

“Social capital is a community’s human wealth – the sum total of its skills, knowledge, and partnerships. It is a powerful motor for sustainable development because it harnesses local capacity, indigenous knowledge and self-reliance” (UNESCO 2001, 69 in Gould).

An initial examination of these policy statements does not reveal explicit reference to the role and involvement of grandmothers. Rather surprisingly, none of the policy statements of these leading child development organizations directly refers to the role or involvement of either “grandmothers” or “grandparents” in child development actions. However, a closer analysis of these policy priorities reveals that they do provide support for the inclusion of grandmothers in child development program-

ming. Table 1 below suggests how each of the policy statements (left column) do in fact support the integration, or inclusion, of grandmothers in child development programs (right column).

This analysis leads to the conclusion that there is a significant discrepancy between the policy statements of key international organizations that support the inclusion of grandmothers in child development programs and the virtual absence of these senior women in child development programming. Each of the statements in the right column clearly suggests how grandmothers can be incorporated into community level program activities. Examples of how various programs and projects have involved them are presented in the following two chapters

TABLE 1: Policy Support for the Inclusion of Grandmothers in Child Development Programs

Child Development Policy Priorities	Implications for the Inclusion of Grandmothers in Child Development Programs
1. Strengthening family systems	Grandmothers should be full partners in all efforts to strengthen family systems.
2. Building on cultural roles and values.	Grandmothers’ roles and experience in children’s development should be reflected in materials and activities.
3. Integration of traditional and modern childcare practices.	Grandmothers’ practices should be inventoried, the beneficial ones encouraged, and the harmful ones slowly discouraged.
4. Building on community resources and strengths.	Grandmothers should be viewed as a positive force for children’s development, while at the same time they are provided with opportunities to strengthen their practices.
5. Strengthening community support mechanisms for children and their families.	Programs should strengthen natural grandmother leaders and networks as well as their sense of collective responsibility for children in the community.
6. Building social capital for sustainable development.	Links between grandmother networks and other community structures should be reinforced.

III. HOW HAVE CHILD DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS INVOLVED GRANDMOTHERS?

“With age comes experience and wisdom. Grandmothers are the main resource persons for all matters related to the well-being of women and children.”

**Community Leader,
Mali**

This chapter aims to answer the question, “To what extent do programs that promote children’s development view grandmothers as a resource, involve them in community programs, and capitalize on their experience and commitment?” Here, programs that have explicitly involved grandmothers, referred to as grandmother-inclusive programs, are reviewed.

PROGRAMS INVOLVING GRANDMOTHERS

An extensive search was carried out, based on the published literature, on information about the programs of numerous development agencies involved in children’s development, on the gray literature to which the author had access, as well as on information from multiple key informants. The results of this review support the conclusion that at a global level, in the areas of ECD, basic education, maternal and child health and nutrition, and HIV/AIDS there are very few programs that have explicitly involved grandmothers. Alternatively, involving grandmothers in development strategies produces benefits for all generations. This assertion is illustrated in the brief descriptions of grandmother-inclusive projects (below), and in the more detailed

description in Chapter IV of work in Mali supported by Helen Keller International (HKI).

The projects identified are presented here by topical area: early childhood development and primary education, newborn health, child nutrition, HIV/AIDS, and maternal and child health. For each of these projects/activities a brief description is provided that includes, whenever possible, information on how grandmothers have actually been involved in the child development activities, whether the grandmothers’ role is reflected in educational, communication, and training materials, and the results of their involvement for children, other family and community members, and for themselves. Given that the documentation on the identified experiences is often limited, it was usually not possible to collect information on all of these parameters.

EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT AND PRIMARY EDUCATION

BOLIVIA

A nutrition education booklet based on grandmothers’ advice.

In a collaborative effort between the ministries of health and education, a booklet was produced for use in the schools entitled, "Our Food: Advice From Grandmother Manuela" (Nuestros Alimentos: Los Consejos de la Abuela Manuela CEMSE 1997). It contains drawings and advice from grandmother Manuela sitting with and teaching her grandchildren about good nutrition and food hygiene practices based on both traditional and modern concepts. The booklet depicts the grandmother as a respected and knowledgeable member of the family and community. This contributes to strengthening both children's respect for grandmothers and the inter-generational communication between them.

BANGLADESH

Grandmothers' stories for intergenerational education.

