



Tostan Canada Annual Report 2024 -2025

Advancing community-led development in West Africa





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Message from the Co-chairs

Dear Friends and Supporters,

It is our pleasure to share Tostan Canada's first Annual Report for the fiscal year ending May 31, 2025, and to reflect on a year of meaningful impact, partnership, and progress.

Across West Africa, communities continue to demonstrate what is possible when people are equipped with knowledge, supported in exercising their rights, and empowered to lead their own development. Through education grounded in dignity, human rights, and local leadership, Tostan's programs are helping communities create lasting change for women, girls, children, and future generations.



Kelly Baxter and Sophie Champagne - Co-chairs of Tostan Canada

At Tostan Canada, our role is to strengthen the connection between Canadians and this extraordinary work. This report highlights some of what your support has made possible. Thanks to the generosity of our donors and partners, this year Tostan Canada contributed to community-led initiatives across Senegal, The Gambia, and Guinea-Bissau, advancing women's leadership, improving maternal and child health, expanding educational opportunities, supporting entrepreneurship, and strengthening local capacity for sustainable change.

These outcomes are not imposed from outside. They are defined, led, and sustained by communities themselves, which has been central to Tostan's approach for more than three decades.

As we look ahead, we do so with optimism and determination. We face a difficult funding climate. And the challenges facing communities across the region remain significant, but so too does the resilience, leadership, and potential within those communities. Canadian supporters are an important part of this journey, and we are profoundly grateful for your trust and partnership.

Together, we are helping build a future where women and girls can learn, lead, and thrive, and where communities themselves drive lasting and meaningful change.

With gratitude,

Kelly Hawke Baxter and Sophie Champagne

Co-Chairs, Tostan Canada



Who We Are

Tostan Canada is a registered Canadian charity that raises awareness, mobilizes resources, and builds partnerships in support of community-led development and gender equality across West Africa.

Many rural communities in the region continue to face barriers to education, health, economic opportunity, and are not part of the decision-making that affects their lives. Women and girls are disproportionately affected by these challenges and continue to face obstacles to leadership, education, and the realization of their rights. Lasting change requires approaches that strengthen local leadership, promote gender equality, and support communities to identify and achieve their own vision for development.

Our work supports [Tostan International](#), an African non-profit organization headquartered in Senegal that has worked alongside communities for more than 35 years to advance human rights, education, health, women's leadership, and sustainable social change.

Through its respected Community Empowerment Program and community-led approach, Tostan has helped thousands of communities strengthen literacy, improve health outcomes, increase girls' education, expand women's participation in decision-making, and collectively abandon harmful practices such as child marriage and female genital cutting.

Tostan's approach is rooted in the belief that lasting change is most effective when it is led by communities themselves. Programs are delivered in local languages and are shaped by local priorities, culture, and leadership. Over more than three decades, this community-centered model has demonstrated significant and lasting impact across Senegal, Mali, The Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, and other parts of the region.

Tostan Canada serves as a bridge between Canadian supporters and Tostan's work on the ground. Tostan Canada engages Canadians through fundraising, communications, and strategic partnerships that help expand the reach of Tostan's programs.

Approximately 93% of funds raised by Tostan Canada are directed to program implementation through Tostan International.



From left to right: Kelly Baxter, Tostan Canada Co-Chair; Molly Melching, Tostan Founder; Gail Kaneb, former Tostan Canada Chair; Sophie Champagne, Tostan Canada Co-Chair; and Dominique Chauvet-Staco, Tostan Canada National Director.

Mission

Tostan Canada is dedicated to advancing community-led development and gender equality in West Africa through education. We support Tostan International by raising awareness, mobilizing resources, building strategic partnerships, and engaging Canadian individuals, foundations, and institutions in support of its transformative, community-driven initiatives across the region.

Vision

We envisage a world where every woman and girl can reach her full potential, regardless of where she is born, where communities lead their own socio-economic development and where empowering education builds the foundation for human rights, equality and well-being.



A young woman shares what she learned from a Tostan lesson in a community in Senegal



Building Awareness and Connections

2024 - 2025 was a year of continued engagement for Tostan Canada. Despite a challenging fundraising environment, our community of supporters remained committed to advancing education, human rights, and women's leadership through Tostan International's work in West Africa.

Engaging a Community of Support

Raising awareness remains central to our mission. Throughout the year, we engaged Canadians during key moments such as International Women's Day and the International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation, while also sharing a powerful [PBS documentary](#) highlighting Tostan's community-led approach and the transformative impact of its work across West Africa.

