I think it’s time to get started and I’m just so delighted that I’m able to introduce Molly Melching of Tostan, the founder and director of the Senegal based NGO. She’s not often in Seattle I’m delighted to say that her sister lives here and so she comes here sometimes and so today she will be talking with us about the power of human rights in transforming communities to decide to improve women and children’s health. It’s really an amazing story. Specifically the amazing story is about community decisions to eliminate female genital cutting and forced child marriage and the empowerment of communities to make their own decisions which is based on human rights principles and knowledge.

I first learned about Tostan when I was on the East coast working on child survival projects that were US aid funded projects and I learned about Molly doing working Senegal. She started working there in 1974 and in fact, started working more and more with human rights, I guess, over the last twenty years, maybe even before that. Molly and Tostan have been recognized for ground breaking educational programs. They have worked in more than forty-five hundred communities in Senegal, Guinea, Gambia, Somalia, and Burkina Faso, as well as some other countries Djibouti, now, Mali, Mauritania, Somalia, and Sudan. They’ve been recognized in Mali specifically received the Humanitarian Alumni award from the University of Illinois at Verbena, Champagne in 1999. The Sargeant Triver Distinguished Award for Humanitarian Service in 2002 and Sweden’s Anna Lindh Award for Tostan’s work in human rights in 2005. And that’s not the end of the list in 2007 Tostan won the Conrad Hilton Humanitarian Prize, the largest and most prestigious award in the humanitarian field. They have also been featured in Half the Sky by Nicholas Christoph and Sheryl WuDunn and they have won the Skoll Foundation Award for Social Entrepreneurship in 2010. So without further ado, I will stop talking and present Molly Melching and thank you so much for coming.

Molly Melching

Thank you so much all of you for coming I see a lot of friends and other people don’t know but I’m happy to meet. I am here to actually visit my sister but I have been able to speak in several classes and meet some other people here in Seattle, so it’s always a great pleasure for me to be here in Seattle with people like Batina, who has done a lot of work in the field and supported or work as well as my sister come to Senegal and really look and understand what’s happening in the field and inform us in how to better move forward. Today, I thought that it would be fun to do this presentation by taking you all back. I’m sure you’re all wondering what this first image is, well this is the cart you’re all going to get on so that we can ride to the village of Sunjan. Sunjan is a village in Senegal, in the middle of Senegal. It resembles many other villages in Senegal, it’s a poor village with no electricity, no running water. And fifteen years ago, there was no health service in this community. There was one room for the school and this was a village where women did not work. They did all of the work in the community for their family and their husbands, the husband s worked in the fields with the woman but in the dry season would go off looking for work in towns.
And I thought it would be interesting for you to look at the life of one of our participants and I chose Marian Bamba, she is one woman but she represents many women the program not only in Senegal but as Beth said, The Gambia, Mauritania, Mali, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea, Somalia and, Djibouti, where we are now working. Mariam Bamba fifteen years ago was like many women in her community. She’s a happy wonderful woman but to really understand her we need to look at many, many more of the people in her society. In other words, we cannot look at her as an individual, but rather as a member of a society that has a specific role and like all of the women in not only in her community. If this is her community, let’s say, the people who affect how she is and what she does and what she believes and how she acts, they all live in these other communities and they’re all interconnected through family ties, through ethnicity, and through a history, their ancestors were all connected and then probably spread out, intermarried and yet to this day they still meet for different reasons, for baptisms, for deaths, for marriages, and also for religious reasons. And so Mariam, we have to understand like every other woman fifteen years before we began the program in that community, the girls did not go to school, almost no one in the community had been to school, they were just taught to fulfill their roles in an agricultural society they all worked in the field alongside their husbands. They all went through the practice of female genital cutting around eight years old because it’s a Bambara village and very influenced by the Malian Bambara group where female genital cutting is practiced at a very high prevalence. Often married at twelve and fifteen, Mariam herself was married at fifteen. They have children, of course cook, clean, gather wood, fetch water, rarely travel and Mariam never participated in any kind of public decision making. And when she had health problems, like eighty percent of the Senegalese population, she went to a traditional Margo, a religious leader, to get blessings, to get an amulet to protect her child from evil spirits often much more than people would go to a doctor or a health center. At least they would go there first and then if they had no success, they might go to the health center. And then Mariam participated in a class like this. The Tostan education program came to their village and we organized classes like we do in all the communities where we work. It’s a non-formal education program. It’s very different formal as school as you can see. People sit in a circle. People dialogue there are men, there are women and the whole first year is oral tradition. It’s the oral tradition so that people can do what they do best in these communities, and that is dialogue and discuss and talk about issues that are so critical in their community often that they have never talked about before and they all say this, that one of the first impacts of the program was that they knew all these people, these neighbors but they had never sat down and really discussed important issues and problems in the community and thought about their community in terms of looking at what they wanted for the future of their community what their vision was for five years from now or ten years from now and this was facilitated by the methods that we used, we started with the program. It came out of an experience when I lived in a community for four years in a small village, it’s not the same one, it’s a different one, but when I went to Senegal I was actually, I didn’t start working Beth, I wasn’t that old yet. I was a student at the university, it’s okay, I’ve been there thirty-six years, so now I have to start saying that I was five years old when I went or I have to just say that I’ve been there over 30 years, but I did live in a community for 3-4 years and working with the community I realized that to be able to give them the information that they needed to know to make their own decisions, it wouldn’t work to set up a school where people were in these little what they call les tables bane, where they’re like children scrunched behind these seats in a row and there’s a teacher who knows everything and it was just so unlike what they were used to, the women what they loved to do which was to sing and dance, and to do poetry and theater, to work together to talk together. And we really in Tostan, we were a team of three working in that community, I was with an oral traditionalist, a traditional communicator, a brio as we say and an artist and we really looked at what excited people, what made them want to come to class at night when they came home from the fields when there were tired, and what would get them really motivated about coming to class three times a week for two to three hours and it turns out it’s just simply using the things they know already and they love and putting information in that poetry and putting it in the theater, using their
own proverbs to discuss new issues that came up. And here you see a small group discussion, sometimes, we have a play and one of the findings I think, of Diane’s research recently when we filmed these classes over a period of time was that these small group discussions really helped women to speak out for the first time. At the beginning of the classes, they could hardly say a word or I have literally seen people just shaking like this, but after two months in the class because of the rehearsal in the groups and before others and together in small groups, they were able to then to finally stand up and express their ideas and to really publicly participate for the first time and the first part of the program, I thought I’d tell you just a little bit about the program that Mariam Bamba went through. The first part is dedicated to teaching about democracy, human rights, problem solving and health and we do this by first asking the community to think about where they want to be for the future, what does that involve what are the things that are important that they do not want to lose and that then they would like to add to their community, they need a health service center and if they need education, if they want more classrooms, if they want more economic opportunity. If they need more water, or they need a well or they look at what some of the most important needs are of the community and where they’d like to be in five years, and then we look at democracy how they’re going to organize. We don’t go in and teach democracy as much, this is what democracy is, we let people explore this for themselves. We send them off to an island where they have to set up their own society and out of that exercise, people come to a conclusion that they want to live in a certain way and be organized in a certain way and it just turns out that those are some of the fundamental elements of a democratic society and from that we look at some of the guiding principles and from that we pull out the human rights to the human right to peace and security, for example and the human right to health for men, women, and children. People always ask me, okay this sounds like a great program, was it always successful, didn’t you make any mistakes. And I always say, we make every single mistake we could possibly make, but we learn from our mistakes. But the people at Tostan, there are about 1300 people at Tostan now 99% of which are African, but I think all of us have the same spirit, it’s okay to make mistakes, just recognize them and learn them. Share the mistakes with others and what we did to improve that. We started with women’s right and can you guess what happened when we started working on women’s rights in Senegal, and Sudan, and Mali, can you guess anybody? When we started doing modules on women’s rights in the classes? What happened when we did this?