Save the Children in Bangladesh recently conducted a workshop in which grandmothers' traditional stories were told, written down, and compiled in a booklet to be used in educational activities to promote intergenerational communication and learning. The stories will be used with different ages of children in story-telling and reading activities.

MALI AND NIGER

Grandmothers involved in playgroups for young children using traditional learning activities.

In UNESCO-supported programs in these two countries, both grandmothers and younger women are being trained and supported to set up "clos d'enfants," or playgroups, with small groups of young

children at the community level (Combes 2004). The aim is to provide holistic stimulation and care to young children using traditional stories, toys, games, songs, and dances while strengthening the capacity of grandmothers and younger women to manage these ECD activities.

NEWBORN HEALTH

MALI

Grandmother-inclusive nonformal health education strategy.

In a nonformal education strategy, using open-ended stories, songs, and group discussion related to pregnancy and newborn health, grandmothers are involved as key actors. The Ministry of Health (MOH) and HKI developed this strategy based on results of formative research documenting the central role played by grandmothers in these matters at the household level. The strategy works with networks of grandmothers in order to strengthen their capacity to analyze needs and problems related to pregnant women and newborns and to collectively decide what action should be taken. The songs and stories acknowledge the role of the grandmothers and encourage them to combine new practices with their traditional ones.⁶ (See Chapter IV for a detailed description).

NORTHERN TERRITORIES, AUSTRALIA

Grandmothers promoting health of pregnant women and newborns.

In central Australia, Aboriginal grandmother leaders have been full partners in developing, implementing, and evaluating the Strong Women, Strong Babies, Strong Culture project supported by the district health service (Fejo 1996). The project

⁶ Further discussion on nonformal education methods, strategies, and approaches is included in the Mali Case Study in Chapter IV.

"I am very young and am accustomed to working only with adolescents. Before I thought that it was not necessary to involve the elders. After working with the grandmothers I have changed my mind. I can see that they are a wonderful group and that they can teach us a lot. Involving them can be a strong point in our work with communities."

Nurdida
Project Hope Staff
Navoi,
Uzbekistan

"In this approach we have become important in our village. Before we were ignored. Usually only younger women were involved. We weren't included and, therefore, we couldn't learn things."

Grandmother
Kati district
Mali

"According to our traditions, in order for a development activity to be successful, the elders must be involved. We are delighted that the grandmothers have been involved in these nutrition activities because it is their role to teach the younger women everything they need to know to care for their children."

Community leader
Velingara district
Senegal

"We are thrilled that we were asked to participate. Grandmothers are human beings like everyone else and we can learn and change our ways. We must be open to the new ideas. We feel much stronger than before because now we not only have our traditional knowledge but we also have acquired modern knowledge."

Grandmother leader
Mbour district
Senegal

IV. A CLOSER LOOK AT INVOLVING GRANDMOTHERS: MALI

“Usually health workers meet only with younger women and those who have been to school to discuss health/nutrition topics. We observe what they are doing. If they do not invite us to be involved and share our experience, why should we be interested in their ideas? If, on the other hand, we are invited to participate, if our experience is respected, we will be encouraged to listen, to share our experience and to follow the new advice.”

A Malian grandmother involved in newborn health activities

Although the literature has revealed that few projects have explicitly involved grandmothers in child development activities, the previous chapter describes various projects that do so. Looking more closely at these projects, in some cases their success can be credited to the nonformal education methodology utilized in the design and delivery. The community health project in Mali, in West Africa, is a good example of how nonformal education methods were used with grandmothers and other community groups to promote improved practices related to child health.

DEVELOPING A GRANDMOTHER-INCLUSIVE STRATEGY

The experience of Helen Keller International (HKI) in Mali illustrates how child development programs can work with grandmothers in order to improve the health and well-being of children, and serves as an example of how the six child development policy priorities, proposed in Chapter II, can be incorporated into a community strategy.⁷ The six priorities, as previously noted, are:

- strengthening family systems,

- building on cultural roles and values,
- integration of traditional and modern childcare practices,
- building on community resources and strengths,
- strengthening community support mechanisms for children and their families, and
- building social capital for sustainable development.

In the context of a broader child health project, HKI developed a nonformal education strategy that was implemented primarily with groups of grandmothers in order to improve the health of newborns. This experience confirms both the influence of grandmothers in children’s overall development and grandmothers’ openness to new ideas when the pedagogical methods used are based on respect and dialogue and engage them in critical reflection on issues that concern them.

