity building or an increase in participation of previously excluded groups in the design, management and evaluation of development activities. Garba (1999) distinguishes between An emphasis on outcomes leads to a focus on economic development or increased access to other visible resources (Uphoff, 2003).

Measuring Empowerment

There is no one single accepted method for measuring and tracking empowerment. According to Oxaal and Baden (1997), the process of monitoring and evaluation can even be disempowering if it is not done in a participatory way that promotes two-way accountability. They question whether indicators should even be used at all to measure empowerment. The definition of indicators is not only location specific, but, as empowerment is a process, the relevance of indicators will change over time. It is important, therefore to contextualize indicators within an analysis of the local power structures in order to highlight the factors that create powerlessness in the first place (Narayan-Parker, 2005).

Empowerment Approaches to Development: From Theory to Practice

Participation

Participation is a widely accepted development practice because it is considered more sustainable than top-down approaches. Definitions of participation range from

community collaboration in pre-determined projects to recognizing that communities must determine and control their own development projects. Partnerships bring all the stakeholders in a community together to support development initiatives and to develop a common vision for the community (a bottom-up approach). An empowering approach to participation is a collaborative process in which participants and an external facilitator (change agent) work together to identify needs and capabilities within their existing contextual framework (Fahlberg et al., 1991). The idea is to reduce or work around power relations usually associated with development and give marginalized individuals and groups a voice. Organizations that typically hold power, such as NGO's and community-based organizations (CBO) act more as facilitators and allow participants to become involved in the design, implementation and outcomes of development projects (Chambers 1994, 1997). Rowlands emphasizes the role of the facilitator as a 'change agent'. She argues that the change agent should be an outsider or expert in some form and should be able to reveal information and share perspectives that can help participants identify and remove obstacles to empowerment that might not have otherwise been apparent (p. 136).

Critics of participation have noted that participation focuses too much on agency and the positive contribution of external agents is often downplayed too much in favor of a romanticized idea of local knowledge. As a result, local-scale action is given too much priority while links to institutions and wider processes are often neglected (Cooke and Kothari, 2001). Conversely, the role of the facilitator (change agent) in participation has also been criticized for masking the perspectives, values and priorities of Western experts

behind their "relaxed" approach and then labeling outcomes "community-driven". It is argued that their presence is generally not neutral, particularly when they present tools for empowerment that reproduce Western values such as democracy and capitalism (Mohan, 2001).

Kresby critiques the sustainability of participation and emphasizes the role of space in empowerment and participation. If facilitated correctly, he argues, participation creates a very specific space for empowerment to occur. He argues, however, that more needs to be done "to enable people to sustainably reperform those empowered ways of being within the very differently constituted spaces of their everyday lives (Kresby, p. 2060)." For example, a college student might experience a heightened sense of empowerment in a participatory course in feminism but this sense is diminished outside of the classroom, when the student is removed from the supportive environment. His argument demonstrates that empowerment needs to be practiced and 'performed' outside of the participatory environment in order for it to retain its potency.

Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA)

In many development agencies, a general empowerment approach is often replaced by a HRBA as it is increasingly evident that social and political structural constraints limit the effects of empowerment. Empowerment, however, is an important principle in the UN Common Understanding of HRBA to development (Luttrel and Quiroz, 2007). A rights perspective is able to provide a framework for identifying and assessing the aspects of power relations that influence people's capacities, rights and

responsibilities. This framework is considered a supportive structure and can add value to empowerment when it is used by the rights-holder as a tool used to navigate power imbalances (Fox, 2005). A HRBA uses participation as a method of not only teaching about rights, but also allowing participants to recognize themselves as key actors in their own development rather than passive recipients. The empowerment component of this approach is viewed as the process by which people's capabilities to demand and use their rights grows (Berman, 2008). The HRBA also connects individuals to a wider set of institutions, such as civil society and government, that a general empowerment approach does not. Alsop (2005) points out that civil and political rights are able to empower people to not only claim their rights, but to demand accountability for effective public services and policies that reflect their interests.

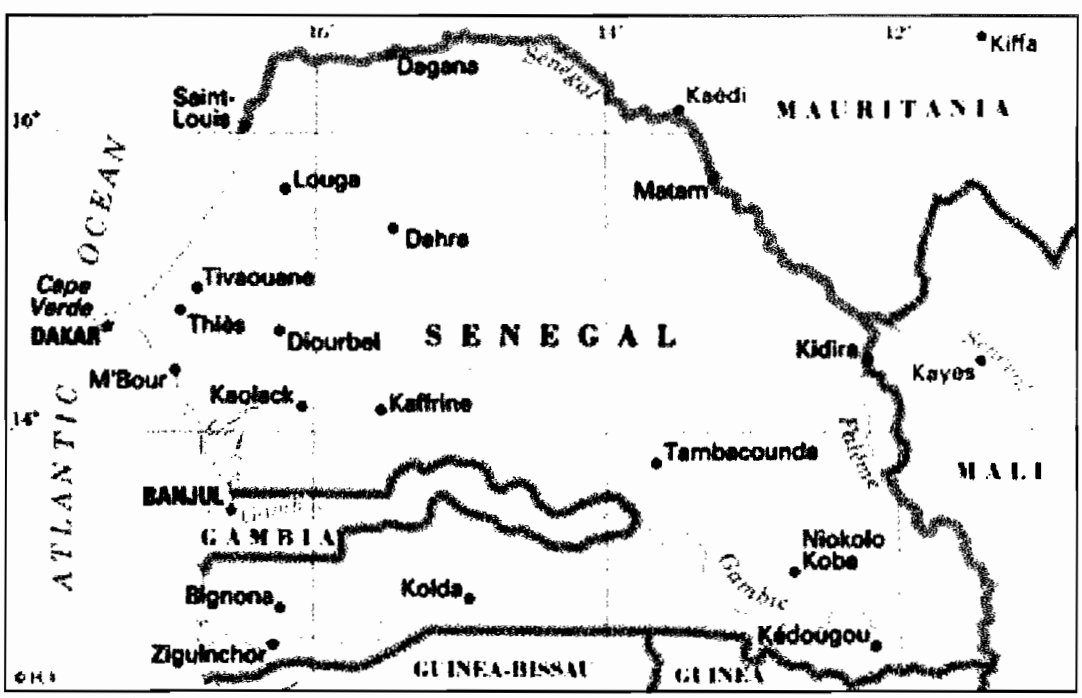
CHAPTER III

CASE STUDY BACKGROUND

Senegal: Country Background and Overview

The Republic of Senegal, situated in West Africa, borders the North Atlantic Ocean between Guinea-Bissau and Mauritania to the west and to the east it is bordered by Mali and Guinea-Conakry (map 3.1).

Figure 3.1 Map of Senegal



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A former French colony, Senegal gained its independence in 1960. Today, Senegal has developed a fairly well entrenched democratic system with approximately 26 registered political parties (CIA).[10] Historically, Wolof is the dominant language as well as ethnic group (43%), followed by Pulaar, Serer, Diola, Mandinka, and others (CIA). Although French is the official language of Senegal, Wolof is the lingua franca and is spoken throughout Senegal and parts of The Gambia. The current president, Abdoulaye Wade, was elected in fully democratic elections in March 2000, thereby characterizing Senegal as a leader in one of the most successful democratic transitions in Africa. As a result, Senegal has drawn praise from other democratic states for modeling good governance and embracing democracy. This has created an environment that is increasingly desirable for NGO's, the World Bank, IMF and other international agencies interested in delivering effective aid. Ethnic relations have been relatively stable in Senegal although there is some separatism in the southern region of Casamance that has long been problematic and challenging to the integrity of the Senegalese state.

Economy, Dependency, and Development

The United Nations Human Development Report (UNHDR) ranks Senegal 145th in terms of overall GDP and 156th in terms of its HDI value out of 177 countries (www.undp.org). Senegal is also a considered one of the 40 Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) by the IMF and World Bank. Economic debt and dependency plague the current economic and social situation in Senegal. About 70% of Senegal's 9.1 million

[10] CIA Factbook

inhabitants are rural and make up the majority of the workforce (www.state.gov/p/af/ci/sg).[11] Senegal's economy is the fourth largest in West Africa, supported mainly by the agricultural sector and marine fishing industry (CIA). The peanut industry has created the most important cash crop for farmers, who generally harvest their crops manually and rely on environmental conditions, such as rainfall, to determine yields. These industries do not generate enough income to support the needs of the majority of Senegalese people. In turn, the Senegalese government is unable to deliver the infrastructure and services that can increase economic output without the help of large loans. Services provided by international NGO's are also welcomed because they often fill in the gaps that the government cannot provide, such as building schools, delivering health services and delivering education.

Senegal has a history of adopting free-market values in its economic policies. In the 1990's, the former president, Abdou Diouf, led the privatization-based development effort during the IMF structural adjustment and austerity period. Abdoulaye Wade was the first non-socialist president elected and he has promoted a liberal, free-market development approach. In order to reduce farmers' dependency on the relative success or failure of a monocrop, Wade has been implementing measures to modernize the agricultural economy through diversification and the development of exports of vegetables, fruits, and flowers. However, since 2008 global economic crisis has significantly impacted the economic feasibility of these efforts and the economic

[11] US Department of State

situation is worsening. The price of food and other staples has risen considerably driving rising numbers of Senegalese into poverty (www.npr.org).

Religion and Politics

Religion is an important aspect of daily life as 95% of Senegalese are Muslim and Islam is central to the political sociology of Senegal (CIA). However, there are relatively minor socio-political cleavages based on religion, whether between Muslim and non-Muslim or between Sufi brotherhood orders. In fact, outside of a very small urban minority, there is little opposition to the secular state which the dominant framework of the Senegalese political system.[12] The major brotherhoods shot down the idea of an Islamic state because they feared that it would give them less autonomy. Therefore, they supported a secular state, or *état laïc* and the idea of an Islamic state proposed by some Islamist groups has not been able to gain popular support (Loimeier, p. 1183). Senegalese democracy is also accepted by the strongest "religio-political" movements in Senegal led by the Mouridiyya and Tijaniyya Sufi brotherhoods.

Education

Approximately 58% of school age children attend primary school and about 38% of the total population is considered literate (CIA). The Senegalese constitution adopted in 2001, guarantees that all children have access to education and that it is free and compulsory to the age of 16. In reality, the Senegalese government and public school

[12] According to Loimeir, the major brotherhoods shot down the idea of an Islamic state because they feared that it would give them less autonomy. Therefore, they supported a secular state, or *état laic* and Islamists have not gained popular support.

system is unable to cope with the number of school age children and struggle to make schools accessible. In the rural populations, especially, access to schooling is often limited. In addition, demand for secular education is not as prevalent in rural areas where Islamic education is viewed as more relevant and valuable. Enrollment of girls in school is lower than boys because girls are often kept home from school in order to help out with household chores.