Audience

The men were probably outraged.

Melching

Yeah they were outrages and shouted what are you doing women’s rights for? We even did children’s rights at one point and the parents were like what about our rights ad parents? So what we learned from that was the best way to get everybody on board was to do people’s rights and human rights. And we started doing human rights in 1996 after we had done participatory with the women in a women’s health module. We learned from that research that we couldn’t talk about health without talking about human rights because even if women learned the information they needed, they couldn’t possibly use or apply this information if they didn’t know they had the rights to do that and then learning about responsibilities was really important because after we talked about what your right is, then what is your responsibility, the mothers started okay, we have a responsibility to our family to take our children in when they are sick. We have a responsibility to make sure our daughters are in the best health. We need to re think about some of the practices. They started this on their own. They started coming up and discussing and dialoguing about some of the things that they were doing that maybe were causing their daughters to have problems, specifically I think of Lala Balde, I asked her she was one of the first declarations for ending FGC, and I said, ’when was the moment to end female genital cutting for your daughter?’ And she said,
‘oh, it was when we did the human right to health and my poor little daughter is nine years old and she has to go to the gynecologist all the time and I thought I am responsible, I did that and I thought, now let’s make sure that no other daughter will have to go through and that she is going through to this day because she had that done to her and I feel a bit guilty.’ A lot of women will say this, too that the human right to health, responsibility, the human right to be free from all discrimination interestingly enough because female genital cutting means that you can only marry within a certain ethnic group that has done the same practice as you and when’Worry Sow told me that when her son cam and said he wanted to marry a Wolof girl, she said, ‘absolutely not she is a girl who has not gone through the tradition, she will not be able to serve food to others, she will not be able to serve water, she will have no respect in our community. You cannot marry someone who has not gone through our tradition and thank heavens she ended GFC, I finally allowed my son to marry a Wolof woman. He was very happy when we abandoned the practice.’ So that whole first year, then they go on to learn hygiene and health and human rights and organizing and problem solving. There’s a whole module on problem solving. How we can organize to overcome human rights violations other problems. In one of our communities I was saying in her class yesterday, we just got a report saying that they have built a bridge, during the rainy season there was water running through the community and people had to walk around to get to the other side and so the community go t together and said, ‘we can do it.’ They have been asking the government to do it for ten years they didn’t do it. We’ve been saying we need this we then realized we can do this on our own. So are all kinds of things that come out from these modules. And the second part of the program is called Aawde and that is a Pulani word that means to plant the seed. The Kobi, is a Mandeca word it means to prepare the field for planting. And the second part is the Aawde, a Pular word and, Tostan do you know what Tostan means? I don’t know if you know what Tostan is a Wolof word [African Term]. Many Wolof people do not know what Tostan is.

Audience

Actually I didn’t know until I read the flyer.

Melching

Well, I’ll tell you it’s a hatching of an egg. [African Term] It’s a deep word that is like the hatching of the egg and then the egg hatches and the hen grows and hatches another egg and it’s the idea of spreading. It was given to me by my professor, [inaudible] who loved that word he said it is a very meaningful in Africa because it’s when people themselves are spreading the knowledge that we will have real development in Africa. So they learn to read and write, they learn to project management, they learn to do a feasibility study and we now have a new part to the program, but at the time, Mariam went through this whole program and together she and her village started meeting being part of the decision making instance of the community, participating much more than ever before they started working on organizing health commission in each community we organize a management committee with seventeen people that acts as a liaison between the class and the community and is the stability of the program because all of these human management committees have now become registered CBOs, Community Based Organizations and we’ve had fifty-eight of these CBO’s receive projects funding directly through the CBO, not through Tostan, but from the committee itself. So this is a really important element of the program and these CBO’s they in federate with others in the area, the people they trust with their interconnected community and the federations have even bigger projects and they work on zonal problems and have gone through the same program so they are all on sort of the same wavelength of human rights and responsibilities and possibilities for projects and so it’s quite exciting to see what they are doing now, they organize vaccination campaigns and they have led many campaigns also to end child marriage which can be a problem in Gambia and Senegal and Gambia and Guinea-Bissau, where we work. The communities then do bread baking activities, the women started when they saw there was a need,
they said why should we be buying bread every day in the city in Chess let’s make our own bread and sell it to the twenty surrounding villages and so now they’re making quite a bit of money selling. And it’s very good too. And this is an environmental project that we do, we do this in almost every community, the adaptive woodstove, for the environment, saving wood and also saving on cooking time, so that the women will have more time to attend class. And this is for health hygiene, this is a trash separation project where they separate the organic from the other waste and even the plastics and we even now have a machine for plastic, to recycle plastic, and this is the compost for the organics, and then compost is then sold to the rest of the community for their gardens and their farms. So Mariam went through the program she is the coordinator of a Community Management Committee and she led her village to build this health clinic she is standing up against the health hut and she is very dynamic and she told me she never dreamed fifteen years ago she said, ‘I just never dreamed.’ One day we had an unusual evaluator come to the village, it was very interesting. He said, ‘I want to see a picture of you women,’ he said to Mariam, ‘before the program and after the program.’ And I said to him, ‘I’ve never heard anybody do anything like that before.’ And he said, ‘Oh, shut up.’ And I said, ‘okay.’ And she ran off and she said, ‘look at this picture, look at all of us women sitting in the middle of grass we didn’t even know that this could bring malaria, that we could get mosquito, we didn’t even know that we could do so many things in our communities, we would never speak out and now look at this picture.’ Well you will see it coming up. ‘We are going off to tell people about human rights, to tell people to stop female genital cutting.’ And he said, ‘well see I was right that’s the best evaluation.’ But she also went to India, she went to become a solar engineer. I don’t know if any of you have heard of the Barefoot College in India, it is a college started by a man named Bunker Roy and he only takes grandmothers who have never been to school and they learn to become solar engineers through color. If you get a chance and look at the Barefoot website it is an amazing program and it’s amazing to see her up on the roof, she came back and immediately started training others In her community. Why do you think he only takes grandmothers? Have you got any idea why he only takes grandmothers?

Audience

They don’t have children to take care of. They’re freer and older more experienced.

Audience

They teach other people.

