

Thursday 9th July 2015

**STATEMENT DELIVERED BY ISATOU ALWAR GRAHAM AG. DEPUTY SOLICITOR
GENERAL & CURATOR OF INTESTATE ESTATES, AT THE
61st SESSION OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF
DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN
GENEVA 6TH JULY 2015**

**Your Excellencies, Chairperson of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women,
Honourable Members of the Committee
Ladies and Gentlemen**

On behalf of the Office of The Vice President and Minister of Women Affairs Dr Aja Isatou Njie Saidu and Committee of Experts on the Rights of Women and the girl child . It gives me as the Head of The Gambian Delegation great honour and privilege and for the members of my delegation to address and participate in the proceedings of the 61st session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). The Gambia looks up to the Sessions of the Committee with great expectation as we find them as a platform of renewing our commitments and obligations in the cause of women human rights. We are therefore gathered here today to reaffirm our commitment to end violence against women.

BACKGROUND

Development context and priorities of development goals

Hon Chairperson

The Gambia's commitment to end violence against women and girls are evident by our ratification of a number of important instruments with provision concerning violence against women and girls namely: **the United Nations Declarations on Human Rights (1949), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and International Covenant on Economic, Cultural and Social Rights.**

The Gambia is also a signatory to and has committed herself to the implementation of the following International Conventions, agreements and declarations which are directly relevant to the implementation of the Beijing declaration, namely, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, The Solemn Declaration on Gender Equity in Africa, and several other human rights instruments.

Chairperson: You may wish to recall that in 2012, The Gambia submitted its 4th and 5th combined Reports to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.ⁱⁱ Further it has present to you our response in June 2015, in respect to the issues raised by the Committee. Our presence here reiterated the commitments and emphasis placed by the Government of The Gambia and to actively participates, learn, share experience and adopt best practices.

GEOGRAPHY

The Gambia is a small State in West Africa with an unrivalled history of religious tolerance and tribal harmony and peaceful co-existence. The government of the Gambia is committed on strengthening and nurturing the peaceful co-existence among its multi-ethnic and multi-lingual citizen and to anyone who called The Gambia home. Since the right to housing does not mean right to have a roof over one's head, but as the right to live

¹ Source: Women's Bureau

somewhere in security, peace and dignity without your self being and property being attack as a result of xenophobia.

In this order the government of the government of the Gambia is committed to enhancing and strengthening its legal framework and infrastructure and to continuing to integrate the promotion and protection of women human rights into its national development strategies.

The roles of Women in Gambian culture is poignantly captured in our folklores and customs, there bravery and participation in warfare strategies and welfare of their communities during the Soninke Marabout wars could not be overemphasised. Thus Gambian women have a long history of resilience, bravery, valor and strength as Manifest in the person of her Excellency and Vice President of The Gambia Dr, Ajiratou Isatou Nije Saidy and renowned women rights activists.

Role of His Excellency the President

His Excellency the President of the Republic of The Gambia has set up a Trust Fund, known as the President Educational Trust fund for girls' education (PEGEP). Has over the years provides scholarships for thousands of girls to pursue further education up to the level **tertiary education. This laudable initiative is in conformity with S.26 of the Act** which prohibits discrimination of women and the girl child in the field of education it also recognises the right of every woman including the girl child to be educated and **S.28** prohibits the removal of girls from school for marriage. It also serves as an effective measure in preventing teen age pregnancy.

THE CONSTITUTION OF THE GAMBIA

The Constitution of the Republic of the Gambia 1997 is the Supreme law of the land. **Chapter IV Section 17 guarantees** the protection of the fundamental human rights and freedoms of all persons in the Gambia irrespective of colour, race, gender, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property birth or other status. It is therefore evidentially clear that the above provisions protect the fundamental right of all persons including human right defenders.