The Matam Region

The Fouta Toro is an area situated along the northeast Senegal-Mauritania border, stretching for approximately 250km along the middle valley of the Senegal River. The Matam Region and the St. Louis region have areas that are located in the Fouta Toro. The Fouta Toro has an important historical past because it is where an Islamic reform movement took power in the late eighteenth century. This movement is attributed to making Islam the popular and practiced faith of Senegal (Robinson, 1975).

The majority of the population in this area is comprised of Haalpulaaren[13] , who are typically farmers and herders. They have maintained strong ties to Islam and value Islamic education and intellectualism. The Haalpulaaren follow a patriarchal social structure and follow a caste structure that determines profession and family relations. The Toorobe are considered the elite class, and they are traditionally concerned with the learning and propagation of Islam. As a result of this tradition, many of the Marabouts,

[13] Haalpulaaren are also referred to as Toucouleur by the majority of people outside of this area. However, they refer to themselves as Haalpulaar ("speakers of Pulaar")

imams, and Islamic scholars in Senegal originate directly or can trace their past to Haalpulaaren origins.

The severe droughts and economic restructuring that occurred in the 1980's had profound effects on Haalpulaaren society. A reduction in arable land and increases in population drove many young men to seek work in urban centers and, increasingly, abroad. This is a trend that still continues and has impacted traditional family life and family structure, since so many men are absent. It has also brought an influx of economic potential. The remittance economy that is created by the diaspora community has allowed families to enjoy unprecedented material wealth and offers potential for future economic development.

Background and Overview of the NGO Tostan

Molly Melching's Vision

Long before it was officially established as an NGO in 1991, Tostan's founder, Molly Melching, was steadily conceptualizing the organization from her vision of "education and dignity for all" (www.tostan.org). Molly originally traveled to Senegal in the mid 1970's as a student, where she was inspired and mentored by the famous Senegalese linguist and historian, Cheikh Anta Diop. In fact, it was Cheikh Anta Diop who came up with the name Tostan, meaning "breakthrough" or more precisely "hatching of an egg" in Wolof, the national language of Senegal (Williams, 2009). Moreover, Cheikh Anta Diop explained that the word *tostan* also held deeper cultural meanings and implied "sharing" and "spreading" ; a concept very relevant to Senegalese culture and Molly's mission (Gillespie and Melching, 2009).

Molly remained in Senegal as a Peace Corps volunteer and developed the first children's radio program broadcast in local languages. She recognized that the French formal education system excluded the majority of the rural population and that this divide would have a negative impact on development. She decided that the best way to bring education and meaningful development to rural communities was to create literacy materials in national languages such as Pulaar, Serer, and Wolof. This, in effect, would allow a greater number of communities to engage in ideas and the educational process. Molly felt that a curricular focus on national languages was important not only for facilitating the spread of literacy and conveying deeper meaning and context, but also for instilling a sense of pride and expressiveness in one's native language (Tostan). With the help of Senegalese cultural experts and community feedback, she designed literacy programs that also addressed development issues and utilized indigenous methods of learning through discussion, song, dance, theater, and poetry. Early on, Molly recognized the value that education could bring to rural communities when individuals were engaged as active rather than passive learners.

Organizational and Curricular Evolution of Tostan

Tostan's initial non-formal education curriculum focused on women's literacy and was designed to be participatory which, at the time, was a concept that was lacking in other literacy programs. The then-established literacy programs tended to focus on rote learning in a more formal teacher-student environment. Tostan wanted to break away from this approach because women complained that they often struggled over literacy

exercises that seemingly were not applicable and practical in their daily lives (Easton, Monkman and Miles, 2003). Therefore, it was a priority for Tostan to include rural women in the shaping of the curriculum and create a learning environment that would be both relevant and engaging. This collaboration resulted in a curricular model that used a problem-solving approach based on the women's own perceptions and priorities. In order to encourage inclusion and participation, Tostan chose to break away from the traditional education environment by identifying teachers as "facilitators" and students as "participants".

The initial Tostan program was comprised of six modules focusing on hygiene, oral rehydration, immunization, leadership skills, feasibility studies for local projects, and project management techniques. Tostan also encouraged communities to have a sense of ownership over Tostan activities by requiring them to provide a classroom and feed and house the facilitator for the duration of the program. In turn, Tostan provided all of the learning materials. The program lasted 18 months and literacy lessons were interwoven throughout the various modules (Easton et al.). Literacy was presented as a tool that could help women design and manage their own projects and increase their competency. The idea was that participants would continually engage and apply problem-solving skills to various aspects of their lives and, consequentially, find the value in literacy. As collaborative participants, the women participating in this program were asked, in the spirit of *tostan*, to share what they learned with non-participating adults within and outside the community (Gillespie and Melching).

Tostan also began to introduce village improvement projects and income-generating projects following the completion of the classes. This allowed participants to have the opportunity to apply what they had learned in real world situations outside of the classroom and possibly improve their situation. It was also considered an attractive incentive for more communities to request and participate in the Tostan program (Easton et al.). As the Tostan program increased in popularity, many of the participants began to request further training and more educational opportunities. In order to meet this demand, Tostan set up a 'continuing education' program in which the participants determined the needs and desired curriculum. From this information, Tostan developed and added the following four modules to its curriculum: human rights, women's health, early childhood development, and sustainable natural resource management. The first two modules in particular, human rights and women's health, generated a lot of excitement and interest. Facilitators reported record attendance and heated discussions on normally taboo subjects, such as FGC and sexuality, which had never before been openly discussed (Easton et al.).

Human rights became the framework used to not only build Tostan's curriculum but also to contextualize important themes that interested the participants such as health, democracy and problem solving.

Public Declarations to End FGC and Child/Forced Marriage

In 1997 women and a few men in the village of Malicounda-Bambara initiated an idea and made a choice that would draw national and international attention; they decided

that they would publicly abandon Female Genital Cutting (FGC) in their community. On July 31, 1997 the villagers of Malicounda-Bambara invited 20 Senegalese journalists to their community and made a public statement that they had collectively agreed to abandon FGC (www.tostan.org). This decision was rooted in deep and meaningful discussions on human rights and women's health and the effort was led by a woman who was herself a traditional excisor. She had seen firsthand, the potentially negative health effects that FGC could cause. Many outside religious leaders and critics who did not understand this framework did not easily accept publicly abandoning FGC and began to object. Yet, this did not stop two neighboring communities who had also participated in Tostan's program to openly discuss following Malicounda-Bambara's lead. These activities concerned the well-respected imam Demba Diawara because they challenged a well-established tradition (Williams). Perceiving this as a threat to Islamic values and practices, he decided to investigate the situation and express his concern.

When Demba Diawara approached the women of Malicounda-Bambara with his objection, they suggested that he ask women about their experience with FGC before further discussing the situation. Then a surprising turn of events occurred. He returned to Malicounda-Bambara influenced by what he had heard from the women in his family and decided that the women of Malicounda-Bambara were right (Williams). Furthermore, he decided to help in their efforts and worked with them to develop guidelines that would make their mission even more effective. For instance, he suggested that it was important to approach all the villages in the inter-marrying community and let them know what Malicounda-Bambara had done but not demand that they follow suit. Rather, it was

better to let these villages discuss the situation and reach a decision on their own (Easton et al.).

Since 1997, Tostan has recorded 3,548 villages in Senegal, 298 in Guinea-Conakry, and 23 in Burkina Faso who have joined the women of Malicounda-Bambara and publicly declared their commitment to abandoning FGC (www.tostan.org). In addition, many of these villages have also declared to eliminate child/forced marriage.

Tostan's Community Empowerment Program (CEP)

Tostan's current curriculum, the Community Empowerment Program (CEP) has been greatly influenced by the developmental stages of the organization. Tostan's success has, over the years, attracted increasing numbers of donors willing to offer support as well as increases in financial support from those donors already involved. Overwhelmingly impressed by Tostan's success with FGC, donor-driven support influenced Tostan's decision to focus more on the following modules related to FGC: human rights, women's health, problem solving, and community hygiene (Easton et al.). As a result, Tostan no longer defines itself as a literacy program although literacy training is still provided. Instead, Tostan's programs are centered around its newest mission "to empower African communities to bring about sustainable development and positive social transformation based on respect for human rights (www.tostan.org)."

CEP is a 30-month program that is introduced in two phases. The first phase is called the Kobi[14] and is the social empowerment component of the program. It focuses

[14] Kobi is a Mandinka word meaning "to prepare the field for planting."

on democracy, human rights and responsibilities, problem solving, hygiene, and health. This is followed by the Aawade[15] which is the literacy and economic empowerment phase of the program. This phase focuses on pre-literacy, literacy, and writing, math for management, and project management. A new SMS texting program has emerged in this arena that allows participants to practice and apply their literacy and management skills and disseminate and collect information in new and exciting ways. To date, Tostan has implemented CEP in over 2,600 communities in the following nine countries in Africa: Djibouti, The Gambia, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Mali, Mauritania, Senegal, and Somalia.

Community Management Committees (CMC's)

Tostan introduced the idea of Community Management Committees (CMC's) in 2000 (Donahue). Through the Community Empowerment Program (CEP), each village forms a CMC to coordinate activities within the Tostan classes and the larger community. CMC's are comprised of 17 members, each one responsible for distinct coordinating and leadership roles (Tostan, 2009). Coordinators are responsible for forming commissions in the following areas: health, education, child protection, income generation, environment, and social mobilization (Donahue). CMC's are intended to create a sustainable mechanism whereby villages can effectively create and manage development opportunities, build partnerships with other NGO's and local officials, and advocate for their needs long after Tostan is gone. However, the sustainability of this mechanism has

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[15] Aawade is a Fulani word meaning "to plant the seed."

been a recent concern for Tostan and measures have been taken to professionalize CMC's and improve their efficacy and durability (Donahue).

Initially, CMC's generally confined their activities to their local communities. Increasingly, however, they are expanding their scope and collaborative efforts by forming federations with CMC's in surrounding communities. Currently, there are 35 CMC federations in Senegal who meet quarterly and annually to discuss collective strategies and goals (Donahue). In 2006, Tostan additionally introduced the Empowered Communities Network (ECN) to help connect over 1500 CMC's with each other as well as facilitate partnerships with other local and international organizations (www.tostan.org). An added effort is being made to professionalize CMC's and improve their capacity to raise and manage funds by encouraging them to seek governmental *groupement d'intérêt economique (G.I.E.)* status (Donahue, 2009)[16].