Melching

Right, they teach other people all of the above but he also says I never take men, if you teach a man he will go right off to the city and he will never return to their village. The grandmother’s will stay in their village and they also provide extraordinary role models for everyone who stays, so she came back, she taught others, here she is with those who she trained. They all get solar lamps, they get also other lamps that you can fix on the wall and they also get a charger for their cell phones and now the new innovation in our program this past two years has been to teach, we now teach literacy through SMS texting which has been amazing. As you can see, one of our big problems for illiteracy has been motivation but we have solved that problem right here. People are so excited to send text messages to their family elsewhere in the city but also in the diaspora and communicate that way and be able to receive text messaging. University of California, SEGA, did an amazing evaluation over the first four months just so we could know is this really worth continuing and it went from 8% of people knowing how to read and write text messages to 73%. It was amazing so we really know that this a way forward and everyone has a cellphone and we come in with seventeen for the Community for the class and so they have seventeen that are left and the community management now manages that and we have solar suitcases because of course not every village can have these
solar units they’re kind of expensive but the solar suitcases allow them to charge their phones so that becomes a business for the community management committee. And that has worked very well we are trying that and other ways to help they can charge their phones in their community. So they learn numeracy and reading and writing through the SMS texting ad that’s been great. And the other thing with that is we did a rapid SMS village so we connected seventeen villages and over 400 people were on that and they were influential people, they organized vaccination campaigns they distributed more than 70,000 bed nets through this network, they communicated about security issues in areas of civil conflict, this is a great thing to have. They warned each other, there was one case of robbers in the area and they could warn each other about this. And we feel critical for girls and women who are often left out of any kind of technology revolution in country. And then Marian Bamba did something else too. Given a man that is very important in our program whose name is Nimba Jaro, when the first community started standing up to abandon female genital cutting in Kenya because they had gone through this program and they started among themselves that they were going to abandon this, one community stood up by themselves and announced, because they abandoned we said would you be willing to share this with others, so we brought some journalists, they said of course we’re wellbeing to share this with our sisters so that others can understand why we’re doing this. And the journalists came and it was the first time in Senegal that there had ever been a village that stood out and said they were abandoning this practice, so they have horrible problems. It caused a national stir, it was on the TV it was on the radio, it was in the newspapers, some people, said, ‘what?’ and their interconnected group was furious, they were insulted, they were called betrayers of their cultural group, so Djimba came along and said you see that village, this is the wrong way to end female genital cutting, and I said what do you mean? Well I live in a village that’s connected to their village, we’re very small but we’re very big. We would never stand alone to end a practice like this because all of our interconnected communities, all of these would be furious with us because I would not be able to marry daughter in these communities, we would be doing this alone, and therefore in order to change this practice, ‘I said,’ yes what is the answer?’ He said, ‘well I’ll put on my shoes and I’ll go from community to community and I’ll talk to them.’ Which he did over the next months, and he brought them together in intervillage meetings, and on February 14, 1998 was the first real public declaration for FGC abandonment. The first one was July 31, 1997 at Mali Kunambara that was lots of problems. The Diabobo declaration lead by Djimba, there were no problems because it was the interconnected community that came together and abandoned them together. And Mariam who was here in the middle, she and her friends went through the program Maria Tunjara is here she had two daughters who actually died of female genital cutting. Her story is actually on the website she spoke at the women’s forum in New York at the Daily Beast and her story is on the website. And they came together from different villages and they went to 148 villages and talked to them about why they abandoned, about human rights, about health consequences and Maria she said, ‘You know when I told my story,’ she said you would have been amazed at how many women stood up and said the same thing that happened to you happened to me,’ and she said we would sit and cry because people could never say this before it was always and if people had a girl who had died they would say it was malaria, they would never say it was from the practice. And so their efforts led to people going out presenting human rights going to other communities, people doing plays around these issues with the men, with the religious leaders on board. Always working very closely with religious leaders and then doing these inter-village meetings. People coming together discussing these issues together as a united family together and then a very important moment in this whole process is the public declaration. This is not the declaration that Mariam did, but it shows an example of a declaration of over 200 villages came together and it declares of now no one will practice this tomorrow. And actually what’s very interesting about this is this the way that foot binding ended also in China in the nineteenth century. Foot binding lasted a thousand years, it ended in twelve and it ended in these public pledges of marrying groups who came together and said we are not going to marry ours son to women who bound feet and we pledge also never to bind the feet of our daughters again. And so it’s very
interesting we didn’t know this when we started, Djimba didn’t know this of course, but we’re working with some body at the university of California, Jerry Mackey, and if you are interested in the parallels between female genital cutting and foot binding movement In China you can go to our website and look up Jerry Mackey and read about it, it’s very interesting. And I have to tell this story, we have a woman who came to work with us just day before yesterday, from Boston, she is from an organization who is helping us strategize our MGO, Alice’s parents came from China and when we were sharing our power-point on foot binding and FGC, she became very quiet and she said, ‘I have to tell you something my grandmother had her feet bound and my Mother does not have her feet bound because my Grandmother was in a marriage society where they said that they would not bind the feet of their daughters. And she said, ‘I’m sitting here now watching this.’ And all of a sudden and it was like a huge moment for her we all had goose bumps and now she’s gone back and has been interviewing her mother about how this happened and it’s really interesting that these social norms happen like this, so to present we’ve had 4770 communities declare publicly that they have abandoned female genital cutting. In guinea 364, in Gambia 99, Somalia Puntland which we thought would take a long time, a very severe form of female genital cutting it’s [inaudible], there are thirty-four communities. and Mauritania we did the program in 30 villages. Hassania and Tupilar villages. These are ethnic groups that have traditionally been in conflict with each other and so they came together to abandon this practice together. And in Burkina Faso in 2003 there were 23 communities there that abandoned.

And I want to do a little role play right now to show you how this works. I need a few volunteers. Gannon you come over here, [inaudible] do you speak good English? No, if I can get somebody else, Batina would you just come up here. Your name is? Ignas, okay. And Mavis, you come up. This is a little role-play to show you why we think this is important, this approach. So come on up. Now we are all in the same family. We are linked by tradition and culture and we love one another and have always been together and we have certain traditions and one of those is that when we meet each other we always hug and kiss. Okay, so now we’re meeting each other, kiss, kiss, hello love. Now this is so important to us that it is unimaginable that we would not do this, right? Unimaginable. Now what would happen if you are all together at the market and everything and I come by and I walk by? What do you say?

Audience

Terrible.

Audience

Is something wrong with her

Audience

Bad

Audience

Did you see what she did?

Audience

Rude

Melching
You’re not happy, right? You can be even madder. You can express your anger. How do you feel?

Audience

It feels bad

Melching

Would I ever do that? Would I ever dream of doing that? Walking by? Why would I never do that?

Audience

Because it’s tradition.

Melching

Why would I not do that even if it’s tradition? What would happen to me?

Audience

Ostracized

Melching

Wait until she comes back. So let’s say Batina, you’re over in your village. We all live in different villages now. Mavis you’re in your village, Ignas, you’re in your village, and I’m in your village. And now I’m listening to the radio now, I don’t know if Mavis listens to the radio or not, but Ignas you are and Batina, you are and we are thinking great there is a health program on today and suddenly we hear there’s a very bad disease in the country and in our zone and we can become contagious quickly and we can infect people and if we kiss and hug others and shake their hands and kiss and hug we can pass this disease very quickly, it was the swing flu, no let’s just say that there’s this disease. So Batina you’re hearing this on the radio, what are you thinking?