Chairperson: **The multicultural Character of many of our cultures stand as an obstacle and impediment to both social and legal reforms, thereby undermining the achievement of gender equality and women empowerment².** Thus violence against women and girls in The Gambia manifest itself in many forms for instance: sexual harassment, rapes, forced prostitution, trafficking, sexual exploitation, and domestic violence. However due to traditional taboos and attitudes towards victims of sexual violence cases were not reported as a result of a deeply rooted culture of silence. However the enactment of specific legislations aimed to redress such impunity is witnessing an upward trend in the number of reported cases.

The Government of the Gambia in it's striving to put an end to impunity as incidents of violence in the domestic sphere, have enacted the below mentioned Legislations:

Legislation Addressing the Issues Relating to Violence against Women

In recent years the Government has been increasingly proactive in addressing the issue of Gender Based – Violence passed into law the Women's Act 2010, Domestic Violence Act 2013 and the Sexual Offences Act 2013.

²² Child Labour in Sub-Saharan Africa : I satou Alwar Graham

ACCESS TO JUSTICE AND EQUAL PROTECTION BEFORE THE LAW

S.7 (1) of The Gambia Constitution (1997) states that every woman is entitled to equality and justice before the law and to equal protection of the law (2)

Chairperson: The Women's Act 2010 as Amended in 2012 is a comprehensive piece of legislation that embodied the law to enforce women's human rights and provide protection against discrimination. It domesticates provisions of the CEDAW and the protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa and also provides for the implementation of the legal provisions of the National Policy for the Advancement of Women and Girls. It prohibits all violence against women and girls. Section 6 including any form of physical, sexual, psychological, or economic harm, suffering or violence occurring in public or private. It prohibits domestic violence of wife beating. Section 9 and 10 prohibits discrimination of women through words, acts inactions, omissions, regulations or administrative procedures by public, government or private enterprise.³

The Act also seeks to ensure that the inequalities of the past in respect basis to gender based violence are eliminated, and on the other hand to promote the achievement of substantive equality in the country:

- a) . By monitoring and assessing the extent to which unfair discrimination on the grounds of gender
- b) .by Equality primarily through monitoring in the private and public spheres
- c) .On the improvement of the quality of life and status of women,
- d) Further Office of the Vice President and Ministry of Women Affairs, is charged inter –alia with the responsibility of coordinating, monitoring on all activities in the enhancement of women's rights and empowerment
- e) .The Committee on The Universal Periodic Report monitors and oversees government's progress regarding compliance with international instrument

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

S.8 Women Act 2010 states that every woman is entitled to freedom of expression including freedom to hold opinion and to receive and impart ideas and information without hindrance. This section mirrors the constitutional provision guaranteeing freedom of expression but make it specifically application to women. Apparently this Section is quite innovative as there is no specific corresponding provision in both CEDAW and the Protocol. It also recognises that there are indeed circumstances were woman are denied the right to express themselves s in our patriacical setup in the Gambia

Chairperson: The Government of the Gambia has taken significant measures to address violence against women; Efforts have been made at strengthening the legal and institutional framework on violence against women. The Women`s Act 2010 imposes **specific obligation and duty on Government to promote women's rights and to take positive measures to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women. Section 9, 10, and 14 (1)** a woman shall not be made to suffer any discrimination by reason only that she is a woman **Furthermore Section 12 & 13** the provision of this Act are enforceable in the same manner as is set out in **section 37 of the Constitution** of the Gambia 1997, or any successive provisions

Notwithstanding the generality of subsection (1), the following persons have the right to approach a competent court alleging that a right in this Act has been infringed or threatened and the court may grant appropriate. The above provision together with its definitions is very innovation as it recognises the need to

³ Source: FLAG

protect the woman against violence, and it also outlines the scope of what violence entails so that offences and cause of action against perpetrators can be easily determined.

ADOPTION OF TEMPORARY SPECIAL MEASURES IN FAVOUR OF WOMEN

SECTION 16 (1) every organ, body, public, Institution, Authority, or private enterprise shall adopt Amendments of law to ensure more safe guard for women and girls

Temporally measures as set out in this Act aimed at accelerating equality between men and women. Further Section 16 of the Act prohibits discrimination of women, in employment opportunities. It provides for the rights of women to employment in realisation of their human right to work and economic empowerment. It also seeks to eliminate the stereotyping of what types of employment should be for the female gender, and protects working mothers to enable them cope with family and employment without much hindrance⁴.