These efforts brought supporters together around a shared purpose: advancing dignity, equality, and opportunity for women and communities. They also helped sustain both awareness and financial support, strengthening the connection between Canadian donors and the communities they support.

Field Visit to West Africa

In November 2024, Tostan Canada led a delegation of Canadian donors and partners on a field visit to The Gambia. The visit provided an opportunity for participants to engage directly with local leaders, Community Management Committee members, facilitators and participants involved in the Community Empowerment Program (CEP) supported by Canadian donors. The delegation visited districts in The Gambia's Central River Region where the first phase of the program is underway.



Kelly Baxter and Kelsey McFarlane with CMC leaders during a field visit in Kerewaan Samba Sira, The Gambia.

The delegation observed community-led decision-making in action and heard directly about changes in knowledge, attitudes, and practices related to human rights. In particular, women described increased confidence, greater participation in decision-making, and the ability to speak publicly within their communities.



Left to right: Kelly Baxter and Sophie Champagne with Nimya Faye, Regional Gender Officer, Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Welfare, The Gambia.

As one board member reflected following her first visit to the region:

“One regional government official I spoke to deeply moved me by sharing that, without Tostan, she would likely have undergone genital cutting, been married at 13, and denied an education. Thanks to Tostan, she now leads and inspires.”

— Sophie Champagne, Co-Chair, Board of Directors, Tostan Canada

The visit deepened participants’ understanding of Tostan’s community-led approach and strengthened their connection to the impact of their contributions.



Impact of Your Support

In 2024–2025, Tostan Canada and its supporters, including individual donors, foundations, and partners, enabled meaningful progress across West Africa. Their combined commitment helped improve the well-being of women, expand community education across Senegal's Kolda region, The Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, and Mali, strengthen women-led entrepreneurship through training and microcredit, and enhance Tostan's learning hub, the Tostan Training Center in Thiès.



A Tostan facilitator in a community classroom in the Kolda region, Senegal.

These initiatives reflect the strength of Tostan's holistic, human rights-based approach and demonstrate how strategic funding and local collaboration can drive lasting change and empower communities to lead their own development journeys.

Improving the Well-Being of Women – Community Empowerment and Health

This year, Tostan Canada and the Pathy Family Foundation supported the expansion of the three-year Community Empowerment Program (CEP) to 100 new communities across West Africa, including 20 in Senegal, 40 in The Gambia, and 40 in Guinea-Bissau. Through locally led dialogue and learning, the program engaged 7,900 participants (84% women and girls), strengthening community capacity to improve well-being, advance gender equality, and support collective decision-making.



A woman attends a Tostan class with her child in the Kolda region, Senegal.

In all communities, obstetric fistula awareness was integrated into the CEP for the first time, enabling those affected to seek the support that they need, access treatment and reintegrate into their communities to live their lives with dignity, understanding and respect.

KEY RESULTS

- Each of the 100 communities elected a 19-member Community Management Committee (1,900 members in total, the majority of whom are women), which serves as the local leadership body for the Community Empowerment Program and supports inclusive decision-making and collective action toward community well-being.
- 24,400 community activities were organized on health, education, and governance reaching 191 villages not participating in the CEP, through “organized diffusion.”
- Over 9,000 women accessed pre- and post-natal care; more than 34,000 children were vaccinated.
- In Senegal, 46 women received holistic fistula treatment and were successfully reintegrated into their communities; this approach was recognized nationally as a model for ending obstetric fistula.

Strengthening Community Economies through Finance and Entrepreneurship

With support from Fondation DevKey, a new Tostan Canada partner, access to Community Development Funds (CDFs) was made possible in The Gambia, thereby strengthening women's economic empowerment and enabling women-led entrepreneurship to flourish. Managed by Community Management Committees, these funds support local projects and provide access to seed capital for income-generating activities. Most recipients are women who are accessing microcredit for the first time. They also received support to build sustainable livelihoods thereby contributing to the economic growth of their communities.



Women gather for a community meeting in Sami Pachonki village in The Gambia.

KEY RESULTS

- In 40 villages across The Gambia, approximately 32,000 people now have access to microcredit through Community Development Funds established with CAD 69,000 from Tostan Canada. Managed by local Community Management Committees, these funds provide approximately CAD 1,725 per village to support loans and community-led initiatives.
- A total of 683 micro-businesses were established, 95% of which are run by women.
- 760 Community Management Committee members received training in financial management.
- All 40 committees are now registered as Community-Based Organizations with bank accounts and collective savings of CAD 10,625.
- Loan repayment rates exceeded 90%, supporting sustainability and ongoing reinvestment.