Batina

Maybe this is not such a good idea to hug and kiss.

Melching

Mavis what are you thinking?

Mavis

Well maybe that’s why she passed by without greeting us.

Melching

No, I didn’t do that. Well I wouldn’t dare do that. Well I’m thinking that you know, you hear lots of stuff on the radio, everyday there’s something new I don’t really believe what’s on the radio, Ignas what are you thinking?

Ignas

No. Maybe people on the radio were wrong. People have been doing this for many years and
nothing happens.

Melching

Yeah, nothing’s happened to us we can do this. Nobody in our family’s gotten sick, I don’t know, I don’t know. Batina is hesitating a little bit. Mavis is also hesitating also a little bit. Ignas is like me, he doesn’t believe like I, I don’t believe. So what happens, we meet by accident in the market place, we meet again what do we do? We meet, what do we do?

Mavis

No.

Melching

Why does she hug and kiss why do you think she would hug and kiss even if she’s hesitating?

Audience

It would be insulting.

Melching

Right, it’s insulting if we don’t. We saw that when I walked by that you were very upset. So why would we not be able to do this? Why would we not be able to not kiss and hug?

Audience

Because not everybody agreed not to kiss and hug.

MELCHING

Right there has been no common discussion to do this. However there was some hesitating this is what Christina Bugari calls, who’s a sociologist who we work with a lot, she calls this pluralistic ignorance. I’m going to kiss her because I didn’t know that Mavis was hesitating she was hesitating and didn’t want to but she knows that Ignas will be really upset if she doesn’t do it so, she thinks that, she doesn’t know that he’s listened to the radio. So we don’t have this commonly shared knowledge we don’t discuss this openly and publicly so there is this pluralistic ignorance around the practice. Now let’s say that we’ve kissed and hugged and we come from oh we’re so happy to see each other and we have someone come in from the state health department who says

Audience

Hey, hey why are you doing that?

Audience

This is our tradition.

Melching

What is wrong with you?

Audience
What is wrong with you? I’m from Washington D.C., the real Washington.

Audience

This is Senegal.

Audience

Don’t you care about your families? Are you crazy? We’ve launched a campaign to end this terrible practice you are doing.

Audience

What are we practicing?

Audience

You’re hugging and kissing and risking the lives of your family.

Melching

I don’t think he understands. Why don’t you just go away? Oh, my gosh he’s coming back with a sign, 'Down with kissing.' So why did we become resistant suddenly?

Audience

Because of his approach. He’s just like he’s from D.C. so you have to explain it like’

Melching

But you were hesitating before

Audience

Yes, I was.

Melching

You were hesitating and you were mad at him when he came.

Audience

Yes because I was thinking he needed...

Melching

So you would change but as soon as he came from outside you started to become defensive.

Audience

Exactly, because I didn’t know where he was even coming from.

Melching

Now let’s say with all of this going on, let’s try to get some information from Judy, Judy is part of
our group too, and she’s a health worker, maybe you’re hesitating and Judy she comes, Judy you can either come or not. But Judy says look this is true, and she’s part of our group, she’s part of our traditions. She shares this and so now we talk about this for some time and we decide among us that we will abandon this. But wait a minute there is Varaciry over there and Wendy she’s part of our group too, and so is Fatu and Diane and Mike and maybe there is somebody else, Lillian’s back there and she lives overseas. What are we going to do about these people? As soon as they come up they’re going to expect what? Hug and kiss us. So what are we going to do? So in order for us to really stop, because when Lillian comes back and she’s been gone for a long time are you going to be able to say loosen up? No. What are we going to do?

Audience

Shout it out.

Melching

Shout it out. How are we going to do that?

Audience

We need to talk about this.

Melching

We need to communicate with her somehow, maybe we just learned how to do SMS texting, maybe we could let her know what’s happening and maybe we could make a film about why decided to do this and we could send it to her and she could see why decided it’s not because we don’t love her and it’s not because we aren’t happy to see her, you know, so we would really have to make sure that everybody, Syrie, and Mike, Fatu, everybody and Wendy will have to know that when we see her that it’s not because we are betraying her.

So that is why there is that declaration. There would then be a day when people come together and decide as of tomorrow we’re not going to kiss and hug anymore, maybe we’ll do this when we see each other, or maybe we’ll do something else, so we now know why and we’ve decided together and it’s not because we don’t love one another, it’s not because we don’t want to stay united and be one family. So this is why this moment is critical and I think maybe through the role play you see why. That it has to be a moment when people come together and together make that decision and it’s not blame and shame, it’s not oh we’ve done this awful ting kissing and hugging, it’s that we’ve gotten new information and we’ve learned if we do it can cause harm and we if we want to maintain our unity we’re going to do things differently. I’m happy to say the government of Senegal have also done studies on this approach and they have also adopted this human rights approach on February 15, 2010 and said really all NGO's, parliament, all ministries will all have this approach. It will not be the legalistic approach, it will not be putting people in prison, rather it will be education, understanding that this is a harmful practice and allowing people to come together and make these decisions themselves as a group. And I just thought I would briefly tell you that we’re talking a lot and Batina can also talk more about this, but we are looking at this in terms of legal, moral, and social norms. The moral norms are what Tostan tries to tap into. This feeling of do no harm that we’re regulating tings by getting people to see that this is a harmful practice and since we all want to maintain unity of our group the family, the solidarity, peace, happiness, these are all things that we strive for and that they announced at the beginning of the program that they were seeking as a community. And these moral obligations would make us feel a built guilty if we harmed another and actually the legal norms of course reinforce those moral norms because the legal norms are based
upon human rights in general. The whole constitution in Senegal is based on human rights instruments. These are in the constitution; there is a law against female genital cutting and anything that harms girls or boys and men and women. And so where there has been this huge gap is with the social constructs, the social norms. And this we have seen has been even more important than a law. If you had passed a law and said to us no more kissing and hugging, we probably would have had the same reaction as Gannon, we would have said who are you to tell us not to kiss and hug. But the fear of social rejection and the need for trust and reputation, social recognition is so strong among peoples that until you harmonize these three norms, you will not really have social justice. You can see this in many areas where social norms are not in sync with the legal and moral norms. And so what we’re trying to do this is from Douglass North’s Nobel work is to show that by working on social norms, really studying and understanding and knowing how to approach people, that you don’t come in with prescriptive messaging that this is probably the worst thing you can do with social norms. It may work for vaccinations, but sometimes it doesn’t because that’s a social norm also, We’ve seen in Nigeria that this has not worked. For nutrition example, you can bring in messages, but for the practices that people do because they believe they’re doing good for their children and you come in and tell them they’re doing bad with signs and bombarding people with you know this is mutilation etc., is that we have gotten a lot of resistance and defensiveness so we never talk about fighting against a social norm. We talk about promoting health and human rights, we talk about religious leaders. We say we know you’re for health with the populations, for the wellbeing of the populations. We want you to be at the forefront of this movement and they accept because they do want to promote that it’s not about fighting against something that’s a tradition it’s about promoting health and hygiene and human rights of people and we believe that once you do harmonize those you can get agreements within society and the important thing is that then they will be sustainable because they are owned by the people and the decisions have been made by everyone together. And we are doing this now, just briefly I’m almost finished, but we are working on other social norms in areas such as parental education, looking at the social norms that have hindered children from learning and there are many in Senegal, we’re seeing that for example that mothers don’t talk to their babies and there are reasons for this. But we now know that talking to your baby is critical for the brain development and so we are not just working with one mother or a family or several families but the whole social network because what happens when you try to teach one mother to talk to her baby, because that happened here too, mother’s here didn’t always know that, but in Africa and Senegal is everyone is making fun of one mother. You’re crazy if you talk to your baby, there are reasons for that, the spirits might, fi you favor your baby, talk to your baby, there are reasons for that but I won’t get into that because it’s getting late. But it’s amazing because it does apply to other social norms also and it really is helpful in finding the keys to really encouraging people to adopt new practices that they would otherwise never have wanted to do because of peer pressure.