Tostan and Empowerment

Tostan does not formally define what empowerment is or what an empowered community should look like (Donahue, 2009). This is not to say that Tostan does not recognize empowering outcomes. Rather, Tostan operates under the principle that there is no one single definition of empowerment but there are certain tools that can help individuals and communities define opportunities, build capacities, and create unique

[16] G.I.E is a form of doing business in Senegal that is modeled on a French system of pooling economic and like-minded business efforts to create competitive advantage. Members of G.I.E's are allowed to create and manage bank accounts. According to Cody Donahue, Tostan's international MERL coordinator, this brings a level of professionalism to CMC's that seem to maintain CMC cohesion for a longer period of time.

situations of empowerment. Tostan has identified tools that can help individuals and communities identify needs, advocate for those needs, and become engaged and active in the development process. These tools include problem solving, democracy, human rights, health and hygiene, literacy in local languages, and basic math and accounting skills (www.tostan.org). The extent to which these tools lead to situations of empowerment rests on each individual and community and may vary greatly. In fact, Tostan considers empowerment to be such a complex and varied process that outcomes cannot and should not be predicted or directed (Donahue). Tostan's non-directive organizational and educational philosophy is an integral component of their mission to move development away from passive donor-recipient relationships toward more active and engaged "community-led" development. The goal is to help individuals and communities realize that they, themselves, hold the power and capacity to make positive lasting change.

Tostan promotes empowerment through both a participatory process and a human-rights based framework. Tostan facilitators are trained to present information in such a way that participants and communities are able to engage the information and may accept, reject, or adapt the information without interference or judgment from the facilitator or Tostan. Human-rights are not imposed on the participants in the form of a law that they are required to abide by and accept. They are presented, rather, as universal guidelines that they may use to inform their choices and actions. The focus on individual agency allows participants and communities to bring in their own experiences, compare them with the information being presented, and guide their own decision-making. From this perspective, Tostan's conceptualization of empowerment rests more on the idea that

meaningful empowerment effects are and should be both personal and community based. Therefore, apart from providing educational tools and encouraging communities to engage in development, Tostan attempts to remain as neutral as possible in the overall empowerment process.

Human Rights and Tools of Empowerment

Tostan's empowerment tools are targeted more toward relational, organizational, economic and social aspects of empowerment[17]. In the first year of Tostan participation, participants and communities learn about human rights. Human rights were introduced to Tostan's curriculum in the mid 1990's as a framework through which individuals and communities could self-reflect and consider in light of their own conditions (Gillespie and Melching, 2009). Tostan does not, however, act as a human rights watchdog. They are more interested in providing the information and allowing participants to consider and analyze human rights within their existing social norms and cultural context. Tostan chose to use the human rights framework as part of its curriculum primarily because it proved to be a useful tool in teaching about women's health (Gillespie and Melching, 2009). Human rights were also considered an important model to share because it has been and is being shaped by the global community. It is therefore useful and necessary to expose and engage as many people as possible—especially if human rights are to be understood, truly universal, and dynamic in the sense that input comes from all levels of

[17] Using Rowlands empowerment framework, Tostan's emphasis is more on *power to* and *power with*.

global society (Donahue, 2009)[18]. In addition, unlike the concept of women's rights or children's rights, human rights apply to every individual in the community so they can potentially be useful for more people.

When Tostan began to use human rights in its curriculum noticeable shifts in the way communities organized themselves began to appear (Donahue). For instance, a greater number of male participants began to appear in the classes and information sharing expanded in both in numbers and geographical scope (Easton et al.). Tostan participants are generally encouraged to consider what human rights means for them in their local community and individual lives. Tostan views this consideration as a starting point and catalyst for numerous empowering processes and consciousness-raising that were not as prevalent when human rights were not introduced. In addition, human rights are seen as a framework that enhances other empowerment tools such as democracy, health, and education. For example, once health is introduced as a basic human right, rather than merely a service that may or may not be present, the participant can see the missing element in her life and take action to demand and secure better healthcare using the human rights logic and framework.

Tostan attributes human rights education as contributing to the framework most often used by communities who choose to publicly declare to abandon FGC and child/forced marriage. More importantly, Tostan recognizes that human rights education often allows participants to identify problems that may not have been easily identifiable prior to learning about human rights. From Tostan's perspective this validates their use

[18] Donahue, Cody. Telephone INTERVIEW. 14 June, 2009.

of the human rights model as well as necessitating their role in presenting a global and largely foreign idea into the minds of participants. The hope is that as participants become more aware of the obstacles they face a well-developed understanding of human rights will allow them to recognize their role in removing theses obstacles as actors and agents of change.

Tostan's Monitoring and Evaluation, Research, and Learning (MERL) Program

As a way to increase its capacity as a learning organization, Tostan developed a monitoring and evaluation, research, and learning (MERL) program in early 2008. According to Cody Donahue, the International MERL Coordinator for Tostan, The MERL team collects data and generates information used to adapt best practices and monitor action planning. Professional MERL specialists are currently standard in each country where Tostan works and the international coordinator oversees all the activities of the program. MERL specialists collect monthly and annual data from each Tostan community as well as oversee the progress of CMC's. Data collection topics include participant attendance and classroom progression, number of community cleanups, number of visits by local government and NGO officials, and short and long-term changes. MERL also examines other indicators specific to women and empowerment. Examples of these indicators include marking situations of economic power, ability to travel alone, and participation in associations (Donahue, 2009).

Tostan in the Matam Region of Senegal

When Tostan entered the Matam region of Senegal in 2000 it was considered a "hard-case" because they were met with a lot of local resistance by imams and other local leaders who felt that Tostan had an agenda. Tostan's reputation for working with communities who decided to abandon FGC and child/forced marriage was viewed as a threat to cultural and religious values. According to critics of Tostan, these matters should be left private and outside the realm of NGO involvement. Tostan agreed with this critique and explained that the decision to discuss or abandon FGC and child/forced marriage was entirely up to the community. Tostan decided that in this region, it was especially important to involve the imams and encourage them join in community discussions and activities. This softened the resistance to a certain degree but FGC and Tostan has still managed to find success in the region, an indicator that they have developed an effective program. On November 13, 2005, representatives of 70 villages participated in a public declaration in the village of Sedo Abass to announce that they had decided to end FGC and forced marriage. This was a tremendous event with thousands of villagers from up to 300 kilometers away who gathered to witness this celebration (Tostan, 2005). The issues of FGC and child/forced marriage continue to be a heated topic. To date, there is continued resistance in the Matam region from a handful of imams who continue to outwardly criticize Tostan (Donahue, 2009).

CHAPTER IV

EMPOWERMENT AS EDUCATION

This chapter explores the interplay between Tostan training and empowerment, taking into consideration experiential first-hand accounts of *feeling* empowered by education. These accounts are then contextualized within the larger analytical framework of empowerment theory. The effects that Tostan has on the empowerment process within the context of development discourse, particularly as an organization and producer of information, are also considered.

Reports and Analysis of Empowerment as Education

The majority of women participating in the Tostan program had previously never stepped foot inside of a school or had any exposure to any form of structured education. Of the respondents, only one had attended a French primary school, and seven had attended Koranic school. Schooling was largely a foreign prospect that ignited both feelings of excitement and apprehension in many of the Tostan participants. Dieynaba, a 42 year-old respondent in village A, who participated in the Tostan program with her 18 year-old daughter, Fati, explained, " I decided to participate in the program because I wanted my daughter to be involved. I did worry that I would not be successful because I did not know if I could learn at my age. I did not think that I could learn to read and write." I offered Dieynaba my notebook and pen and asked her if she would write

something, a request I made of all the respondents who participated in the Tostan training. She smiled and wrote her name.

Tangible outcomes of Tostan education were a source of great pride for many of the respondents and represented opportunities for advancement (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1 Frequency counts for major themes raised in interviews regarding empowerment as education

	Education increases potential for collective advancement		**Education means understanding human rights**		**Education increases potential for individual advancement**		**Education means literacy**	
	Total # of respondents who mention	Total # of mentions	Total # of respondents who mention	Total # of mentions	Total # of respondents who mention	Total # of mentions	Total # of respondents who mention	Total # of Mentions
Village								
A	5	11	6	13	5	11	5	9
B	5	13	5	10	4	8	5	8
C	5	14	5	12	5	12	5	10
D	4	7	5	14	5	10	4	10
E	2	5	1	1	1	4	2	6
F	1	2	0	0	2	2	2	3
Total	**22**	**52**	**22**	**50**	**22**	**47**	**23**	**46**

	Education raises social status		**Education leads to regret**		**Education raises hopes too high**	
	Total # of respondents who mention	Total # of mentions	Total # of respondents who mention	Total # of mentions	Total # of respondents who mention	Total # of mentions
Village						
A	4	7	3	5	2	3
B	4	4	3	3	1	2
C	3	5	2	3	1	2
D	2	5	3	5	0	0
E	2	5	0	0	0	0
F	1	2	0	0	0	0
Total	**16**	**28**	**11**	**16**	**4**	**7**

23 out of 25 respondents reported that literacy was an important component of education. The importance of literacy was even recognized in villages E and F, where Tostan wasn't

present. Madia, a 38 year-old respondent, demonstrated her great sense of accomplishment from being able to write her own name. When it was time for her interview she entered the room where I was conducting interviews clutching a small piece of cloth. "A gift," she said, handing me the cloth, which I could then clearly see was a handkerchief, "for coming all the way from America just to hear my experiences." I flattened the handkerchief out in front of me. Embroidered on it was a picture of a coke bottle and the name "Madia" stitched carefully on the bottom. "I made this," Madia stated, while pointing to her name, "after I learned how to write my name. This was the first most important thing that Tostan taught me. Now I will always be able to sign for something properly without appearing ignorant." As well as being a creative example of a tangible outcome, Madia's embroidery and statement were also significant because they shed light on the fact that she held a pre-conceived notion that illiteracy was tied to ignorance. Her feelings indicate that she was probably very aware of how being labeled "ignorant" implied a sense of *power over* her that she was able to escape through education. In fact, over half of the respondents reported feeling that being educated has the power to raise one's social status.

The respondents expressed a variety of reasons for wanting to join the Tostan classes such as curiosity, an opportunity to socialize, achieving literacy, a desire to learn more skills, self-improvement, and participating in development. They understood that they were committing to a 30-month program that would require them to commit to three two-hour lessons per week as well as participate in community projects. Few of the respondents, however, had anticipated the transformative outcomes that many of them

described experiencing at various points during and after their Tostan training. For example, N'Goura, a 24 year-old respondent and mother of two young daughters from village A, reported the following when asked to describe her educational experience: "When I attended the Tostan classes, I learned a lot of things that I didn't realize were important, such as the idea that everyone has the same rights. Now I can't imagine life without having that education. I will teach my daughters what I have learned. If you don't learn, you can't be a teacher." Fati, Madia's daughter, shared a similar sentiment. "if you study," she stated, " you have an opening, an awareness, and you can achieve what you want. I did not have this realization until I participated in the Tostan classes."