In Mali, it is widely recognized that grandmothers, or muso koroba in the bamana language, have great influence on the practices of younger women and children, and families as a whole. Prior to the experi-

⁷ The neonatal health project implemented by Helen Keller International in Mali was supported by the Saving Newborn Lives program of Save the Children USA and a grant from the Melinda and Bill Gates Foundation.

CULTURALLY-ADAPTED EDUCATION MATERIALS : SONGS AND STORIES

Nonformal education methods often include participatory, culturally-adapted educational materials such as songs and open-ended stories. In Mali, stories and songs have traditionally been used as communication and teaching mediums, and the community groups expressed strong interest in and support for their use. These materials themselves, and the way they were used, contributed to the participatory, collective community learning process that engaged grandmothers and other community actors in transformational learning.

SONGS

Two types of songs were developed for the Mali project; songs of praise to the grandmothers and educational songs on the nutrition and health topics. The songs of praise were developed to acknowledge the important role grandmothers play in family and community health, to show

respect for them, and to encourage them to participate in the activities. Each of the community sessions started and ended with singing these songs. The educational songs contained key information on each of the session topics. They were related not only to the ideas promoted by the Ministry of Health, but also to beneficial traditional practices. Here is an example of one of the songs of praise developed by the team in Mali, followed by one of the educational songs.

In Mali, as in many societies, women enjoy singing. The Malian grandmothers clearly stated that they appreciated the songs as they were both enjoyable and educational.

All community groups appreciated the songs used in the Mali project. They helped establish rapport with the grandmothers and helped them feel relaxed and open-minded during the educational sessions, therefore creating a safe, comfortable environment for learning. In most cases, once the songs of praise were used,

