

## Mamanieva: Engaging Grandmothers to promote optimal nutrition and care of pregnant and lactating women and their young children

<http://wvi.org/nutrition/grandmother-approach>

**What:** Mamanieva Project

**Where:** southern Sierra Leone

**Who:** World Vision implemented in partnership with Emory University (USA) and The Grandmother Project (Italy), with support from Ministry of Health and Njala University (Sierra Leone)

**When:** 2013–2016, process evaluation June 2015, final evaluation May 2016

**Goal:** To better understand the influence of grandmothers on maternal and child nutrition in Sierra Leone and to engage grandmothers more effectively as agents of positive changes using the grandmother-inclusive approach.

**What is the grandmother-inclusive approach?** Developed by Dr Judi Aubel, founder of The Grandmother Project, it is a holistic approach that actively involves grandmothers through adult educational methods.<sup>1</sup>

*Mamanieva* means “for grandmothers” in Mende, a widely-spoken language in Sierra Leone, and is also a respectful way to address mothers-in-law and older women in the community.

**“A house without a grandmother is like a road that goes nowhere.”**

Senegalese proverb

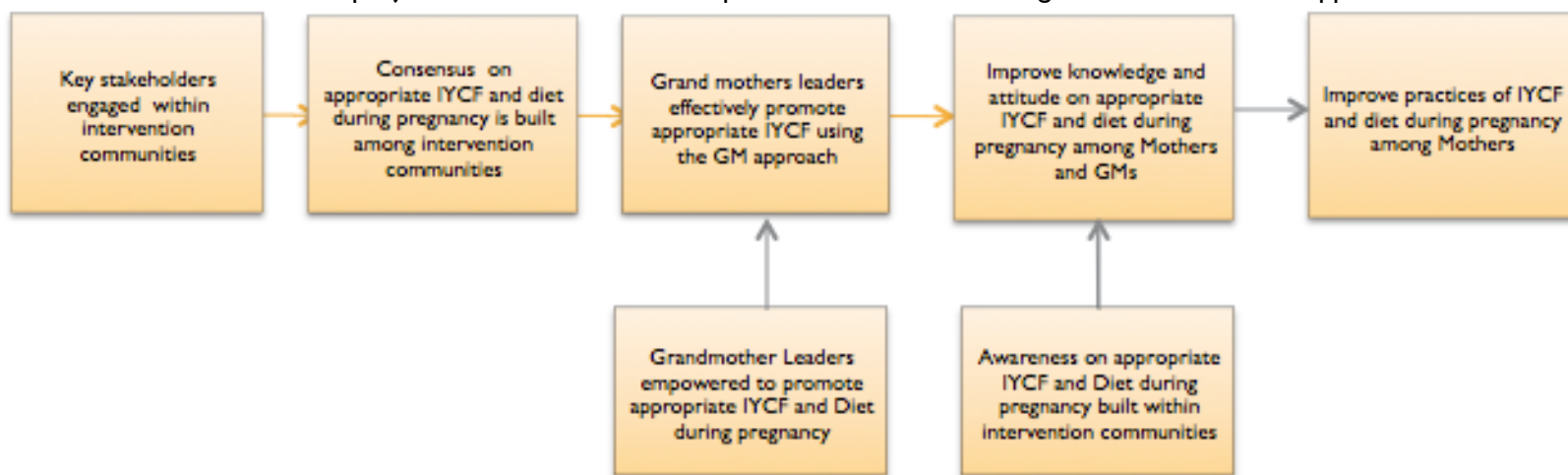
### Why focus on grandmothers?

Grandmothers are key in terms of sustainable change in most cultures, and they need to be strengthened and encouraged in their traditional roles in society, which often include being key resource persons in taking care of young mothers and their infants. Development programmes often neglect the valuable resource of the grandmothers due to many reasons, including prejudices and negative stereotyping.

In the Mamanieva project in Sierra Leone, World Vision intentionally focuses on grandmothers; strengthening and encouraging them as they support maternal and infant and young child feeding, in order to achieve sustainable improvements for children and mothers.

### How are the grandmothers involved in the project approach?

In the Mamanieva project, several activities are implemented to facilitate the grandmother-inclusive approach:



<sup>1</sup> *Educational methods for adults:* Discussions with older women in order to strengthen positive nutrition and care practices and change the negative ones, mutual learning, exchange of experiences, encouragement to make behaviour changes

### Promising ways to achieve an impact and sustainability

Emory University carried out a process evaluation in June 2015 to determine the reach, coverage, fidelity, acceptability and capacity requirements for future programmes. The results are very promising and show a high acceptance of the Mamanieva project among the population due to its uniqueness and appreciation of grandmothers. As well, relationships between daughters and mothers-in-law have improved. One way this is demonstrated is during the praise sessions, when daughters or young mothers are given the opportunity to openly praise or thank the grandmothers through singing a song, performing a skit or dance, or making a speech. Through this process, grandmothers not only acquire more confidence but are also strengthened in their traditional role within the community. This is particularly important for the success and the sustainable work of the grandmothers with the young mothers in the project.

### Process Evaluation Findings:

- Grandmothers and mothers participated in group discussions to acquire new knowledge and due to the visible improvement in the health of their children and grandchildren since the project began
- The creative activities used, such as singing, interactive storytelling, skits and games, have led to increased participation in the group discussions and more prevalent application of improved feeding practices
- Male community members are interested in the Mamanieva project and want to participate. The process evaluation recommends finding useful ways to increase men's involvement in the project.

### Praise of Grandmothers song in Mende:

A mu seigbua mamani moa mu lenga gbeava hun.  
A mu seigbua mamani moa mu lenga houva oh.  
A mu seigbua mamani moa mu lenga waua oh.  
A mu seigbua mamani mao mu lenga goua oh.

### Translation:

Let's thank our mothers for bringing up our children.  
Let's thank our mothers for holding our children.  
Let's thank our mothers for cleaning our children.  
Let's thank our mothers for feeding our children.

Grandmothers from target communities share their experiences:

***"We feel that we are important. We are assigned a particular duty and we feel a sense of belonging."***



Grandmothers at Day of Praise of Grandmothers  
Photo credit: Annicka Webster

We believe that the promising results shown in the process evaluation will be confirmed through the final evaluation, and that a significant improvement in the practices of young mothers regarding infant and young child feeding will be shown—thanks to the commitment and engagement of the grandmothers.