Tostan's pedagogical strategies correspond with what Rowlands discusses in her analysis about emphasizing group work (Rowlands, p. 17). Freire also suggests that participating in group activities and learning projects allows the learner to mover from "insight into action" (Freire , 1972). Further, this move is viewed as an integral component of empowerment because empowerment, itself, is viewed as a process that is neither solely individual nor communal; there must be an interplay between the two in order to achieve a fully empowered state (Kabeer, 1994; Price, 1992; McWhirter, 1991). Rowlands cites a study by McWhirter that is particularly compelling and relevant to my study. She describes empowerment in the following way:

> The **process** by which people, organizations or groups who are powerless (a) become aware of the power dynamics at work in their life context, (b) develop the skills and capacity for gaining some reasonable control over their lives, (c) exercise this control without infringing upon the rights of others and (d) support the empowerment of others in the community (McWhirter, p. 223).

Rowlands expands on this definition by pointing out that McWhirter distinguishes between "the 'situation of empowerment' where all four of these conditions are met and 'an empowering situation' where one or more of the conditions are in place or being developed, but where the full requirements are not present (Rowlands, p. 15)."

Based on the reports by the respondents, I argue that Tostan education and training create more of an 'empowering situation' rather than a 'situation of empowerment.' For example, Madia identified an 'empowering situation' when she developed a skill (learning how to write) that she used to appear less ignorant and more competent. Did Madia feel like she held more power and control over some aspect of her life? Yes. Is she more empowered? Yes, but only in the sense that she satisfied point (b). Has she achieved empowerment? No. To achieve a state of empowerment, she would also need to fully meet points (a), (c), and (d).

In addition to the self-awareness that many of the respondents reported they experienced as part of learning to read and write, all of the Tostan participants expressed that learning about human rights was also of particular significance. For many respondents, learning about human rights added an ideological component to their thinking that challenged their existing reality. In order to reinforce this ideology, Tostan encourages the idea that learning about human rights comes with a responsibility to put the ideas into action. As a result, group participation and collaboration is highly encouraged.

Aissata, a 30-year-old respondent and president of the women's association in village A described how learning about human rights influenced her life. "I did not feel

comfortable speaking out until we learned about discrimination and I realized that I am very much against discrimination. I stated my feelings in front of the whole village. It was then that I realized that education is not just about learning. It is also about action." She later commented, "If you had told me five years ago that I would be heading an association, I would not have believed you." Tostan considers participation in community decision-making an integral component of its education program. From Tostan's perspective, participation is not only a way to share the lessons of the program; it creates a connection to the shared *power with* component of empowerment. In this example, Aissata, since she sought a leadership role, likely experienced the benefits of participation quite deeply.

The respondents reported variations on the time frame in which they felt the Tostan classes first significantly impacted their lives. Responses varied but, for the most part, they all had one thing in common: it was when they felt they had the *power to* accomplish something. For Madia, it was after just a couple of weeks when she learned how to write her name. For Aissata, it was months before she felt compelled to speak out. For Coumba, a 45 year-old midwife in village C, her moment came after a year of classes when she painfully decided to abandon a practice that had given her significant financial and social status. She was an excisor, celebrated in her community for circumcising girls and preparing them to become strong and pure women, ready for marriage. Her decision to abandon her role as an excisor was not easy but it was, for her, a turning point in her education.

Tostan is careful not to use language and training that degrades the women who practice and support female genital circumcision (FGC). They do, however, present many of the negative health effects of the practice in conjunction with the idea that everyone has a *right* to be healthy. These lessons resonated with Coumba because she had always been concerned about the health of the people in her community. She was an excisor because she *believed* that she was bringing health and prosperity to the girls and women she served. "From what I learned through Tostan, I knew that I had to change my actions," Coumba stated emphatically. "When I realized that I was hurting girls and women in my community, I felt regret." Coumba showed me a photograph of herself standing with a group of women in a neighboring community who had made a public declaration to end FGC. " I learned that in order to make changes in this community I would need to lead the change." Coumba explained that she had been an excisor in a number of communities where she planned to help lead the effort to eliminate FGC. "I feel proud that I am helping women and communities move toward a healthier future."

Coumba is not the only respondent who experienced a sense of regret at some point during her Tostan training. Madia also discussed some of the negative feelings she experienced as a result of her education. "Before the Tostan program," Madia stated, "I did not even imagine that education could have so much importance, especially for women and girls. I regret that I did not go to school growing up and that I did not send my daughters to school." Her daughter, Fati, expressed regret as well as frustration. "Although the Tostan program has brought many good changes to our community, it has also made me think that I could be doing more. Lack of education is the only thing that

prevents me from doing everything I want. I want to attend university and teach in the school but I do not know French. I can only dream."

Most of the respondents seemed hopeful that educational opportunities would improve in their community. They reported variations in their perceived sense of agency to change their own situation and the situation around them. Eight of the respondents reported that they would likely see the most change come from their children, whom they had committed to send to school. Other respondents reported taking immediate action to make their vision a reality. Coumba, in particular, was fired up about bringing change to her community and the communities around her. "I believe that women need to be involved in decision-making just as much as men," Coumba stated. "Women and girls need education in order to make valuable contributions to developing our community." This message resonates well with what Tostan is trying to accomplish in the communities where it works.

Tostan and Empowerment as Education

Tostan claims that it is empowering communities through its educational curriculum and pedagogical techniques. This may not be an entirely accurate claim. While it is true that they certainly foster 'empowering situations,' it must be recognized that it is really left to the individuals and communities involved to transition into a 'situation of empowerment' and that this may not always be the case. In fact, an 'empowering situation' for one participant may be disempowering for another. I use the example of Fati and Coumba's experiences to illustrate this point.

Fati participated in the same program as Coumba and was provided with the same educational tools yet she felt the disempowering effects of regret and frustration that prevented her from achieving all four components of McWhirter's conditions for empowerment. This was mainly because her goals were different than Coumba's. While Fati did gain a valuable skill, she realized that it would not be enough to gain reasonable control over the life she *wanted* and did not and likely could not have (attending university). She also became more aware of the power dynamics at work in her life context because it became more obvious to her what contributed to her limitation--the fact that she was denied access to formal schooling because of her gender. It is important to recognize that an 'empowering situation' does not always lead to feelings of empowerment, especially when participants identify new aspirations and realize that they are out of reach. Without a feeling of empowerment, it is possibly more difficult to transition into 'a situation of empowerment'.

Coumba positioned herself in the empowerment process much differently than Fati mainly because she identified a different goal—one that she had the power to influence. In becoming an activist, Coumba also had experiences of regret when she came to believe that FGC was a harmful practice. When she accepted the logic of human rights she also regretted that she had exerted *power over* the girls she cut. Yet, she used this experience to not only act and build a movement, but also to find her *power from within*. This, according to Rowlands, is the key to empowerment because *power from within* is central to the "process that leads people to perceive themselves as able and entitled to make decisions (Rowlands, p. 14)."

Education is a powerful and complex tool. It is a relational situation between those who have information to share and those who receive and process that information. How this relationship is determined and structured can impact education's ability to produce empowerment. Giroux proposes the idea that radical education has the potential to liberate participants (including the teacher) from systems of oppression. Gramsci, on the other hand, discusses how education, especially in the colonial and post-colonial context, reinforces hegemonic relationships. Tostan education contains elements of both.

Tostan's pedagogy leans more toward the radical education Giroux promotes. Its CEP program encourages facilitators to allow participants to direct their learning and guide their own actions. An important aspect of radical education is that all actors involved in the educational process work toward the mission of making society more democratic (Giroux, p. 10). A truly democratic society is built only if all of the members feel they have the right to participate and that they are included in the decision-making processes. Respondents in my study report that they are participating more in decision-making and that Tostan has helped foster their abilities to communicate and solve problems. In addition, Tostan recognizes that empowerment is not simply a women's issue; it is a gender issue involving men and women. Rowlands, as does Tostan, emphasizes the importance of individual agency in the empowerment process and describes an empowered individual as one who "can interact with her surroundings and cause things to happen (Rowlands, p. 111)."

The CEP pedagogy is also clearly promoting a human rights ideology as a system of empowerment. If competing ideologies that exist in the community, such as religion,

contain ideas and practices that do not align with human rights, then challenging them or eliminating them is celebrated. While the human rights ideology may, in fact, prove beneficial to some of the participants and communities, it is also very beneficial to Tostan. The closer a community comes to demonstrating an understanding and acceptance of human rights as a correct model, the more successful Tostan deems itself (and sells itself) as an organization. In fact, Tostan very publicly celebrates communities that make public declarations to abandon FGC. Tostan, by association, also basks in the fanfare and subsequently receives more funding opportunities. Freire warns of this behavior in the following statement: "pedagogy which begins with the egoistic interests of the oppressors (an egoism cloaked in the false generosity of paternalism) and makes of the oppressed the objects of its humanitarianism, itself maintains and embodies oppression (Freire, p. 39)."

Tostan seems to be aware that basking in the light of a triumph, in the world of development, also comes with its own costs. According to Easton et. al., Tostans success has, indeed, attracted more donors as well as more funding from those donors who were already involved. However, these donors have, subsequently, had more say in how Tostan designs and targets its programs. At one point, donors asked Tostan to trim its program and focus on the four modules that would contribute to a more effective 'FGC strategy': human rights, problem-solving skills, community hygiene, and women's health. Rowlands explains how this type of focus and results-driven development can have a negative effect on programs that focus on empowerment. She claims that "funding tied to short-term 'projects' brings pressure for quick, clearly visible,

quantifiable results (Rowlands, p. 137)." The fear is that if certain objectives have not been met within a certain timeframe, the project could be deemed a disaster and funding might drop off. An alternative is to adopt, what she refers to as, an 'empowerment approach' to development that involves the participants themselves setting the agenda and managing the pace of change. In other words, sell the donors on empowerment rather than visible outcomes.

Freire would argue that it should *not* be the role of Tostan "to empower" its participants because this would imply that empowerment is something that Tostan is doing *to* its participants rather than *with* them. Freire clearly makes the claim that liberation, and by extension empowerment[19], is achieved through a "pedagogy which must be forged *with,* not *for,* the oppressed (Freire, p. 28)." The Tostan curriculum demonstrates that in many ways Tostan does work *with* the individuals and communities it engages. Most of the facilitators were, at one time, participants in the Tostan program and they understand that empowerment is a process. The participants are encouraged and allowed to shape the curriculum and create methods of engaging the material that involves the entire community. Yet, as an NGO that depends on funding from the West in order to exist, Tostan still uses some of the language of the oppressor[20] in order to gain support and enjoy their participants' progress as their own. By stating in their mission

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[19] Freire does not make any direct reference to empowerment. He does, however, focus on a similar concept which he terms *conscientization.* As does empowerment, *conscientization* focuses on individual developing an understanding of their circumstances and the social environment that leads to action.