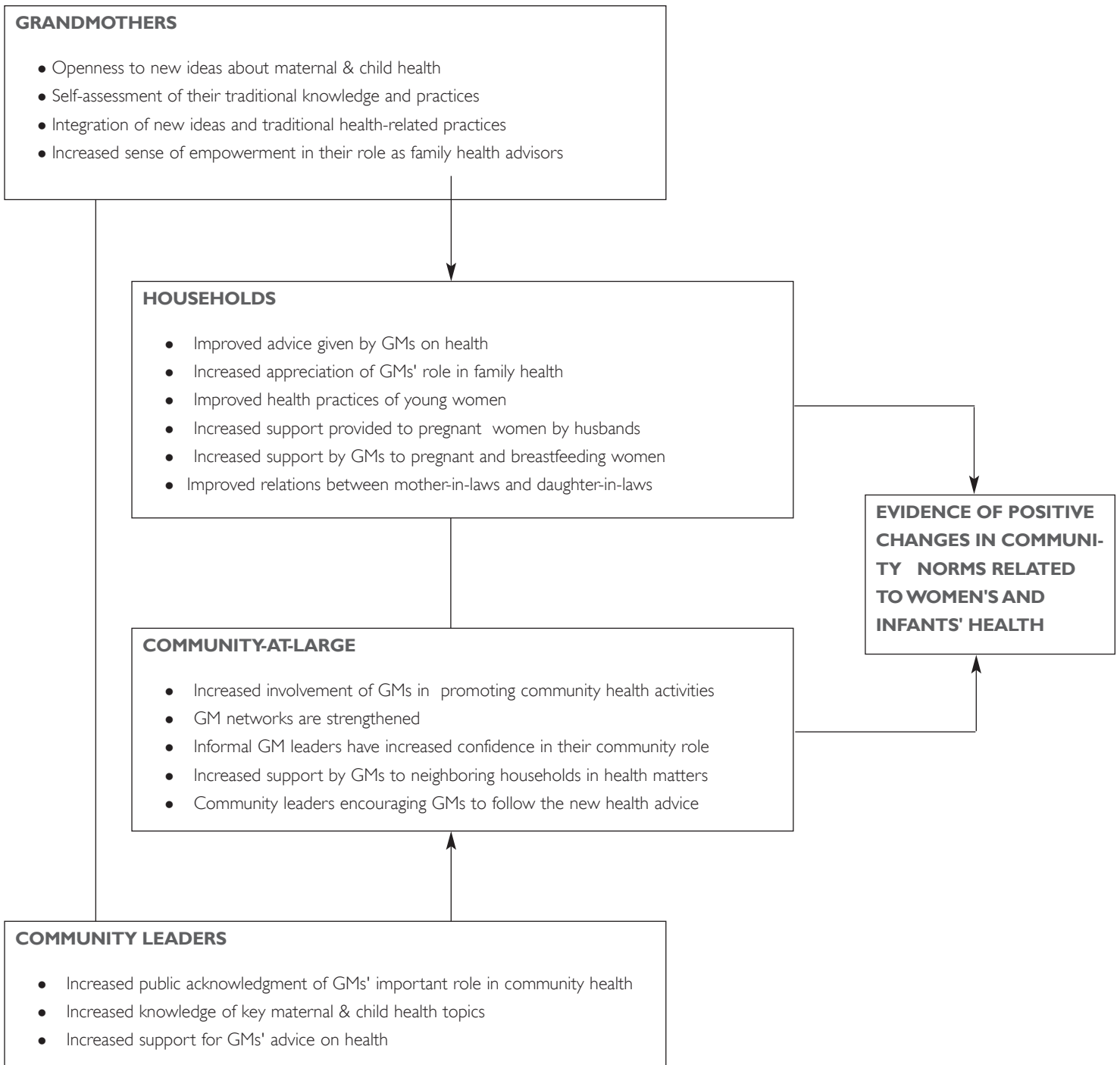
In Praise of Grandmother

Dearest Grandmother, dearest Grandmother
You are such a wonderful person, such a wonderful person.
Dearest Grandmother, dearest Grandmother
Your heart is large and compassionate
Dearest Grandmother, dearest Grandmother.

Grandmother's Advice to a Pregnant Woman

Grandmother, what advice do you give to a pregnant woman?
I tell her to work less.
Grandmother, what advice do you give to a pregnant woman?
I tell her to eat more.
Grandmother, what advice do you give to a pregnant woman?
I tell her to eat beans, peanuts, and green vegetables.

DIAGRAM I:
Outcomes of Nonformal Education Activities with Grandmothers in Mali to Promote Newborn Health



Many health and development workers view grandmothers as a negative force, due to some of their “traditional practices” and “traditional remedies,” and prefer to interact with younger women, and sometimes their husbands.

CHILD HYGIENE

In all cultures where grandmothers play a role in child-care they are involved in teaching young children about socio-cultural norms and practices related to defecation and personal hygiene, such as hand-washing after defecation and before eating. Based on an internet search and an interview with an environmental health specialist (Kleinau 2004), it was not possible to identify any community programs that have explicitly involved grandmothers in promoting optimal hygiene practices.

HIV/AIDS

A major constraint identified by grandmothers and grandfathers is their exclusion from HIV/AIDS awareness activities that focus almost exclusively on young people. In spite of their greatly increased child-care responsibilities in high HIV/AIDS prevalence areas, there are few programs that are providing direct psycho-social, financial, or material support to these elder family members to help meet their increased child-care responsibilities.

SEVERAL FACTORS CONTRIBUTE TO THE LIMITED EXCLUSION OF GRANDMOTHERS' IN CHILD DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS.

Often in community child development programs that focus on younger women there are a few grandmothers who partici-

pate. However, few programs have identified grandmothers as priority community actors and have explicitly and actively involved them in community strategies. Several factors appear to contribute to this fact. First, many development agencies and staff have negative biases against grandmothers related to their “age,” “inability to learn” and “resistance to change.” Second, the models used as a basis for design of child development programs, borrowed from the west, tend to focus on “mothers,” and sometimes “parents,” while ignoring the significant role and influence of elder household actors in non-western societies.

A FEW SUCCESSFUL GRANDMOTHER-INCLUSIVE CHILD DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS DO EXIST.

There are some examples of child development programs that have explicitly involved grandmothers. Although few in number, these experiences illustrate how programs can acknowledge grandmothers' role and past experience, actively involve them, and in so doing strengthen their knowledge and skills. In programs where a grandmother-inclusive approach has been adopted, feedback from grandmothers, from other community members, and from development staff has been very positive and in most cases their involvement appears to have contributed to increased program results.

“Grandmothers raise children; they tell stories in the winter and teach children the skills they need for survival. Grandmothers are the central characters in the daily and symbolic lives of Native (American) women—indeed, of Native people.”

Rayna Green

THERE IS A GAP BETWEEN POLICY STATEMENTS AND GRANDMOTHERS’ INCLUSION IN CHILD DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS.