By combining financial access with training and support, these initiatives are strengthening local economies and enabling women to drive lasting economic change.

Case Study: Sanna's Story

In Karantaba Tabokoto, a small village in eastern The Gambia, Sanna Sisawo, a mother of five, once ran a tiny food stand with limited resources. Without access to credit or formal banking, expanding her business seemed impossible.

Through the Community Development Fund, Sanna received a modest loan of 5,000 dalasi (≈\$104 CAD). This support went beyond money; it was a vote of confidence in her potential. She used the funds to buy ingredients, prepare meals for schoolchildren and neighbors, and steadily grow her business.

“Before, I could barely provide for my children. Now, I can send them to school with pride,” Sanna says. She has since become a mentor to other women, encouraging them to save, plan, and start their own businesses.

Sanna's story illustrates how small, community-led investments can spark lasting change, fostering financial independence, confidence, and leadership that benefit entire communities.



Sanna Sisawo, from the village of Karantaba Tabokoto, The Gambia.

Donnons-leur des Ailes – Strengthening Opportunities For Girls and Young Women in Senegal

In 2024, the Foundation Marcelle et Jean Coutu designed and provided funding to launch Let's Give Them Wings: Together for the Empowerment, Education and Leadership of Women and Girls. This innovative two-year consortium initiative brings together Tostan and two local Senegalese NGOs, AMFE and Grow Academy, to address the interconnected barriers to education, leadership, and socio-professional integration faced by girls and young women in the Matam region and the suburbs of Dakar.



Grow Academy and AMFE participants during a Consortium training workshop at the Tostan Training Center in Thiès, Senegal.

As consortium lead, Tostan plays a central role in strengthening partner capacity and fostering shared learning. Through training and exchange opportunities at the Tostan Training Center, consortium members draw on Tostan's human rights-based, community-led development approach and adapt key elements of the Community Empowerment Program within their own programming. This collaborative model helps build local capacity while extending the reach of community-led development practices.

In 2025, the consortium welcomed Kitambaa, another local NGO, further strengthening the alliance and expanding its expertise. By combining Tostan's community-led development approach with AMFE's work to keep girls in school, Grow Academy's digital skills training, and Kitambaa's expertise in menstrual health and dignity, the partnership is well-positioned to deepen its impact and create new opportunities for girls and young women. Together, the partners demonstrate how collaboration can accelerate progress toward greater inclusion, empowerment, and leadership for the next generation.

Building Capacity for Sustainable Learning

Canadian donations also contributed to improving the facilities at the Tostan Training Center (TTC) in Thiès, Senegal. The TTC is a hub for training leaders and partners across Africa. Renovations and new facilities created a vibrant, eco-friendly space balancing modern learning technology with a welcoming West African aesthetic. With renovated lodging, training spaces, and solar-powered water systems, the TTC is set to host larger seminars, generate revenue, and serve as a center for youth and social innovation.



The newly renovated Tostan Training Center campus in Thiès, Senegal.

Together for Lasting Change

Across Senegal, The Gambia, Mali, and Guinea-Bissau, Canadian support continues to translate into tangible, lasting impact. From improved health and education to strengthened local leadership and economic independence, these initiatives demonstrate how communities drive their own development when equipped with knowledge, resources, and collective agency.

Highlights from Tostan International

While Canadian support contributed to the initiatives highlighted in the previous pages, Tostan International also continued to advance its broader mission across West Africa. Across Senegal, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, The Gambia and Mali, Tostan expanded the reach and impact of its Community Empowerment Program (CEP), a model grounded in human rights education and local leadership. The year was marked by innovation, organizational growth, and strong evidence of community-led progress:



A young girl holds Tostan learning materials in Senegal.

- **Communities empowered:** In 2025, 95 communities publicly declared the abandonment of FGM/C and child marriage, bringing the total to 10,324 communities across all the countries where Tostan has worked since 1997.
- **Shifting social norms:** In partner communities, reports of spousal violence declined, and community members increasingly expect collective action to prevent harmful practices against women and girls

- **Growth of women's leadership:** Two-thirds of CEP participants are women and girls, with many taking active roles in community governance, household decision-making, and economic initiatives.
- **Economic opportunity:** Over \$500,000 was invested in income-generating activities, creating hundreds of new opportunities primarily for women and girls.
- **Innovation:** In partnership with SolarSPELL, Tostan is developing solar-powered, offline digital learning libraries that will provide rural communities with continued access to Community Empowerment Program resources in local languages. The libraries will also include materials from the Reinforcement of Parental Practices (RPP) program which enables parents to access practical tools that support nurturing home environments and children's early learning and development. By extending access to knowledge beyond program completion, this innovation helps communities sustain and build on the gains achieved through Tostan's programs.