This is a member of Mariam’s member of her family, I couldn’t remember if it’s her niece or her granddaughter. But she’s seeing her grandmother Mariam up on the roof of the hut putting in solar units her mother is the coordination of the community management committee, she will not be cut, she will go to school, she will not married in forced marriage at twelve or thirteen so you can see that in one generation things have really changed in Sunjan, but in hundreds and hundreds of other villages also. And I welcome you to come and visit one day and see. Batina has been to many of the communities where we have worked and it’s a very exciting movement that’s going on and we hope that it will continue to accelerate in the coming years, thank you.

Beth

On behalf of the global justice project and the law school and all the other cosponsors of the event I’d like to thank Molly and Tostan for being here and I would also like to open up the floor for
questions. Molly would be happy to answer those.

Melching

Gannon Gillespie is here from Tostan; he is from the Washington, D.C. office.

Audience

How much effort in terms of educating men themselves?

Melching

We include men in our classes; we have found that this is one of the most important aspects of our program even if they don’t have time to participate. Is this is we ask the women to adopt someone, it could be their co-wife, their sister, their brother, sister, but most times they do adopt their husband. But we try really to get the information out to the men without the men and the boys, this stuff does not work. It’s been critical, this is why we changed our whole program in 2000 and we included men’s rights in the program also and there was a huge change in attitude and, just the attitude of not blaming and shaming men. I gave a presentation in Sweden and the Swedish women asked me, oh you must have a horrible problem with the Somali men. I said are you kidding the Somali men are incredible, they’ve been so supported, they’ve been so involved, they’re leading the movement. And all of the Somali men came up to me afterwards and said this is the first time that we haven’t been blamed, shamed, tell us that we’re awful and oppressive and now it’s just like we want to belong to this movement, this is a neat and exciting movement, what can we do to help? So I think that it’s really critical, let me say this, I didn’t say it enough in this presentation, but you’re so right it is a good question.

Yes, what is your name?

Audience

Caroline. So what are some of the mistakes that have changed your course along the way just to get an example?

Beth

Molly could repeat the question?

Melching

She wants to know what are some of the mistakes that we’ve made? I can think of a whole lot I can think of an example and this really helped me a whole lot also. We went to a village and the villagers themselves said you know we want a garden. And I was with people from Dakar, so they were city people, they weren’t from the community and we said we’ll look for the funding we looked for the funding we got funding to do a dig a well and do a garden and we said this is how we’re going to organize the garden we’re going to have everybody working together and it’s going to be this one big happy family. So the first day, 50 people came and the next day 40 people came, and the next week, 10 people came and the next week nobody came. And we said, ‘come on this is your project this is what you wanted.’ And so we held a meeting and we said what did we do wrong and they said this isn’t how we organize. And we said, ‘how do your organize?’ And they said, ’if we have a garden like this, we would do rows and each row would be owned by a family and would be responsible for that row.’ And we said, ’why didn’t you tell us this?’ And they said, ’you didn’t ask.’ And we said, ’why didn’t you just tell us that?’ They said, ’you were so excited and
enthusiastic we didn’t want to disappoint you.’ And so we said okay, now the first thing to always do is to say how do you organize, how do you want to do this what is the best way, so that is the lesson in everything is carry through and how do you make tea? What are the steps you do when you organize a baptism? Well these are the same steps you can do when you’re solving a problem and starting a project is always go back to people and ask them is there a different way of organizing and there’s a different community and this is how they organize. But never just go in and just say this is how we’re going to do this. That was a big lesson. But probably the women and the men thing not including the men was a huge mistake that led to lots of different problems, but in everything we’ve gone over the sessions when we found out that human rights was so critical we actually went back and redid in 2000 even though we’d been doing this program for years we went back and put democracy and human rights is the foundation of our entire program. It took a lot of effort because each session, you know you have to put a lot of effort in to each session, but that took a lot of time and energy but we made that the foundation of our program because we saw that everything else from economy to marriage to health, to hygiene, everything was based on knowledge, and understanding, their application and their feelings of this is right, this just makes sense related to human rights, so that was another lesson. Mavis?

Mavis

So what is the reaction of the women that have had their genitals cut especially the younger ones having the knowledge that this wasn’t a good practice so how are they reacting to this?

Beth

Molly could repeat the question again?

Melching

She asked about girls who have already been cut, have already had the operation done. How are they reacting to others abandoning?

Djimba said something that I didn’t know this last time we were at the carter center and I brought Djimba because I think he is the hero of this movement and I wanted him to share with others about this movement I think and he was something that I didn’t know was that one of the major influences on him was Needa, his niece she said, ‘I was cut and I went to school and when I was seventeen I learned what had been done to me, I didn’t know,’ she said, ‘I have never been so angry at someone in my life and I yelled and screamed at my mother how could you do this to me.’ And she would say, ‘now that you asked me what my ideas are I would say go ahead with what you are doing I’m behind you one hundred percent.’” He said, ‘the way she talked to him he said he knew that he would never sit still the rest of his life.’ I think she is saying that she recognized that she just didn’t want her sisters and her cousins to ever go through the same thing. And our approach is, ‘never be mad at your mother’. And I can tell you that Marice Deary who wrote Desert Flower and Kathusha a famous model she said, ‘I’m so angry.’ And I said Katusha she loved you, she said how could she do this to me? I said, She loved you she wanted you to be successful she just didn’t know, she could not go against, she was trapped in this convention, there is no way that she could not have done it. And it was this huge thing, she said, I don’t have to be mad at my mother anymore? It was like wow, you could just see this cloud lifting off of her. She wrote a book and she wrote this was you know, a turning point. Unfortunately she died in a tragic accident but I’m so glad that she didn’t die angry with her mother anymore. It’s time as Djimba says, it’s easier for this to happen and I really think with this approach it makes it easier for people to abandon rather than have somebody from the outside and coming in and telling them this prescriptive message, when it’s their own group the people themselves organizing themselves, then they can do it. Yes, what is your name? Kat.
Kat

I’m just curious I know in a lot of places I know that FGC is a coming of age for the girls, do villages have other ceremonies to substitute for it or is it just not necessary to do that?