S22 (3) criminalises certain actions or omissions perpetrated against women in employment and are punishable by law. Thus S.26 of the Act prohibits discrimination of women in the field of education it also recognises the right of every woman including the girl child to be educated. S.28 prohibits the removal of girls from school for marriage, and SECTION 20 MATERNITY LEAVE (1) every woman is entitled to a period of six months maternity leave with pay or with comparable social benefit without loss of employment, seniority or similar benefits. (2) In order to reinforce the common responsibility of men and women in the upbringing and development of their children, every father is entitled to a reasonable period of time not exceeding ten working days as paternity leave with pay, for every child delivered for him

Chairperson: We hereby urged the **Committee to note** that the aforesaid **Section 20 deals with maternity and extends the maternity Leave period** to six months paid leave. It also affords the father the opportunity to take responsibility in the upbringing of children. The section recognises and caters for the WHO recommendation for women to breast feed their babies exclusively for a period of six months. Thus **S.20 (1)** recognises the right of every woman to enjoy the highest level of physical, mental and social well being, health care and health care services including family planning it protects women against discrimination. The said Right also includes **reproductive health rights and services and provides for the rights to medical abortion where the pregnancy endangers the life of the mother or the foetus. This provision has a direct relation with the effects of GBV some of the consequences of GBV negatively affect the physical mental and social well being of the victim**

S22 (3) criminalises certain actions or omissions perpetrated against women in employment and are punishable by law

Amendments of Law to Ensure More Safe Guard for Women and Girls:

Domestic Violence Act 2013

This is a very innovative piece of legislation. It is an Act 'to combat Domestic Violence, provide protection for the victims of domestic violence; particularly women and children and for other related matters'. The definition of Domestic violence under Section 3 is broad to include 'physical abuse, sexual and economic abuse, and emotional, verbal and psychological abuse.' Section 4 provides for the definition of 'domestic relationships', which extends the frontiers of Domestic relationship beyond marital and family relationship to include several other intimate and close relationships. Section 6 reinforces that the consent of the victim is not a defence to a charge of domestic violence.

⁴ Source: National Review Report on The Beijing Declaration by Mrs. Janet Sallah Njie

Violence in a domestic setting is no longer just a private, family affair. A victim of domestic violence can seek redress by applying for a Protection Order from the court against the perpetrator of the violence, as well as lodge a complaints against perpetrator who can be prosecuted for the offence of domestic violence and if found guilty can be sentenced to a fine not exceeding One hundred thousand dalasi or to a term of imprisonment not exceeding two years or to both.⁵

- **The sexual Violence Act 2010 as Amended in 2012 and**
- **the Criminal Code (the Criminal Code also criminalise buying or disposing of a person as a slave, habitually dealing in slaves, and unlawful compulsory labour s.242 Criminal Code)**

Sexual Violence Act: the Sexual Offences Act of 2013 sought to amend the Criminal Code in respect to trials for rape and other sexual offences and to combat sexual offences. It came into being to provide protection for the victims of sexual violence particularly women and children.

Apparently the laws of The Gambia as provided in **Section 7 (d-f) of the Constitution of the Gambia 1997 comprises Common Law, Customary Law and Sharia Law.** However, the Civil Courts are accessible to all persons but with regards to the **Customary Laws, it is used in so far as it concerns the members of the communities.** In this vein **Sharia Law, is invoked in matters cornering marriage, divorce, devolution of property and inheritance among members of the communities to which it applies.** (Source Mrs Janet sallah Njie)

CONSTITUTIONAL, LEGISLATIVE AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