[20] Freire would argue that, in a post-colonial context, organizations and ideas that spring from Western thought risk reifying the oppressive colonial structures (Freire, p. 28).

statement that it is their *mission* "to empower", Tostan is marked by its origin as a developer (because it must do something "to" a group or individual), trapped in the developmentalist discourse. In fact, as an NGO, Tostan's mere existence is forged from the prejudice that attracts funders: a lack of confidence in a people's ability to think, act and know (until they think, act and know like them).

CHAPTER V

EMPOWERMENT AS INDIVIDUALIZATION

According to Rowlands, empowerment means more than just inclusion and participation in decision-making; it also includes "the processes that lead people to perceive themselves as able and entitled to make decisions (Rowlands, p. 14)." This perception, although perhaps influenced by relational and collective forms of empowerment, is developed from a highly individualistic sense of self, capacity, and agency. It is these precise qualities that characterize the process of individualization. Tostan claims that it does not specifically focus on the psychological effects of empowerment on its participants. The program does, however, present human rights as a potentially empowering framework and most of these rights are inherently individualistic. The respondents report that learning about human rights has contributed to an increased awareness of their individualistic rights, goals, and sense of agency. They also report the significant role that literacy has played in developing an increased sense of self-worth and self-confidence. This chapter examines how the process of empowerment can create new opportunities for individualization. It also identifies some of the possible inhibiting factors that can create obstacles for individual empowerment, especially when increased individualization is met with resistance.

Reports and Analysis of Empowerment as Individualization

Rural women in Senegal typically have the fewest options for developing a sense of self and making individual choices. It is primarily the responsibility of women to build and maintain the household. This often means putting the needs of others before their own, especially if they aspire to be deemed successful and competent. Men, typically, lead the household and have the final say in decision-making; a woman might be able to influence a man's decisions are ultimately up to him. Women's household duties also take up a significant amount of their time, leaving little opportunity for them to pursue individual interests. It is not uncommon to see a girl as young as six years old left in charge of a younger sibling or baby while her mother is away gathering food or water. For girls, play, or what Bloch and Adler refer to as "play-work", is often embedded in the performance and completion of daily household chores and little time is dedicated to personal free time (Bloch and Adler, 1994). Service to others is so ingrained that it is likely challenging and foreign to develop an individualized sense of self without some form of self-actualization. In this study, the respondents report that participation in Tostan has helped them redefine their position in their communities and that this has resulted in a re-conceptualization of some of the internalized cultural expectations, such as dependency and lack of opportunity outside of the household.

One of the more predominant claims made by the respondents, was that they have a greater understanding of the value of increased self-reliance and autonomy (see Table 5.1). Oumy, a 38 year-old respondent in village D explained, "Tostan taught me that you must be able to make and demand choices for yourself and your children because it is

your right. We have a right to speak out, participate, and let our thoughts be heard." Her statement reiterates the effects that Tostan's rights-based pedagogy has had on her feelings of autonomy. She also explained how this contributed to her understanding of democracy. "If we do not all think for ourselves and let these thoughts be known," she stated, "then we cannot have a meaningful democracy."

Table 5.1 Frequency counts for major themes raised in interviews regarding empowerment as individualization

	Individualization means increased self-reliance and autonomy		**Individualization leads to more meaningful democracy (works toward collective goals)**		**Participation in Tostan has made me more autonomous**		**Individualization means having the right to bodily integrity**	
Village	Total # of respondents who mention	Total # of mentions	Total # of respondents who mention	Total # of mentions	Total # of respondents who mention	Total # of mentions	Total # of respondents who mention	Total # of Mentions
A	6	9	6	11	6	7	4	4
B	5	8	5	7	5	6	3	4
C	5	12	4	7	3	9	3	7
D	5	12	4	6	4	10	2	2
E	2	6	0	0	0	0	0	0
F	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	24	48	19	31	18	32	12	17

	Individualization means that women have the same rights as men		**Individualization sometimes works against collective goals**		**Individualization is met with resistance by family/community members**	
Village	Total # of respondents who mention	Total # of mentions	Total # of respondents who mention	Total # of mentions	Total # of respondents who mention	Total # of mentions
A	3	4	0	0	0	0
B	2	2	1	2	1	1
C	3	4	2	3	2	4
D	3	3	2	3	2	2
E	0	0	1	1	0	0
F	0	0	1	1	0	0
Total	11	13	7	10	5	7

Rowlands describes empowerment as a "circular interrelationship" where "participation in the group may feed the process of individual empowerment, and vice versa (Rowlands, pg. 115)." Many of the participants made similar claims as Oumy and reported that participation in Tostan and community decision-making contributed to their feelings of individual empowerment and sense of individualization. Coumba, a respondent first mentioned in the previous chapter, was particularly affected by her participation in the CMC in her village. "Being the president of the CMC has given me the confidence to participate in activities outside of my community," she stated. "I now travel to other communities to share my ideas and I have become very outspoken." This case demonstrates, like Rowlands' "circular interrelationship", how participation can help increase confidence and individual agency. Seynabou, a 52 year-old respondent, reported how her increased sense of individualization allowed her to participate and shape the decision to construct a community garden. "I am proud of the garden that we have because we decided to use my idea to sell some of the vegetables at the market. Now we can put the money we earned toward more initiatives."

Of the 32 mentions that "empowerment has made me more autonomous," 25 mentions from 15 of the respondents referred to literacy skills. Aissatou, a 36 year-old respondent, explained how it was difficult to be away from her husband, who emigrated often and had been away for nearly three years working various jobs in the Ivory Cost. Communication with her husband over the telephone was difficult because the nearest *telecentre* was nearly 2km away and her husband moved around frequently. The long distance fees were also quite expensive so Aissatou and her husband corresponded

mainly through letter writing. Before she participated in Tostan, Aissatou did not know how to read or write and she depended on a man in the market to read her the letters from her husband and write him back. Since gaining literacy skills from Tostan's program, she prided herself on being able to read and write these letters herself. "Now that I can read the letters myself and I can write back to him, I let him know what I am thinking and we can keep it private."

Literacy, itself, can be viewed as an instrument of psychological and social change (Goody, 1968; Oxenham, 1980). Literacy in early-modern Europe led to a rise of the notion of private space and with it, the individual (Cressy, 1980). Jack Goody theorizes that in a literate society, it is easier to avoid the dominant culture and cultivate individuality because reading and writing are normally solitary activities. In non-literate societies, this separation from the dominant culture is more difficult because "every social situation cannot but bring the individual into contact with the groups patterns of thought, feeling and action (Goody, p. 59)." In this example, Aissatou is no longer dependent on the man in the village, who likely benefited from a formal schooling that many girls are denied. Aissatou is able to overcome this dependency and, perhaps, escape some of the effects of the dominant patriarchal culture.

Moreover, the act of writing, according to Goody, "by objectifying words, and by making them and their meaning available for much more prolonged and intensive scrutiny than is possible orally, encourages private thought (Goody, p. 62)." Literacy, in this sense, has allowed Aissatou to become more self-reliant and this self-reliance has enabled her to communicate and connect with her husband in a more profound manner.

Literacy skills have also given Aissatou the self-confidence to compose and communicate private thoughts to her husband; thoughts that would have otherwise not been communicated. Whether or not this has been an empowering situation in her relationship with her husband remains unclear. What is clear, however, is that Aissatou's independence and self-confidence mark a clear point of entry for the process of empowerment to occur in her marriage.

Oxenham proposes that the skills of reading and writing are so transformative and essential to the development of humanity that they deserve to be considered universal human rights (1980). He supports this position by postulating that literacy, given the right conditions, can be used by people to transform first themselves as individuals and then society. This process resonates well with Rowlands conceptualization of empowerment; personal empowerment allows individuals to competently contribute to collective empowerment and transformation.

Aissatou also discussed how her literacy skills had helped her husband gain more confidence in her ability to manage the household while he was away. "Now he sends money for me to manage and he instructs me as to what actions he would like me to carry out in his name," She stated. "He has greater confidence in me to handle his affairs and he trusts me to make good decisions with the money he sends." She showed me a notebook where she kept a log of the family finances and discussed the house he wanted to have built. She explained that rather than keeping an account with a shop owner, he can rely on her. Although it is clear that Aissatou's husband makes the decisions about the money he sends, she is at least included in the process; an indicator that she is

experiencing more empowerment in her relationship with her husband. The fact that Aissatou could read and write allowed not only her, but also her family, to be more self-sufficient. This demonstrates that the transformative power of literacy that Oxenham describes above is potentially empowering for Aissatou and her husband.

Over half of the Tostan participants reported that they felt that women have the same rights as men, particularly in terms of participation in community decision-making. Several of the participants stated that they addressed the inequality that existed in their community by actively participating in village meetings. Oumy, in particular, described what this was like for her. "To speak out in front of a group of men was unheard of," she stated. "In the beginning, I was afraid to speak out and I felt very shy. Now I must have my voice heard because it is my responsibility." Rowlands claims that this level of participation is not possible without some degree of personal empowerment. She writes, "without empowerment at an individual level it is very hard for the individual to be active collectively. It is likewise very difficult for a group to become active and effective without some critical mass of individuals participating who have achieved a degree of personal empowerment (Rowlands, p. 115)."

Some of the respondents reported feeling frustrated by family constraints that prevented them from achieving personal goals or goals that they wanted for their children. Two of the respondents reported that they wanted their children to attend formal schooling but their husbands did not approve. "I want my daughter to go to school so that she can have more opportunities than I have had," stated Anta, a respondent in village B. "If my husband and I cannot agree, then he has the final say."

Fati, first mentioned in the previous chapter, stated, "My dream is to become a facilitator or a literacy teacher but my parents don't approve because they want me to get married." These comments suggest that power dynamics within family structures outweigh individual aspirations and can hinder individual empowerment as well as the process of individualization.

Several of the respondents expressed concern over certain aspects of individualization, particularly with regard to culture. In villages C and D, four of the respondents mentioned that there was opposition in their communities when talk of abandoning FGC and early/forced marriage were discussed. Coumba, in particular, discussed the opposition that she faced. "Many of the community members oppose the idea of abandoning FGC and early/forced marriage because they view it as positive for their daughters and families. They don't consider their daughter's right to bodily integrity if it means she cannot be married. In this situation, the integrity of the family is more important. There are many people upset with me for wanting to abandon this practice." This is not to say that Coumba, herself, has experienced a decline in individualization because of her advocacy work. However, it does demonstrate the concern she has for the individual rights of all the girls and women in her community if she is not successful in her mission.