Melching

According to Jerry Mackey there are very few places where there are ceremonies, there’s the Gambia where sometimes you have that and the Kenya, but in most other places there are not ceremonies. And I ask the women in the villages where we work and they say are you kidding that’s a western romantic idea of doing some initiation right I said really? They said we haven’t done that for years and besides they said we’ve learned human right snow and you know our daughters were going through these initiation rights and what you learn is how to obey your husband, how to be patient, how to accept anything that befalls you and we’re kind of want to get away from that now. They said, ‘We want our daughters to get a different type of education. And they said can you do this program for adolescents and actually we did, we always do the program for adolescents now. It’s really important because you have this sort of disconnect between the adolescents and the adults.

Audience

You offer a very holistic interconnected approach. Part of the problem is whether it’s donors or grant work you apply for is that you have a very categorized, compartmentalized goal, so it’s ‘down with kissing’ but says nothing about compost or solar power or anything else and I’m wondering how is it that an organization you came to that realization and how do you work with various funding sources to convince them that that is a better approach?

Melching

Great question, Gannon do you want to answer that?

Gannon

She’s asking me because I help with a lot of the fundraising. I think that the one thing that we’ve done is just been very stubborn we’ve had a lot times people have said, ‘we just want the session on subject X just run that for two weeks, don’t do all this other stuff.’ And we say no, ‘we don’t do that. And when they say just run one year and we say, ‘no, we don’t do that.’ Because in our experience and even from evaluations have shown that when you only do part you only are addressing part of community’s needs. You can imagination if you’re doing education without skills and without microcredit to earn a little bit of income and start to apply those skills or if you’re just doing microcredit without education. I think that was the other big lesson we learned, was not to do literacy first, you do literacy after you’ve got momentum in the class and people are comfortable learning in front of one another but it is a big challenge because we always talk about this, we are a holistic model in a very sect world, but so we’re lucky that we have had so many donors and supports that are willing to say, ‘well we’re interested in the literacy part but you can go ahead and do all of this other stuff if you really think it’s that important. And I think some of them have come around in what their interest in specific is it’s actually reinforced by the holistic nature of the program in other words if you’re addressing women empowerment, that makes the literacy program much more effective whereas in a lot of their literacy approaches especially in the nineties where people would just drop out and you see very low attendance rates and then people say well they weren’t interested in learning and that’s not the case it’s just that the access wasn’t there.
Melching

We’ve refused actually a lot of programs over the years because of that and we’ve been accused of not wanting to share. And people say we just want a five month program and they say you just don’t want to share your program. We do but it just doesn’t work, and we think women deserve, women who have dropped out of school and are twelve and are married or sixteen or hopefully eighteen, they deserve to have this basic information that can save lives, so we are ready to really be stubborn as Gannon says. We don’t like to use the word fight or we want to be stubborn and say women have that human right to education in their own language that’s what’s so important it’s their own language. We work in twenty-two national African languages we always do, it’s a long process, there are three years and every session is written out maybe five, six pages it takes a lot to translate and adapt all of this to Somalia and Djibouti, but we haven’t had to adapt even that much, when we asked Somalia, oh yeah you have to change a lot, and I said what do we need to change? They said the drawings, you have to put the scarves’Oh the case studies we’re going to change those and the names, but we have the same problems’what we say is that the program is like a frame work but the content is what the people put in it. They see what their problems are and they see how they’re going to go about solving it. And they use their experiences. And we get examples from others, when the women of Jalakotcho marched because one of the women was beaten up in the community, they did a peaceful march and the whole community was never seen anything like it, but it worked, they didn’t have violence in that community, the police station told me that it just was amazing that the women said we just don’t accept this anymore so we put that in our module as an example a peaceful march that we just don’t except this anymore. It’s been one of the biggest results of our program ending domestic violence, it’s been huge and we don’t say that it’s ended, violence hasn’t ended, but what has ended is the reaction to violence people stand up immediately and they go over with their little committees and they say no, we don’t accept this anymore and I just came back from Nambur a month ago before I came here and the women said one of the women in our class was beat up the class took her to the hospital, we paid for her hospitalization, we came right back we went and got the village chief, we got the Imam who’s highly respected the whole class went with our husbands we went over and we said we will not accept this anymore and when his wife got out of the hospital we brought her in and we negotiated and the woman was sitting there saying now we’re getting along and I said did that work and she said he doesn’t dare hit me anymore. So there’s a reaction that leads to public knowledge to what is right and what is not and there is a consensus around this and I think it makes a huge difference.

Audience

What are the health issues and how do you go about promoting health in the villages?

Beth

Can you repeat the question?

Melching

He wants to know how we go about promoting health in the communities. There is the human rights on the right to a clean environment, there is the right to health and responsibility and people start coming together working within their commission when the health committee is set up, they immediately start looking and saying if we don’t have a health hutch or small health center, how can we get that. Then when they come to the module on hygiene and health, they begin realizing, they go out and actually do their own participatory research in the village, they see how many kids have actually been vaccinated how many haven’t. How many kids are registered, that’s very important, many of the children were not even registered. Many of the girls were dying but we
don’t even know they were dying because they weren’t even registered at birth. So they’ve organized to register everyone in the community at birth they have started vaccination campaigns, bed net treatment, HIV/AIDS. In cases like in the Futa, we had one case of women the women said, I heard this from our coordinator out there he said, or actually, I heard it at a seminar, one of the doctors said, ‘OH it was amazing because in the Futa, men were coming back from France, there were so many people going off to work in France.’ So what the community management committees did for the women was they said that no man can come back without a certificate that he doesn’t have HIV, he has to do the testing and it has to go through the committee.’ Because a woman alone would not be able to stand up and say no I will not have sex with you, there’s no way a woman can do so. They said how can we solve this problem, you know, we’re not going to t change things overnight so the committee informs people before they come back, you have to come back with a certificate saying that you’ve tested and you don’t HIV/AIDS because we want to protect our girls and our children here. Gannon?

Gannon

Just I think for me personally from conversations I’ve had with different communities I think the single most important thing that Tostan does for health is train communities in germ theory. And I think that’s a huge lesson for us they say we’ve heard these messages on the radio for years, people talk about washing your hands, or malaria or whatever, but learning about germ theory which is a little bit crazy if you think about it, there are these invisible things that make us sick sometimes, you’ve never gone through that moment looking through a microscope, you’ve never been to formal school you’ve never had that moment that huge shift that there are subatomic particles that have a huge difference and all these things, once you understand that then all of a sudden all these messages make perfect sense and they become very active and then it’s a burden of information because they’re saying my gosh look at all of these other communities who are just leaving trash and their animals are everywhere and they don’t know about this germ theory thing and so we have to go talk to them about it. Anyone doing health communications just ask yourself do the people hearing this message if you’re making messages, and if they don’t how affective is that communication going to be?