Chairperson: We would like to stress the successes in Strategic Litigation of The Female Lawyers Association- Gambia (FLAG) employs a dynamic approach to women's rights advocacy in ensuring access to justice for women and girls whose rights are violated. In two recent unprecedented landmark decisions relating to the enforcement of the Women's Act, the High Court in *Matty Faye v Dawda Jawara*⁶ and *Karla Keita v Mustapha Dampha*⁷ declared equitable sharing of the joint property in accordance with section 43 of the Women's Act which is a replica of article 7 of the African Women's Protocol on equitable distribution of matrimonial property. In both cases, the High Court held that the plaintiffs (women) had beneficial interest in the property resulting to equitable shares in matrimonial property based on monies that they contributed in the development of the property. (Source Female Lawyers Association FLAG)

These cases clearly illustrate that the Women's Act 2010 can be instrumental in ensuring that women enjoy their rights (e.g. property rights) in case of separation, divorce or annulment of marriage. It also ensures that divorced women will no longer be disadvantaged where they have contributed substantially on acquisition and development of matrimonial properties, irrespective of whether the property is registered in their names or the names of their spouses. These cases clearly demonstrate that the provisions if effectively implemented, will guarantee the full effect of the rights they create. Added to this FLAG has also successfully used other provisions of the Women's Act 2010 enforce the rights contained therein such as in cases where employers have sought directly or indirectly to deny female pregnant employees their right to 6 months maternity leave. These cases were successfully settled out of court to the satisfaction of the clients.

Challenges

The full enjoyment of the full rights accorded to women in the Women's Act 2010 is restricted in certain cases because some of the provisions are subject to personal law. As highlighted earlier in this report, Section 7 (F) of the 1997 Constitution of the Republic of the Gambia includes Sharia as part of the laws of the Gambia governing marriage, divorce and inheritance, the overwhelming majority of Gambians being Muslims. It is for this reason that some of the provisions in the Act relating to marriage and family had to be made subject to personal law, and care had to be taken to ensure that they are not in conflict with the Sharia, This compromise was necessary to ensure the survival and inclusion of some of these provisions in this and other sections

⁵ Source: FLAG

On Right of Vulnerable & Disable Women

Since the concept of human rights cannot be adroitly articulated without; emphasis on the **right of physically challenged women to self development and economic empowerment**. Furthermore In August 2007 the former Director of the Human Rights Unit office of the Ombudsman together with the then Deputy Ombudsman, responding to complaints of discrimination lodged by some physically challenged and vulnerable women confined to wheel chairs, who alleged that they have been repeatedly denied license permits by Gambia Tourism Authority which would enable them to operate kiosk stall within lucrative Tourist Craft Markets within the Tourism Development Area (TDA). They further lamented that despite their vulnerability they have refused to depend on begging as their means of livelihood, since begging would make it more difficult to sustain the family income and would disengaged them from their right to development and other sustainable income activities⁸.

In a bid to address their grievances the said Human Rights Unit developed a proactive broad base participatory approached targeting, representative of The Tourism Craft Market within the TDA and other stakeholders placing emphasises that cultural expectations , superstition and power imbalances are among the underlying factors for their perpetual begging, exacerbating their existing poverty and vulnerability to domestic abuse. Further this initiative and sensitisation have culminated in enabling some of these vulnerable women to operate kiosk stalls within the premises of some lucrative hotels craft markets. ⁹This viable economic activity has enabled these women to refrain from begging and to engage in sustainable income generating activities.

Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) 2006-2015: This Strategic Plan contains gender mainstreaming strategies which are geared towards minimizing educational costs, especially for girls; increasing the number of child-friendly school environments; and equal gender participation at the PTAs, governing boards and management levels of schools.