Tostan and Empowerment as Individualization

Tostan claims that it is not as concerned with the individualistic psychological effects of empowerment as much as the structural, relational, and collective outcomes

that result from their program. However, it is perhaps at the individual level that Tostan makes the deepest and potentially significant impact. Rowlands argues that outside intervention is often necessary to ignite the process of empowerment and that Tostan could be considered what she refers to as a 'change agent.' Drawing on the respondent's reports of individual empowerment, Tostan appears to be a particularly effective change agent. Rowlands claims that an effective change agent is able to promote ideas and situations that allow individuals to develop self-confidence, self-esteem, and a sense of themselves as able to act in a wider sphere. According to this study, the majority of respondents felt a greater sense of autonomy and ability to work toward collective goals.

The area where some of the respondents seemed to struggle the most was in their attempt to actualize individual goals, especially the individual goals that they created as a result of their Tostan training. This reflects the reality that many of the participants are struggling to achieve empowerment within the structural power dynamics that exist because, more often than not, they present a barrier. It is difficult, then, to assess the sustainability of the positive effects of Tostan intervention. How long will self-confidence, self-esteem, and a sense of being able to act in a wider sphere last if personal aspirations are met with resistance?

The individual aspect of empowerment is likely the most fragile point at which there is the potential to experience disempowerment if an outlet is not created through which some of these structural barriers can be eliminated. Tostan is invested in fostering these outlets by encouraging collective decision-making, the establishment of a CMC,

and pedagogical partnerships with men and other non-participants. However, it must also be aware that the act of intervention can also lead to unintended disempowering effects.

CHAPTER VI

EMPOWERMENT AS PARTICIPATORY PROCESS

The act of participation is an important component of empowerment when it brings together individuals who possess or exercise the different forms of power that Rowlands refers to—*power over, power to, power with, and power from within*—because this is considered one of the most effective ways to have a truly transformative social experience. Tostan encourages men, women, adults and adolescents to participate in the collective empowerment process with the understanding that they are entering the process from different positions of power. In the villages where I conducted interviews, men typically enter the participatory process from a position of *power over* (in relation to women) whereas women enter the process from a position of relative powerlessness (in relation to men). In addition, male and female adults and elders typically have *power over* younger individuals.

Reports and Analysis of Empowerment as Participatory Process

From a gender analysis perspective, including men and women together in the decision-making process is essential. This is because community dialogue and decision-making that includes everyone allows the opportunity to address and confront power dynamics. This confrontation, if approached correctly, can lead to more favorable conditions of empowerment, such as mutual respect and viewing others as equals

(Kabeer, 1994; Longwe, 1998; Moser, 1993). The ultimate goal is to tamper gender specific power relations to the extent that empowerment can be emancipatory for men as well as women. In patriarchal societies, such as Senegal, such a goal may seem far off. Participation, however, may present a situation in which such an outcome can begin to unfold. Tostan promotes a human-rights based approach (HRBA) from the bottom-up so that individuals, particularly women, have a specific, meaningful framework from which to negotiate their position in relational and collective structures. The idea is that any movement toward equality will engender the qualities that contribute to durable and sustainable development.

The respondents in this study report that participation helped them negotiate access to resources, develop self-confidence and a sense of individual agency, and identify and address community problems. These results were mainly achieved through active participation in Tostan classes and community meetings, having one's voice count through voting and democratic processes, and involvement in collective development goals (see Table 6.1). They also report that aligning with a cause was an important aspect of participation. In village A, for example, five of the respondents mentioned that they felt very positive about the public declaration their village made to abandon child/forced marriage. In village C, three of the respondents mentioned that a vaccination campaign helped them feel as if they were part of the participatory process. Some of the respondents also reported that they thought participation was important because it was a way of demonstrating that they have equal rights as men to be involved in community decision-making.

Table 6.1 Frequency counts for major themes raised in interviews regarding empowerment as participatory process

	Participation means acting collectively to achieve development goals		**Participation means speaking out at public meetings**		**Participation has improved community building**		**Participation means voting and democracy**	
Village	Total # of respondents who mention	Total # of mentions	Total # of respondents who mention	Total # of mentions	Total # of respondents who mention	Total # of mentions	Total # of respondents who mention	Total # of Mentions
A	6	13	6	12	6	14	5	7
B	4	9	5	8	4	7	4	7
C	5	13	5	14	4	9	5	11
D	5	14	5	12	5	10	5	13
E	2	4	0	0	1	3	0	0
F	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	23	55	21	46	20	43	19	38

	Tostan program has influenced my decision to participate more in my community/region		**Participation means aligning with a cause**		**Participation is frustrating when it does not lead to individual gain**		**Participation means men and women have equal rights**	
Village	Total # of respondents who mention	Total # of mentions	Total # of respondents who mention	Total # of mentions	Total # of respondents who mention	Total # of mentions	Total # of respondents who mention	Total # of Mentions
A	6	9	5	10	2	4	2	4
B	4	7	3	7	1	2	1	1
C	4	13	3	9	2	6	1	3
D	5	8	2	4	0	0	1	2
E	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0
F	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	19	37	14	31	5	12	4	10

	Participation has increased community discord	
Village	Total # of respondents who mention	Total # of mentions
A	1	2
B	1	1
C	1	3
D	0	0
E	0	0
F	0	0
Total	3	6

Nearly all of the respondents reported that participation means working together to address development goals. Even the non-Tostan participants identified this as an important process. All of the Tostan participants, however, also identify speaking out at public meetings to be an important aspect of this process. According to Kieffer, speaking out at public meetings is considered a point of entry into the process of collective empowerment. Kieffer describes the participatory process as having four stages of "participatory competence"; the final stage resulting in a position to achieve collective empowerment. The four stages, which he describes as a transition from socio-political "infancy" into socio-political "adulthood" ultimately result in the ability to adapt recent empowerment to continuing community mobilization (Kieffer, pp. 18-25). Kieffer's framework is useful because it helps contextualize and locate many of the changes that most of my respondents report experiencing.

The first stage of participatory process and citizen empowerment that Kieffer refers to is the "Era of Entry" (pg. 18). During this stage participation is exploratory, unknowing and unsure and some individuals are first discovering their political power and potential for external impact. Most of the respondents had never spoken out in a structured group meeting in front of men or women prior to participating in the Tostan program. Many of them report feeling intimidated and unsure when they first began to participate. "I was not used to speaking out," reported Dieynaba, a 19-year old respondent from village A. "I was worried that I might not say the right thing. I did not want to appear ignorant." Fati, first mentioned in chapter 5, stated, "We had never spoken out in front of a group of men before and it was uncomfortable in the beginning. Now we

participate and speak out in the meetings." These reports indicate that the perception of power and non-confrontation are weakened as participants practice engagement. They do not reflect, however, the extent to which men included women in the decision-making. Participation alone does not determine the extent to which power dynamics shift, particularly between men and women (Moghadem, 2007).

Some studies have shown that power dynamics are often reinforced in participation and that even "deep" participation constitutes a form of power that has a dominating effect (Cooke and Kothari, 2001). Dieynaba admitted feeling more comfortable participating within her own peer group and claimed that her involvement in a female youth association was a particularly empowering experience. "I have gained confidence in my ability to communicate and solve problems. I was the president of the youth association when our village made the public declaration to abandon child/forced marriage. We spent a lot of time educating the community. I am very proud of this achievement and I felt like I helped to make it happen." The formation of peer groups is an important aspect of participation because Dieynaba may not have been able to experience the same ability to act in other participatory arenas. Power dynamics between older and younger women might have inhibited the younger participants from full participation. Kesby presents the idea that "participatory discourses and practices whose effects are empowerment must be seen as spatially embedded (Kesby, pg. 2038)." He claims that peer group participation can help participants feel that they are part of a collective, or possess Rowlands idea of *power with.* As an extension of this collective, other participatory arenas can be penetrated and social transformation can result.

Although creating separate spaces for participation may not initially challenge existing power structures, in this case it allowed peer-to-peer mobilization that did influence the overall social dynamics in this community.

Other reports indicate that most of the respondents experienced feelings of empowerment within gender-specific female spheres, indicating that gender divisions remain defined. Participation in this study seemed to mainly result in men and women participating side-by-side rather than together, at least in the initial stages. The respondents reported that many of the projects and initiatives they worked on dealt with activities that were already considered within the women's realm; village sanitation, vaccinating and registering their children, establishing gardens, etc. The women may have formally discussed these initiatives with the men in the village and the men may have let the women decide what to do because it did not ultimately challenge their authority.

Kieffer points out that an issue that holds deep meaning to those involved usually fuels the empowerment process. In village A, child/forced marriage became an issue that actively engaged the Tostan participants because it affected them personally. Men are also key decision-makers in marriage decisions and the women had to convince them that they wanted to change certain marriage practices that were considered a social norm. Human rights provided the framework to negotiate the change in behavior. The majority of respondents in village A reported ten mentions that aligning and fighting for this cause helped them feel influential and gave them a sense of *power to* and *power with.* Their

efforts resulted in one of the first public declarations in the Fouta to abandon a cultural practice.

Some of the respondents reported not always feeling empowered by the participatory process especially if participation did not result in change in their favor. For example, in village B, Tostan introduced a microcredit program to participants in their classes. It was the responsibility of the CMC to manage the $300 that Tostan provided. The money could either be divided up to give small $20 to $50 loans to ten women or it could be invested in one single community income-generating project. The CMC decided by majority vote that they would put all of the money toward a *robinet*[21] project. The idea was that they could generate money by charging a usage fee for the robinet and when the money was recuperated, they could invest in more projects. Khadija, a 49 year-old respondent and member of the CMC did not agree with the decision to invest all of the money in this particular project. She explained:

> I do not think it is fair to charge everyone a fee for water. We have two wells that we can use. One is centrally located and the other well is 2 km away. Installing the robinet on the centrally located well will mean that we can no longer draw water from it without paying a fee. This will force man women to walk further to get water if they do not have the money to pay. We voted to install the robinet so there is not much else I can do. This has been a frustrating experience for me.

This statement is informative for several reasons. First, it provides an example of a situation in which participation leads to a disempowering effect. Not only is the

[21] A *robinet* is a spigot that draws water from a well or other water source. It is especially important for women in rural Senegal because without it, women and girls typically devote hours of back breaking labor to pulling water up from wells or carrying it long distances.

respondent who was included in the decision-making process left frustrated but some of the women in the community who were left entirely out of the decision may suffer the consequences. Second, it demonstrates that some new power dynamics (as a sort of "power within the empowerment process") may have/or will emerge between those who participated in the Tostan classes and those who did not. From Khadija's account, it appears as if the majority of the women in the community were not included in this decision. The decision-makers, by virtue of their participation in Tostan or other factors that allow them to take a leadership role, now possess *power over* other members of their peer group. Rowlands presents this as a possibility when a particular group emerges that may prioritize their own agenda (pg. 126). In this example, some of the Tostan participants agreed, from their new "advantaged" status to install a project that would ultimately be self-serving since the money would be going back in to a poll to use to steer their own projects. Third, women who were not able to participate in the Tostan program are further marginalized. Batilawa proposes that participation can lead to increased burdens for those individuals who enter the empowerment process from the most disempowered positions (pg.7). Khadija clearly considers this possibility as well as the possibility that it will also adversely affect many of the women who did not even enter the participatory process.