Melching

And that helped with FGC as well, because Buba Sow he told me that my daughter died of FGC but I never knew that until I went to Tostan, because the doctor said she died of tetanus, but actually she had gone through the procedure and then she got a fever, so of course, two weeks later, and I thought she had malaria, well I treated her for malaria first, and she didn’t get better and then I took her to the health clinic and it was too late. The doctors said she had tetanus, I knew she had been cut but I never associated that, but he said we use an ancestral knife that is never cleaned. It is used on all of the girls and then we put it away. Then he said, ‘I knew, I knew.’ A lot of times the people who are leaders of this movement on the grass roots level are people who have been through a death or illness or hemorrhaging and have become really involved. The women and the men both have become really involved because of that. Yes Suri?

Suri

Have you worked in urban areas and if not have can this program be adapted to urban areas and if you have what kind of what adaptations have you already made. Because in Senegal it’s such a high percentage live in urban areas upward of [inaudible] percent.

Melching
We’ve worked in Ches and Dakar, we work with neighborhoods, and we organize people in neighborhoods. It’s harder it’s not as easy but it has worked especially in the suburbs where peoples tend to come, the Fulene, the [African term] come together, the [African term]. It is a bit easier it’s like each neighborhood represents a little community from the certain areas etcetera, and in Ches, we did a lot of organizing, we worked in a neighborhood and people are very organized around human rights activities also, it’s harder communities are much more units that are easier to work with and then they federate, it’s a bit easier but it does work, we’ve had excellent in Ches and in Dakar too in the suburbs. Batina did you want to say anything? I thought might want to say, she’s done a lot of work on FGC too.

B

About the urban areas?

M

Well just some of your work on female genital cutting

B

Well one of the main points that came out of our study which came out in what you were saying earlier, is the important role of men and what we were finding out as well is men in the Gambia and the part of Senegal where we were working, they often describe the practice as women’s business but it doesn’t mean that it’s not of interest or concern to men it’s really women’s business vis-a-vis men’s business because of the complimentary role they have. So men do in fact participate in the decision for female genital cutting and we found men were twice as like in favor of abandoning the practice to mothers, and in the conversation girls were much more likely to remain uncut, so what you’re describing about the importance of including men jumped out hugely in the research we did and one of the things that is also interesting is that there are national representative data on FGC from the demographic health surveys and UNICEF the mixed data and again and again and again men are more likely to favor abandoning the practice, it’s a huge trend across countries where the practice is found.

Jaimie

I have a question and I teach human rights here at the University of WA, How do you get the ball rolling? How do you introduce the topic what are the things you say?

Melching

We did people who come to consensus about how human dignity is, that’s how we do it. We start with human dignity what it means, when does a person not have human dignity? And then from that say yes there are instruments that exist and we use seven major instruments from which we have polls that have about twenty principles, values if you like, around that and then they are all the things that people pretty much say that people need to have their dignity. They have food, water, shelter, they need to have work, love, respect not be discriminated against be treated with dignity, equally, you know the right to survival not to be killed, not be harmed, right to be free from all forms of violence. All of these things we pull out and then we go through them one by one by plays and poetry. And around the right to be free from all sorts of violence, for example, they will go into their small groups and one group will do a poem on it, and another will do a play on it and the other one will do a song on it, and then the other one will do a picture, draw a picture around it and then they will go out to the community and they will present the song, the prayer, and the story and the
picture they draw on it and communicate that and use those to teach others. That’s the kind of reaching out they do, but they do that in class. And one very important thing is they always look at this human right in relation to Islam and we have religious specialists who work with us, we have an Islamic rights specialist who has gone through and for every human right has a verse from the Koran, or two or three that reinforces that human right so we ask people who usually have knowledge on this anyway. And then we ask them about culture, tradition, does this human right, is this in our traditions, that we see that this is important also. Is there anything in our traditions that go against this principle? So what we really have are people uniting around moral norms. What their values and principles are and they come to a consensus around this, then they start thinking, what are some of our social norms? Uh, oh, we’re doing this this doesn’t really help us achieve the values we have and what we think is important and they debate about it and they say we’ve got to stop doing that because that does not help us achieve our goal of health, of wellbeing, of security, etcetera. But, again it’s their decision. And somebody asked a very important question in my sister’s class, Rachelle, she said are you worried about destroying African values? And I said it’s a great question because the real values are the unity, the solidarity, the peace, the security, the wellbeing which African communities really adhere to and are seeking. If we were destroying that, for example if we were telling girls to run off away from their families, I would say yes, we are destroying the fabric of African society because this is not the way problems are solved. It is a society in which it is really important to belong to the group so we are trying to find methods that unify, that bring people together and help to bring out what their values and that aren’t often universal values in fact I think that if we did that in America, it might help us to get back to some of those values that we’ve lost that we find in Africa and that are vary status that here in America we’ve lost that sense of family and community that a lot of times that you have in Africa. So I think that if we were doing that, there is another example, as you know, in Burkina Faso, there is a law and they get people to denounce their neighbors, I say no, that’s tearing apart a society, it’s leading to people denouncing, it’s turning against your neighbor these are not methods that lead to peace and help renew happiness and harmony, Again during the discussions, people are for or against, it’s not all yes, yes, no but the time we are finished, they say okay, this is where we are going to go.

Audience

So that comment made me think about what’s going on in parts of Uganda with the kill the gays kind of legislation that’s been trying to go through where there has been cause for amnesty for gay men in particular to actually run away from their society. I wonder if you can envision a mode of working around the concept of homosexuality in the communities in which you work or if you’ve come across that and how you can integrate it and see it as being a part of a community rather than a tension of the West.

MELCHING

Well it is a very difficult subject because it is very sensitive in Senegal. People have discussed it a little bit in the human right to be free from all forms of discrimination. It is easier to talk about in the city than in the countryside. That’s a n issue that people hide still. It’s a very taboo issue. In Senegal, I don’t know about in Togo or in Zambia, but in Senegal people pretty much say do what you want but do with [African Term] with discretion. If you’re gay do what you have to but don’t go out and announce it around to somebody. Right now in our communities, they worked on caste issues, you know, there is a caste system in Senegal and it’s still prevalent and people have actually stood up and done something about that I can give you so many examples of where there is inter-caste marriage now for the first time based on their study of”but this is a subject that is very sensitive right now. I don’t have the answer but I do think that long term answers are better short term answers and if somebody is going to be killed because they are gay, you may have them run away but just to have that as your approach, I think is the wrong approach because then, we’re
talking about a systemic approach, we’re talking about a deeper approach to long term change where you’re bringing everyone together around this idea that being discriminating in this way is not right. It’s a tough question.

African religion teaches about democracy and man rights what are some of the obstacles that you face?