School Improvement Grant: In a bid to ensure that no child is discriminated against and all enjoy their right to free basic education, in 2013, the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education started the School Improvement Grant. This scheme provides grant aid to public Lower Basic Schools

In addition to this legislation the Government has enacted laws that promote the welfare and protection of women and families including:

- a) **Trafficking Against Person Act 2007**
- b) **Tourism Act**
- c) **Children`s Act**

The Trafficking in person Act is being enforced; it is a comprehensive piece of legislation that addresses, amongst other things, the menace of trafficking in women and children. The act has extraterritorial jurisdiction because it applies to TIP offences committed within and outside of the Gambia by Gambian citizens or residents. **The main purpose of the Act is prevent, and punish those engaged those in trafficking in persons, and to rehabilitate and reintegrate victims of trafficking. “A National Agency against trafficking is also established to ensure the implementation of the Act. The police in collaboration with other law enforcement agencies, and the Judiciary have adopted a vigilant and zero tolerance stances towards the**

⁸ Source: Power Imbalances and Gender Inequalities by Isatou Alwar Graham

⁹ Source Power Imbalances and Gender Inequalities by Isatou Alwar Graham

detection, prosecution and punishment of offenders. The department of Social Welfare are to be taken overseas. All adoptions are finalised by the Children`s Court

The Children`s Act 2005 provides for various protection measures on sexual offences against children including the girl child. Section 26 prohibits exportation and importation of children for prostitution, section 30 and 34 deals with procurements of children for sex or prostitution, section 35, kidnapping and abductions of children, s39 trafficking in children and section 32 criminalizes foreign travel, which promotes or encourages child prostitution. The Act also prohibits and eliminates all forms of harmful traditional practices as applicable to children”¹⁰

On Awareness –raising programmes on violence against Women Sensitization

- The Female lawyers Association of the Gambia (FLAG)
- GAMCO TRAP
- UNFPA
- SAVE THE CHILDREN INTERNATIONAL

The institutional setup of the national gender machinery for the implementation

- The Ministry of the Women`s Affairs –responsible for the overall coordination and harmonization of efforts by all stakeholders
- The Nation women`s Bureau- provides technical support on gender mainstreaming to ministries, institutions CSOs and private sector.
- National Women`s Council-Advise government on gender issues ensures implementation of gender policy at the grass root levels.
- NGOs/CSOs- translate the national gender policies, strategies and programmes
- Development partners- Collaborate with the ministry and the bureau on gender mainstreaming as well as provide financial and technical support
- National women`s Federation-Serve as platform for networking and sharing information among female and youths.
- Gender policy monitoring and implementation committee-identify priority gender issues, review progress in the implementation of gender policy.

Achievements

Translation of the Women's Act 2010 into Local Languages: With support from development partners such as United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), The Women`s Bureau has translated the Women`s Act into the local languages for better comprehension of the majority of the population who are not literate in English language

1. **On Assistance measures: The government in cooperation with non-government organisers has provided comprehensive and effective interventions with an emphasis on a multidisciplinary approach such as the**

¹⁰ Source: National Review Report on The Beijing Declaration and Platform by : Mrs Janet Sallah Njie

- **One Stop Center has been established in three government hospitals, by virtue of a Cabinet Resolution to provide assistance and services to victims:**

Multi-sectoral Approach to Supporting Survivors of GBV: (One-Stop Centers). One of the best-known good practices in service provision involves bringing together services in one location, often called the “One-stop centre.” This Centre will be an interagency unit for victim/survivors of domestic or sexual violence. When a case is received, the victim/survivor will first be examined and treated by a doctor and also seen by a counselor, a social worker, within 24 hours in a separate examination room that protects privacy and confidentiality.

If it appears that the victim will be in danger if she returns home, the doctor or nurse will refer her or him to the social worker who would arrange accommodation in a shelter or refuge. If the patient chooses not to seek shelter, she or he will be encouraged to return to see a social worker at the hospital at a later date. In any case, the victim would be encouraged to make a police report at the police unit based in the hospital. In a case involving severe injury or sexual violence such as rape, the police shall see the patient in the ward to record her statement and start investigations.¹¹

The ‘One-Stop Center’ would ensure appropriate prevention of and response to GBV- a multi-sectoral approach that is well coordinated, less bureaucratic, sensitive and friendly. The underlying principle of such a multi-sectoral approach recognizes the rights and needs of survivors as preeminent, in terms of access to respectful and supportive services, guarantees of confidentiality and safety, and the ability to determine a course of action for addressing GBV incidents. ¹²