Policy statements from key international agencies involved in children’s development advocate for strengthening the capacity of all family members to respond to children’s needs. By extrapolation, such policy priorities imply that programs should involve senior family members, including grandmothers. In reality, there are few programs in which grandmothers are explicitly and actively involved. The non-inclusion of grandmothers in child development programs represents a significant inconsistency with policy guidelines.

GRANDMOTHER LEADERS AND NETWORKS SHOULD BE VIEWED AS SOCIAL CAPITAL.

Social capital has been defined by Serageldin as “the glue that keeps communities together and that is required for a collective and sustained response to community needs.” (Krishna & Uphoff, 1999). While there is much discussion of the need to strengthen existing community structures” in community development programs, limited attention has been given to the potential represented by natural grandmother leaders and their social networks for promotion of children’s development. Several experiences empowering these groups suggest that strengthening them can contribute to enhancing a community’s social capital and to sustaining community action for children’s development.

GRANDMOTHERS ARE RECEPTIVE TO THE USE OF NONFORMAL EDUCATION APPROACHES THAT BUILD ON THEIR EXISTING KNOWLEDGE.

In experiences in several countries, nonformal, adult education methods have been very successfully used with groups of grandmothers. They were very receptive to these methods that drew on their experience and engaged them in dialogue on their existing ideas as well as alternative, “modern” practices. Their receptivity to the approach can be explained by the fact that the approach reinforced their culturally-defined role, as respected advisors of younger women and children, while helping them to acquire new knowledge and practices related to child health and development. (The Mali case study highlights the use of these methods).

TABLE 2:
Questions for Basic Education Planners Regarding "Core Roles" of Grandmothers Across Cultures

Core Roles of Grandmothers Across Cultures	Questions for Basic Education Program Planners
All cultures recognize the critical role of grandparents as guides and advisors to the younger generations.	Do education materials and curricula acknowledge and value the wisdom of grandparents in society? Do school programs encourage children to learn from their grandparents? Are grandparents included in program activities?
In all cultures grandparents play gender-specific roles related to child development.	Do programs recognize the gender-specific roles and expertise of grandmothers and grandfathers? Do programs promote respect for both male and female roles and experience?
Grandmothers' child-rearing expertise is acquired over a lifetime.	Are there opportunities for grandmothers to share their life experiences with students in person, in print, on the radio or in other media?
In all cultures grandmothers are involved in various aspects of the lives of children and families at the household level.	Are grandmothers' knowledge and skills included and valued in program activities?
The roles of grandmothers appear to be universal whereas much of their knowledge and practices are culturally-specific.	Are cultural values and traditions incorporated into program content? Are grandmothers given opportunities to share their culture-specific skills and knowledge in school programs?
Grandmothers influence the attitudes and decisions made by male household members regarding children's well-being.	Do schools involve grandmothers and grandfathers in strategies to promote school attendance and school retention, particularly of girls? Are grandparents included, along with parents, in school associations?
Grandmothers are both directly and indirectly involved in promoting the well-being of children.	Do school programs aim to educate grandmothers on children's psychological, nutritional and health needs? Do programs encourage dialogue between grandparents and parents on children's needs?
Some of grandmothers' knowledge and practices are beneficial to child development while others are not.	Are grandmothers presented in a positive or negative light in curricula and materials? Are grandmothers viewed as a resource or as an obstacle to children's educational development? Do programs encourage children to respect grandparents' knowledge even if they have not been to school?
All grandmothers have a strong commitment to promoting the growth and development of their grandchildren.	Do schools support activities that encourage children to acknowledge grandmothers' knowledge and care for them?
Compared to younger women, grandmothers generally have more time to spend and more patience with young children.	Is grandmothers' availability and patience viewed as a resource to be exploited by education programs?
Most grandmothers are interested in increasing their knowledge of "modern" ideas about child development.	Are grandmothers given opportunities to learn new things related to children's educational development?
Grandmothers' knowledge comes both from their own mothers and their peers.	Do programs work with networks of grandmothers and their leaders?
Many grandmothers have a collective sense of responsibility for children and women in the community.	Do educational programs build on and strengthen grandmothers' sense of responsibility for children and women outside their family?
Some grandmothers feel that their status as advisors in child and family development is diminishing.	Are organizations and programs observing this trend or working to increase the inclusion of grandmothers? Do schools encourage children to reflect on what they can do to validate the role of grandparents in the family and community?