MELCHING

Amazingly, the whole reason we did democracy is because people kept telling us, we were doing problem solving, hygiene, health, and how to do a feasibility study, that was our modules in the beginning, we did do some health, vaccination and hygiene. But we didn’t do women’s health and these other subjects. And we kept asking what would you like to learn? We keep hearing about this word on the radio, democracy, democracy, and we have no idea what this means. Could you tell us and can we learn about what this means. So that really came from just a request from all our communities. That’s the next module we want. So we did another module just on democracy. And everybody loved it. And that’s when we started getting lots of men coming, they really were interested in this because it helped them in terms of understanding, they wanted to run for office, especially but then it helped the women also because it gave them a platform to run on, too. And then we started putting human rights in when we did the women’s health module. Then we combined them when we saw well democracy really includes human rights, the respect for human rights. When we went to Guinea everyone said oh you’re going to have terribly problems because of twenty years of dictatorship. Boy, we went to Guinea, not only did all our participants come to the democracy and human rights classes, all of the local authorities insisted on attending all of the sessions and they said, we didn’t know what democracy and we need to know and they were very happy because they said people are paying taxes for the first time. But they said also they’re now demanding accountability but that’s the whole thing is that people didn’t realize that taxes were part of that system so it really got people sort of on the same wavelength in terms of the same notions and really able to communicate so much better between the local authorities and the village leaders and the community answering committees because they were using g the same vocabulary to explain what their rights were and what their demand were.

Can you say something about what you went through in replicating this? Some of these difficult problems take complex solutions or at least holistic solutions it takes getting more and more people to do this, whether it’s growing your organization or having other organizations do that, the ability to replicate is always a tricky one, so how did you approach it.

Melching

It’s very tricky in the beginning we tried to just train other NGO’s to do our program and we found that, I’ll give you an example, one NGO program we worked with, instead of doing the program for hygiene and health, they did that in three days. And we said, oh my gosh, this is so critical to us. They learn it on Monday, they go out and teach others on Tuesday, and they think about it and they come back on Wednesday afternoon and they think about it more. I mean these are women who have never been to school and for us to cram everything into the brain in three days. And they were mad at us; they said this is the way we want to do it. We said okay, well for going into a new country, we don’t want to show this as the model, so we went to Guinea, we had USA ID come out and they visited three times and they said you have to come to Guinea, you have to , you have to.
So finally we went down there but we were working with NGOs and we trained them but we were managing the project, so they couldn’t come in and say okay we’re going to do this for five days and we said no, this is for five months of hygiene and health this is five months for human rights, and democracy and human rights, and problem solving. And so we were controlling and managing and that worked very well. Some of the NGOs took the whole model, some of them took parts of it but that was okay. And now the whole Guinean staff, it was the Senegalese that went down too, the financial officer and coordinator and now the Guinean coordinator and financial officer, so now it’s totally Guinean, of course always the facilitators and supervisors were Guinean but now the whole staff is Guinean, so it’s Tostan Guinea. For the future we’re thinking about a Tostan training institution in Chess because we can’t go to all of the different countries, like if we go to Congo, probably better to NGOs who are working there already, a month is not enough, we pre thinking about doing a longer training for the program and then you’d have to do management. And management of an education program is not easy. We pay facilitators every month, supervisors they train community management meetings, they have so much going on, they have inter-village meetings they have public declaration if you come to Senegal, there are always a hundred different activities going on at the same time. It’s really difficult to manage. We’ve been really working on putting in place systems. Because of the requests to go, like when we went to Somalia, I said this is just too far for us to come here. And the women looked at me, and we met with a hundred NGOs before we went there and the women looked at me and said we get our genitals chopped off all of them and it’s too far for you to come here and she said your method will work here. This is a respectful approach, we’re uncomfortable with this other way and this will work. We want basic education we want it in Somali, so we said okay. We went and it was very quick, the other NGOs I would always say it is best, we maybe went too fast, but at the same time we persevered, we made mistakes, we change a lot of things and we made it through, and now they are asking us to continue, Djibouti, we had an evaluation in Djibouti, it was great, This is the first time there has ever been a community based program in Djibouti in the villages. The first NGO, we’re the first NGO. Well it’s hard to work with the government in Djibouti, it is hard, they want to come with us everywhere. We cannot go supervise our centers without somebody from the ministry but they make us wait for three weeks before we go out, so we just said we can’t do this anymore, we persevered, we persevered; now they’re being very cooperative now because they’ve seen the results. And one of the results in Djibouti is that people were always dependent on the government they waited on the government to do everything and people have become very proactive. And the government is very happy about that, it works out for both sides. People are saying okay; let’s try to solve our own problems instead of just have the government do it. Mavis?

Mavis

Going back to the genital cutting, I thought you said that the men are supporting the genital cutting abandonment, I thought it would be vice versa because it was my understanding who wants the genital cutting, is it the men who want it done or is it the women who want it done.

Melching

First of all why do they do it? They don’t even question, why do we hug and kiss, did we decide on that? No, why? In our play, because our ancestors do it, we dare not do it. Because if we do we are seen as not belonging we are not part of the group.

Mavis

Because it is hurting the women and the women are saying keep doing it and the men are saying stop it we don’t care.
Melching

No, because it’s pluralistic ignorance the women often didn’t know the women didn’t care. This was just assumed that to be respected, to have status, to be served food. One of the most adamant advocates is Worry Saw, I was with the day she sat in front of the village, and we went there I’d never been to this village before and she’s turned to the Imam, the religious leader and she said, can I ask a question we’ve never discussed this question in public before, but can I ask you a question, and he said yeah, sure, sure go ahead, and she said is it true if women don’t have this practice they are impure and dirty and can’t serve, is this really true? And he turned to her and he said worry, you know how if you go walking on the street and you turn and you see your kids following you and you say there are big hyenas on this road and they will eat you? Is that really the truth and she said no and he said well that’s your answer. People have told you this so that you will continue to do it. Maybe some men I know in the Futa for example, the men go off for years to work in France, and some of the men say if we don’t do this, women will be promiscuous, there is that belief perhaps and so there is that fear. But generally we have found a lot of support from the men except in that very conservative. That’s one area where we think there hasn’t been as much abandonment in Senegal because there is a religious who put out a Fatwa saying this is an obligation for women to be cut by Islam. That even though all of the other religious leaders have said this is not an obligation.

Ali

I’m from East Africa, Southern Togo, where this practice continues one of the reasons people do it is a hyperactive sexual woman who doesn’t consider, who is very active sexually and the men often want to have more than two or three years, so they approve this practice.

Audience

So men have three wives because?

Ali

It’s like social control in women what they can do and what they cannot do. So if woman do not cut, she is believed to be sexually active or prostitute kind of a lady of that form

Audience

But if she is married with a husband, how will she be a prostitute?

Melching

Then he will be expected to perform at a higher rate and he has three wives and he cannot keep up with all these women. The sexual desire of the woman so that the men can marry three wives.

G

If I could just step In here, I’ve studied this a lot it’s really tempting to generalize why this happens, but that’s very right, and we do hear those stories, we also hear people say well this goes back to when you had to circumcise men and cut them, and then you hear people say this is about religious control and that’s part of the problem when you deal with norms, and the main perpetuation happens because you’re supposed to and then all these other myths and ideas and everything gets built up around and obviously practice link to patriarchy and Jerry Macky argues that it’s not an accident that you had foot binding emerge around an emperor who had thousands of wives and you
have FGC emerging probably around the same thing the problem of an infidelity thing.

**Melching**

Pharaoh who had two thousand three thousand wives.

**Beth**

I’d like to again thank Molly and close the session formally.

**Melching**

Thank you for all of your questions.

**Beth**

I am sure that Molly will be happy to answer a few more questions. Again, thank you.

**Melching**

You were a wonderful audience.