

New films bring community voices to the forefront on Human Rights Day 2013

December 10, 2013

Dakar, Senegal & Los Angeles, California

In celebration of UN-recognized International Human Rights Day on December 10th, nonprofit organizations Tostan and Venice Arts, together with the Sundance Institute and The Skoll Foundation, will premiere a series of participant-produced films from community members in Senegal.

Through the three short films, which have been produced following training in participant-led media techniques and documentary filmmaking, community members share their own stories about how their lives are changing.

Earlier this year, Tostan was awarded a \$20,000 grant by [Stories of Change](#), a project of the [Sundance Institute](#) Documentary Film Program and Fund (DFP), supported by the [Skoll Foundation](#), to train community members in participant-led filmmaking, which gives the power of the storytelling back to communities, providing them with the opportunity to share stories that are the most meaningful to them.

The training and technical support was undertaken by renowned filmmakers and trainers [Venice Arts](#) and additional funding for the project was received from Sida, the [Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency](#).

The films were shot in Kolda, near Senegal's border with Guinea Bissau, with communities identifying three stories to tell in a short-short (3–5 minute) format.

Film 1 - [Peace Come In](#) takes place in the Pulaar village of Tankanto Maoundé, Senegal. Through short interviews with community members, the film tells of the importance of developing a community vision, protecting children and increasing environmental safety.

Film 2 - [Waylowaylo](#) also takes place in the community of Tankanto Maoundé. *Waylowaylo* means 'change' in Pulaar, and the film shows the changes in attitude in the community towards girls' education through the story of a girl named Maoundé Baldé and her father, Mamadou Baldé, the Village Chief.

Film 3 - [The Crossing](#) takes place in the Mandinka village of Karcia, Senegal. This film addresses a common source of conflict between families and ethnic groups in West Africa – inter-ethnic marriage – and shows how conflict can be resolved through positive communication.

The short films show the impact of human rights education through stories from the communities themselves, revealing what is important to them. The films will be used in communities to foster dialogue, and internationally, to bring community voices to the fore.

"We are delighted to launch these films on Human Rights Day. The amplification of community voices really is key to empowering development, and through participant-produced filmmaking, community priorities and solutions can be brought directly to the forefront. We plan to implement the emerging practice of storytelling-for-impact in our programs, monitoring and communications, and use these techniques to better report the results of the Tostan program."

Molly Melching, Founder and Executive Director, Tostan

"This project developed participants' knowledge of documentary filmmaking and their skills in using media tools but, and more importantly, it deepened their ability to listen for, visualize, and uplift stories of transformation; to understand that even small stories, told well, can serve as witness, facilitator, and change agent".

Lynn Warshafsky, Founder and Executive Director, Venice Arts

"Tostan is taking a leadership role implementing the emerging practice of storytelling-for-impact. We're proud to have supported Tostan's participant-led storytelling initiative. The organizations has identified a powerful way to amplify and accelerate their work by giving the communities they serve the tools and a platform to tell their own stories about positive social change."

Richard Ray Perez, Producer, Creative Partnerships, Sundance Institute Documentary Film Program

The films are available with English and French subtitles and can be viewed on Tostan and Venice Arts' websites on December 10th, Human Rights Day.

Ends.

Note to Editors

1. **Tostan's** mission is to "empower African communities to bring about sustainable development and positive social transformation based on respect for human rights." Tostan works in six West African and two East African countries and has been internationally recognized for its success in engaging communities to make significant change, including the empowerment of women and girls through leadership opportunities, the protection of children's rights and promotion of education, the improvement of maternal and child health, and the abandonment of harmful social practices such as child/forced marriage and female genital cutting (FGC). To find out more about Tostan, visit www.tostan.org
2. **Venice Arts** runs education and mentoring programs in documentary photography, filmmaking, and multimedia primarily targeting Los Angeles area low-income youth. Venice Arts also implements regional, statewide, and international projects with both adults and children; presents exhibitions, public programs, and workshops for adults centered around documentary photography and film; and provides consulting and training on media arts, visual storytelling, and arts education with organizations and groups locally and internationally, ranging from



California's Central Valley to Hong Kong and Senegal. As part of its mission, Venice Arts aims to create and share personal community stories through photography, film and multi-media. To find out more about Venice Arts, visit www.venicearts.org

3. **Stories of Change: Social Entrepreneurship In Focus Through Documentary** is a multi-year, \$5 million initiative of the Sundance Institute Documentary Film Program and the Skoll Foundation. The partnership began in 2008 with the goal of bringing together the power of nonfiction storytelling with the impact of social entrepreneurship. For more information, visit www.sundance.org/storiesofchange/

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