Tostan and Empowerment as Participatory Process

Tostan emphasizes collective empowerment above individual and relational empowerment. For the most part, this seems to lead to positive situations of

empowerment for the majority of the respondents. However, Tostan's intervention as a "change agent" may be problematic for several reasons.

First, men don't participate in the Tostan classes. This seems to be the arena in which the "change agent" has the most influence because participants are able to practice participation in the classes with a trained facilitator. Instead, the women are expected to enter the men's participatory sphere. However, the respondents do not report having much influence in this sphere other than reporting on their own progress and initiatives. Many of the collective decisions that the respondents deem important are female oriented and may not challenge the existing power structures between men and women.

Second, the fact that men don't participate in the Tostan classes but allow the women to participate publicly alongside them may indicate that they don't see themselves as part of the program. They may just tolerate the women's participation because they want to impress Tostan in order to gain access to more resources. If anything, it also gives them more power to influence the collective decisions made by the women and to monitor their activities. The respondent's, on the other hand, did not report influencing major decisions in the male sphere other than forced/child marriage, an issue that predominantly affects women.

Third, women in the Tostan classes are likely the most empowered by the program. The fact that they are provided with the skills and opportunities to make decisions can place them in positions of *power over* non-participants. In addition, those who participate in the program may not represent the most disempowered in the community because they have time to participate. Other women who were burdened by a

greater workload and could not fit in time for the classes, or who were prevented from attending by a family member are further marginalized.

CHAPTER VII

EMPOWERMENT AS ACCESS TO RESOURCES

Many development theorists and analysts agree that economically and socially disadvantaged people lack resources and therefore lack power—that the two conditions are intrinsically linked (UNDP). This diagnosis has informed much of the past and current thinking on economic policies and aid programs that are designed to reduce global poverty. Unfortunately, economic development programs have not changed conditions of poverty very much in the third world (Isbister, 2006). As a response, Tostan approaches economic aid and development from a holistic perspective that is more like the sustainable livelihoods approach (SLA), made popular in the 1990's (Singh and Titi, 1993, 1995). Tostan's pedagogy and rhetoric focuses on helping individuals and communities achieve empowered states so hat they will ultimately be able to negotiate and access resources on their own.

From a theoretical perspective, Tostan acknowledges that development is a dynamic process and that people may adopt many different and unique strategies to secure their resources and livelihoods. In practice, Tostan facilitators are trained to *not* provide specific solutions to people and communities (that may not even work in each context) but, rather, to offer tools (such as problem-solving, democracy, finance and

literacy) that individuals and communities can choose to use to improve their conditions. In rural Senegal, the constraints that individuals and communities most often face are socio-political, structural, financial, and environmental.

Reports and Analysis of Empowerment as Access to Resources

Accessing resources such as food and water, housing, and healthcare was a concern for the majority of respondents. It was also an area where most of the respondents expressed some form of frustration and difficulty, especially in terms of empowerment. Many of the respondents reported that they were not able to access all of the resources that they needed on their own. They reported that family, government, and NGO's were also necessary for providing the most needed resources. In village A, water is drawn from a well built by an NGO and the children attend school in a building constructed by Plan Intenational. The government recently paved the road that runs near the village cutting down the travel time to Dakar by hours and making the interior of the Fouta more accessible. Some of the respondents reported that the environment limited their ability to secure resources because water was in short supply. In village C, in particular, the well was located 3km from the village and the women spent a large part of their day gathering water. The means to be able to access and secure resources relates directly to empowerment and there are some notable trends reported by the respondents (see Table 7.1).

Table 7.1 Frequency counts for major themes raised in interviews regarding empowerment as access to resources

	Access to financial capital directly improves quality of life		**Emigration for self/family member is the best path for securing resources**		**NGO's and/or Government need to provide resources**		**Local communities and individuals are responsible for securing resources**	
Village	Total # of respondents who mention	Total # of mentions	Total # of respondents who mention	Total # of mentions	Total # of respondents who mention	Total # of mentions	Total # of respondents who mention	Total # of Mentions
A	6	9	4	7	4	8	4	6
B	4	7	4	9	3	6	3	3
C	5	11	4	7	2	4	4	11
D	4	5	4	7	3	9	2	4
E	2	4	2	3	1	2	1	2
F	2	3	2	2	1	2	1	1
Total	**23**	**39**	**20**	**35**	**14**	**31**	**15**	**27**

	Microcredit seems promising and helpful and I would participate		**Lack of water resources leads to limited local development**		**Tostan program will/does lead to an increase in other NGO activity**		**Limited access to healthcare a major barrier to achieving goals**	
Village	Total # of respondents who mention	Total # of mentions	Total # of respondents who mention	Total # of mentions	Total # of respondents who mention	Total # of mentions	Total # of respondents who mention	Total # of Mentions
A	5	7	3	4	3	5	2	5
B	4	5	2	3	2	2	2	3
C	4	6	4	11	1	3	2	4
D	4	4	1	1	3	6	1	2
E	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	0
F	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	1
Total	**18**	**23**	**11**	**20**	**10**	**17**	**8**	**15**

	Microcredit will not help solve most of my problems and I would not participate	
Village	Total # of respondents who mention	Total # of mentions
A	1	3
B	1	1
C	1	2
D	1	1
E	0	0
F	0	0
Total	**4**	**7**

The first point of interest is that the majority of respondents reported that they were concerned with accessing financial capital, holding the belief that it would allow them to have a better quality life. Surrounding this claim is the fact that many respondents also reported that they viewed emigration as one of the best ways to secure financial capital. When talking about emigration, 19 of the respondents referred to a male family member going abroad, two referred to themselves and two referred to a daughter. Of the total number of respondents, 12 had male relatives sending them remittances. Also interesting is the fact that the respondents made more mentions of the need for government and NGO assistance, rather than sourcing responsibility at the community level. They also reported that they were hopeful that their Tostan participation would lead to an increase in NGO intervention.

These data indicate that the respondents do not have a fully self-sufficient view of their community. They place a great deal of emphasis on emigration remittance and NGO activity as forming the basis for economic opportunity and meeting needs. This suggests that the respondents base their empowerment strategy on dependence, either on a male family member or an outside agent. According to the literature this could actually have a disempowering effect (Kabeer, 2001; Rowlands, 1997). From a community standpoint, building capital from a remittance economy allows many men and women in the community to be more self-sufficient, depend less on aid, and make material gains. However, it is largely men who hold this power as women depend on them for money. Emigration, in particular, can have the added effect of disrupting social and family structures.

The second point of interest is that nearly one-third of the respondents reported that a lack of healthcare is a major barrier to achieving their goals. Mariam, a 48 year-old married woman in village D, explained how various factors influenced her ability to access healthcare. "One of the main obstacles that I face," Mariam stated, " is that I am not in good health and we do not have a healthcare center. For every one month I have where I don't feel sick, I have four where I am sick." She explained that her village had discussed bringing a health center but that they were not able to agree on the best course of action. This was frustrating for her. "I have to travel over 45 km and it is not easy to travel such a distance." When I asked her what she thought she would do if she felt better she stated, "I would probably involve myself in a village association and be more active in making community decisions. I am interested in vaccinations and promoting health in our community." This led me to ask why she thought there was disagreement about the health center since it seemed like it would be very beneficial to everyone. The main reason was not financial, an assumption that an outside NGO or foreigner (like myself) might easily assume. The reason, rather, was cultural. "Many of the men in our community are opposed to having a health center because they don't like the idea of male doctors examining women here. She added, "My husband allows me to travel to the hospital but some husbands don't even allow that." When I asked her what she thought would be a good solution to this problem, she stated matter-of-factly, "Through education, the men will see that better health will make our community stronger and more productive. They will eventually agree."

Mariam's experience is interesting in terms of empowerment. Again, using Rowlands framework, Mariam has a sense of *power to*, in that she recognizes that she could make a valuable contribution to decision-making and advocating for her needs. However, she can't fully actualize this potential because of her health condition. Paul Farmer would likely position Mariam's struggle within what he terms "structural violence." This is where structural systems in the private and public sector contribute to human rights abuses. He links structural violence to public health struggles across the globe. In this case, Mariam is struggling to access essential healthcare because she exists in a patriarchal system that denies women certain rights by placing control over their bodies. Since the obstacle to having a health center is not financial, the claim can be made that Mariam is being denied her right to health. "Rights violations not accidents;" Farmer writes, "they are not random in distribution or effect. Rights violations are, rather, symptoms of deeper pathologies of power and are linked intimately to the social conditions that so often undermine who will suffer abuses and who will be shielded from harm."

The upside is that Mariam has received training from Tostan that appears to give her hope. She is in the process of empowering herself as to how to approach obstacles with an awareness of her own agency. She appears confident that she can help change the structure that not only prevents her, other women, and children from accessing healthcare, but men as well. If only she weren't so sick. Unfortunately, her dilemma likely affects her ability to advocate for a personal and community need that should would be in a good, maybe even better than many in her community, position to express.

Her illness may not allow her to have the opportunity to experience the *power with* aspect of empowerment in this particular situation, despite her feeling of agency. This situation exposes the often very complex interplay of power dynamics within the process of empowerment and how it can affect one's ability to negotiate access to essential resources.

The third point of interest involves economic self-sufficiency as a path to empowerment. Nearly two-thirds of the respondents expressed an interest in microcredit. Of these respondents none had actually participated in a microcredit program. On a particularly hot day of interviewing, Awa, one of the younger respondents in village A, entered the mud hut where I was conducting interviews and offered me a small plastic sack filled with *bissap*, a popular refreshing drink made from steeped hibiscus flowers and sugar. Thankful for the refreshment, I asked her what she thought she had gained from her Tostan education. "My hopes for myself are that I can get involved in commercialization—have a small business so that I can earn some money. With this money, I would be sure to satisfy my needs and the needs of my children." Then she added, smiling, "I already sell the bissap that I make, here in the village, but I don't make much money from it—just enough to buy more ingredients." I asked her if she knew anything about microcredit. "Yes," she said, "but we have not yet had a microcredit program but I would like to participate if I have the opportunity." I asked her if she thought that she could start a small business without the help of a microcredit loan. "It would be very difficult," she said, "but I pray to God everyday that I will be able to achieve my goals."