Representatives from villages participating in a public declaration to abandon child marriage and female genital cutting in Tambacounda, Senegal.



Leadership Transition

This year marked an important leadership transition for Tostan International with the appointment of Sobel Aziz Ngom as Chief Executive Officer. Sobel is a social entrepreneur and long-time advocate for youth leadership, education, and civic engagement, with over 15 years of experience supporting young people and communities to lead social change across Africa.

As CEO, Sobel brings a deep commitment to community-led development and a belief that sustainable change emerges when people, especially young people, have the knowledge, tools, and collective power to shape their own futures. His leadership builds on Tostan's strong foundation of more than three decades of community-driven impact and supports the organization's continued growth and innovation.



Sobel Aziz Ngom, Tostan International's CEO.



Financial Overview – 2024 -2025

In 2024 - 2025, Tostan Canada raised \$1,514,395 in support of community-led development across West Africa. Most of these funds (93.1%) were directed to program delivery, with a small portion supporting essential operations in Canada.

A total of \$1,410,000 was transferred to Tostan International to fund education, health, women's leadership, and economic empowerment programs across Senegal, The Gambia, and Guinea-Bissau. This amount directly reflects the initiatives and results described in the Impact section above.

Operating expenses in Canada totalled \$65,322, including \$7,472 for administration and \$57,850 for consulting fees. These costs supported governance, compliance, fundraising, and donor stewardship, ensuring effective and accountable management of funds.

Overall, the year ended with a surplus of \$39,073, strengthening our resources available to support future programming and organizational activities.

Approximately \$1.185 million in contributions were restricted to specific programs, ensuring donor intent was respected and funds were directed to their designated purposes.



A community member develops her writing skills through Tostan's Community Empowerment Program.

Financial Report

CATEGORY	AMOUNT (CAD)	% OF TOTAL
Grants and Donations	\$1,514,395	100%
Contributions to Programs in West Africa	(\$1,410,000)	93%
Tostan Canada Operating Expenses	(\$65,322)	4%
Surplus carried forward	\$39,073	3%

For a detailed review, our audited financial statements for 2025 are available [here](#)



Community leaders present the village Vision Board – Kolda region, Senegal.



Thank You to Our Donors

Your donations directly support education, women’s leadership, health, and economic opportunity in communities across Senegal, The Gambia, Mali, and Guinea-Bissau. Every dollar helps communities lead their own development and create lasting change.

We are deeply grateful to all Canadians who contributed in 2024-2025. Your generosity makes this work possible and transforms thousands of lives across West Africa.

We are especially grateful to the following donors and partners whose gifts of \$5,000 or more played a significant role in advancing Tostan’s mission this year:

THANK YOU	
Pathy Family Foundation	Cynthia Baxter
Fondation Marcelle et Jean Coutu	Nancy and Stephen Molson
The Kaneb Family Foundation	David and Sylvie Forest
Red Chair Foundation	Wendy Reed
Fondation DevKey	Charles and Caroline Nicol
The Buchanan Programme & Peter Haldenby	Ann Duffy and Tony Kloepper
Brian and Kelly Baxter	Deirdre Stevenson



Governance

Tostan Canada’s Board of Directors provides governance and strategic direction for the organization. Its members contribute their expertise and commitment to support Tostan’s mission and ensure the sound, transparent, and responsible management of the resources entrusted to the organization.

NAME	TITLE
Kelly Hawke Baxter	Co-chair
Sophie Champagne	Co-chair
Jennifer Potts	Secretary
Gizanne Lafrance-Allaire	Treasurer
Cynthia Baxter	Director
Christie Hollingsworth	Director
Alexandra Kaneb	Director
Gail Kaneb	Director (Past Chair)

Staff

Dominique Chauvet-Staco
National Director



Looking Ahead

In 2026, Tostan Canada remains committed to advancing education, women's leadership, and empowerment across West Africa. We will continue to support Tostan International's mission while deepening engagement with Canadian donors and partners. Together, we look forward to building on this year's achievements and helping communities across Senegal, The Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, and beyond create lasting opportunities for future generations.



Smiling young woman – Senegal.



Boys cheer and clap as they welcome visitors to their village of Chargel in The Gambia.



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