In the same community, I interviewed Fama, a respondent about ten years older than Awa. She was in a different situation than Awa in that she benefited from monthly remittances from her husband, who lived in France. She lived, along with her four children and numerous extended family members, in one of the several cement homes seemed to all be under various stages of construction. This building was considered a more desirable structure than the mud huts, like the one Awa lived in, that were scattered throughout the rest of the village. It was also an indicator that Fama existed in a better economic situation than Awa. Power lines ran into her home and a group of about 30 men and boys were gathered around a large television watching a soccer match, more indicators of her higher economic status.

I asked Fama if her husband sent her enough money for her to take care of her needs and the needs of the household. She stated, "I am able to feed my family but sometimes I don't receive money for two or three months and things are difficult." I was curious how she supported herself when there was no money coming in, so I asked her if she had ever used any of the money her husband sent to her to start her own business. "We did have some initiatives," she stated. "For example, when my husband was home visiting he bought a millet grinder for everyone in the community to use for a fee. Everyone liked the millet grinder but many did not want to pay to use it. They felt that they should be able to use it for free since my husband was working in France. I also think that some people were jealous. My husband gave it to his brother who has a shop in town so we no longer keep it here." I asked her if someday she would like to run her own business or participate in a microcredit program. "No," she stated, "it is difficult to

have a business here because of jealousies. We still need to learn to be supportive of each other."

The differences between these two accounts are significant because of a key element that sheds light on the complex intricacies of empowerment: agency. First, both of the women are connected to a sense of *power to* but in very different ways. Awa felt connected to a *power to* generate income on her own, especially if provided with a microcredit loan. She seemed to have a sense that she would be able to handle a small business and would feel liberated from the life of poverty that made daily life a struggle. Fama's experience with *power to* was somewhat different. She possessed the *power to* obtain the things she needed to live a more comfortable life. She lived a life of entitlement, compared to Awa, but she was dependant on someone else for these entitlements and, consequently, also lived a life of relative complacency. She did not possess the same *power to* that Awa possessed, that could drive her to use her own agency to achieve individual empowerment. Who, then, is likely to become more empowered?

Malhotra and Schuler are strong proponents of the view that the *origins of empowerment* are an important aspect of the process of empowerment. In this sense, empowerment is said to have occurred if it results from the agency of the person who feels empowered. "If a woman works hard and saves enough to buy a cow," they write, "she feels more competent and has more assets; she is empowered. If she inherits a cow or receives a gift of a cow because of her social relationships, she may be wealthier, but is she empowered? (Malhotra and Schuler, pg. 22)" They argue that she would not

because one must use their own agency to achieve a more empowered state, like the *power within* that Rowlands describes. In this sense, microcredit could also be considered a point of origin for empowerment because it requires that individuals use their own agency to achieve success. Theoretically speaking, then, Awa is in a better position to enter a more meaningful process of empowerment while Fama is more likely held back by dependency.

Tostan and Empowerment as Access to Resources

As an outside NGO, Tostan is in a structural position of power over the communities it serves, particularly in terms of access to resources. This is indicated by the fact that the respondents made more mentions that the government and/or NGO's need to provide resources than that resources should be sourced from within the community. The long legacy of colonialism, development, and dependency has likely created this dynamic. It does seem, however, that Tostan is working toward breaking this dynamic. One way they are doing this is by requiring that communities contribute resources, such as a classroom and desks, in order to receive the Tostan program. Their goal is to work *with* communities as much as possible and treat communities as partners in development. However, one situation in village B highlights the tenuousness of such a goal and underscores the underlying power dynamic of the 'developer' and 'recipient.'

As the program in village B was nearing an end, Tostan provided the CMC with approximately $500 that they could use to design and manage a community project. Tostan provides seed money so that CMC's can learn to steer and manage projects using

the problem-solving, democracy and finance skills that the Tostan participants learn in their classes. The CMC voted to put all of the money toward the purchase of a millet grinder. This grinder could be used by everyone in the community for a small fee, which would get pooled back into the CMC fund and could be used for another project. Unfortunately, the project was a failure. From the start, tensions began to arise between women who had participated in the Tostan program and those who had not. Some of the women who had not participated accused the Tostan participants of keeping the fees for themselves and not paying to use the grinder. The women continued arguing until the village chief decided to lock up the millet grinder so that nobody could use it. At the time I was in the village, it had been locked up for over a year.

Although Tostan was not directly involved in this dispute, they did help to create the dichotomy that led to the build-up of tension. First, by directly providing some women with tools and not others and second, by providing the CMC, a committee they helped design, with money. Rowlands discusses *power within the empowerment process* and explains that it is possible that increased *power over* could be exercised as a result of empowerment training. She writes, "armed with an increased ability to learn, analyse, and act could be used by an individual or group to dominate another individual or group and prioritize their own agenda (Rowlands, pg.126)." It is not clear if this is exactly the case here, but some of the non-Tostan participants did hold the perception that the Tostan participants were granted more power than them. They also inferred that the Tostan participants were using this power against them. It is also important to note that several studies report increasing accounts of the disempowering effects that seeding projects and

microcredit can place on social relations (Goetz and Sen Gupta, 1996; Montgomery et al., 1996; Rahman, 1999).

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSIONS

This thesis has served to address the complex nature of empowerment and its useful application in development policy and practice. The background literature reveals that using empowerment as a tool to alleviate poverty, reduce inequality and transform societies remains ill-conceived and lacks a uniform approach. The literature also reveals that an empowerment only approach relies too much on agency and not enough on structure. However, empowerment as a process and more significantly, as an ideal, is emphasized less by Tostan and more in the literature. Tostan approaches empowerment from an instrumentalist perspective and is more interested in facilitating 'empowering situations', rather than claiming that their program leads to a 'situation of empowerment'. Consequently, an evaluation of Tostan's use of empowerment as a development tool reveals both intended and unintended outcomes, particularly when examined in the wider context of empowerment as a process—a process that, theoretically, leads to equality.

The Tostan approach to empowerment incorporates aspects of agency and structure. For example, Participants were not only taught how to manage and generate financial resources , they were also taught how to create a structure (the CMC) that could support their goals. However, the respondents did not report feeling particularly

empowered economically as a result. Rather, the allocation of money into the CMC seemed to contribute more to feelings of disempowerment because it either led to a failed project (due to resistance) or created divisions between the Tostan participants and non-participants. This indicates that Tostan's counterpart system does not fully incorporate the entire community into its participatory process. This study demonstrated that in some situations, the Tostan participants even developed *power over* some of the non-participants.

At the time this study was conducted, there was very little follow-up activity from Tostan after their 30-month program. This was evidenced by the fact that the CMC's in the villages where I conducted interviews, were not very active. This would have warranted a criticism but Tostan has recently addressed this problem and CMC networks have been established to ensure that a supportive structure for managing community projects continues after the Tostan program is complete. The regional networks meet quarterly and exchange effective ideas and practices.

Empowerment is a process that can possibly work as a development practice if NGO's position themselves as an integral part of the process (rather than a neutral change agent, which seems to present a false dichotomy). Empowerment is, after all, a process that involves restructuring existing systems of power so that *power over* can give way to *power to, power with,* and *power from within.* Tostan must recognize that, as an outside NGO, *power over* is implicit in its relationships with the communities it serves. In fact, many of the participants enter into a relationship with Tostan from an overarching perception of ignorance, both on the part of the individual who desires to be less ignorant

and on the part of the organization that seeks to educate. Ignorance, in many rural Senegalese communities is tied to youth and inexperience. It is the elders who impart wisdom and knowledge. While this is likely still true, Tostan's presence possibly displaces indigenous systems of knowledge and brings ignorance outside of the local scale and into a global system that has labeled the entire community as ignorant or deficient in some way.

The respondents, however, report that they appreciate the knowledge that they have gained from Tostan. Irregardless of whether or not their desire to read and write is generated as a result of the discursive trappings of modernity—the majority of respondents reported feeling empowered. They felt proud to be able to read and write and felt that it opened up opportunities. Recently, Tostan has used technology to expand these capabilities by introducing SMS texting. The texting allows the participants to practice and develop their literacy skills, form networks outside of their community and communicate with relatives living abroad.

The expansion of participation is particularly relevant to the progress of development in the Fouta and the success of Tostan. The diaspora, largely excluded from the participatory aspects of the Tostan program play a significant role in the empowerment process. Tostan has recognized this significance and recently set up an office in France to work with the diaspora and incorporate them into their program. This is particularly relevant if public declarations, which should ideally come from a consensus of everyone involved in the community, will have a greater impact.

Tostan appears to be using its power as a NGO thoughtfully and deliberately. It learns from its mistakes and it facilitates new and exciting possibilities for participation. This is not to say that there have not been conflicts and that their intervention has not led to situations of disempowerment. There have. This, however, seems to all be part of the process of empowerment and as long as Tostan is able to remain flexible and respond to the conflicts, as it has been, it can remain a model for positive development.

APPENDIX

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

(Adapted questions for non-Tostan participants in parentheses)

1. What are your main responsibilities in your family?
2. What are your main responsibilities in your community?
3. What activities do you enjoy doing? Not enjoy?
4. What are you most proud of in your life?
5. What are you most proud of in your community?
6. Who are you most proud of?
7. What opportunities do you have in your community?
8. What opportunities do you have outside of your community?
9. Do you participate in family decision-making? Explain.
10. Do you participate in community decision-making? Explain.
11. What are your goals for yourself?
12. What are your goals for your family?
13. What are your goals for your community?
14. Is there anything that prevents you from achieving your goals? Family? Community? Explain
15. What is helping/would help these goals be met?
16. How are you able to meet your needs?
17. Do you experience any limitations meeting your needs? Explain.
18. What influences your quality of life?
19. Why did you participate in the Tostan program? (Why would you participate in the Tostan program?)
20. How has your participation in Tostan impacted your life? (How do you think Tostan participation would impact your life?)
21. What is the most important lesson you learned from Tostan? (What do you think you would learn from Tostan?)
22. How long did it take for Tostan to have an impact on your life? (How long do you think it would take for Tostan to make an impact in your life?)
23. What ideas or knowledge do you have now that you did not have before participating in Tostan? (What ideas or knowledge would you want to learn from Tostan?)
24. How has Tostan affected you personally? (How might Tostan affect you personally?)
25. How has Tostan affected your family (How might Tostan affect your family?)

26. How has Tostan affected your community? (How might Tostan affect your community?)
27. Describe a project in your community. Did you participate? Was it successful?
28. What projects, if any, would help you and your community?
29. What is microcredit?
30. Would you participate in a microcredit project? Why or why not?

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