2. Hotline Centre located at Department of Social Welfare

- 3. Capacity Strengthening of Key Actors:** Women's Bureau, FLAG, NGBV and other organizations have conducted series of capacity building and strengthening workshops on the legislation and Gender Based Violence for religious leaders including Cadis, National Assembly members, traditional leaders, law enforcement, Judicial Officials, Lawyers and Prosecutors, to ensure better dispensation of justice vis-a-vis women who may seek redress from the law.¹³

Participation in political and public life

The Women’s Act has mandatory provisions that also promotes the participation of not just more women in politics but more women in decision making positions, such as in local government, the security services

Challenges

Underrepresentation in Political Decision Making Bodies: Despite the considerable progress made, The Gambia is yet to attain the requisite 30% representation at all levels. The target has been attained at the level of cabinet, but the representation at the National Assembly and Local Government remains below the minimum required. As at 2014, in the National Assembly, only 4 out of the 48 elected members are women plus 1 nominated member (Deputy Speaker), making a total of 5 out of 53 members. Therefore, the percentage of elected women members of Parliament is 4.2%and the total

¹¹ Source Concept Note Child Protection Unit, Ministry of Justice

¹² Source: Concept Note

¹³ Source” Mrs. Janet Sallah Nie

percentage of women in Parliament is 10.4%. These figures are far below The Gambia's commitment to attaining gender equality in this field. ¹⁴

Employment

Agriculture is the mainstay of the economy, three-quarters of the population depends on the agricultural sector for its livelihood and the sector provides for about one-quarter of GDP... **Situation of Women in the Formal & Informal Sectors of the labour market, Women constitute 45% of the economically active population of which 16.4% are in the Fisheries Sector, 22.07% in manufacturing** employment of women in the non-agriculture sector has witnessed great improvement. The share of women in the non-agricultural sector is showing an upward trend. Out of total of 25,280 employees in the Civil Service Integrated Pay Scale (January to December 2011), females comprise 20.82 per cent. Further The tourism industry in The Gambia contributes 16% of the GDP supporting over 10,000 direct and indirect jobs¹⁵. The absence of gender dis-aggregated data makes it difficult to assess the number of women working in the sector (Africa Gender & Development Index Study in The Gambia 2011).

Policy measures:

The Government of The Gambia has also made strides in developing other sectoral policies:

The Gender and Women Empowerment Policy 2010-2020,

[National Youth Policy 2009-2018](#),

The Employment Policy of the Gambia 2010 – 2014,

The National Strategic Framework for the Development of Microfinance in the Gambia,

The Gambia Trade Policy 2011,

National Export Strategy, 2013 – 2017 and the

National MSME Marketing Strategy 2014 – 2018, all of which have been anchored on MSMEs with women forming the main cohort of concern... In future years, the full implementation of these policies will complement and sustain the country's broader socio-economic growth and sustainable development.

ON RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Section 33 of the Women's Act 2010 guarantees rights to women in the rural communities. Every Government agency, organ, body, authority, public institution or private enterprise, individual or community shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in rural areas in order to ensure, on a basis of equality between men and women.

Government is to ensure that rural women participate in and benefit from rural development projects and, in particular, should ensure that rural women have the right to participate in the conceptualization, elaboration and implementation of development projects at all levels; benefit directly from social security

¹⁴ Source: Africa Gender Index

¹⁵ PRSP 11 page 66

programmes; obtain all types of training and education, formal and non-formal, including those relating to functional literacy, as well as, the benefit of all community and extension services, in order to increase their technical proficiency; organize self-help groups and co-operatives in order to obtain access to economic opportunities through employment or self-employment; have access to agricultural credit and loans, marketing facilities, appropriate technology and equal treatment in land and agrarian reform, as well as, in land resettlement schemes.¹⁶

This section recognizes the particular and specific problems/issues faced by rural women including access to land, agricultural credit, social security benefits to name a few, as well as the need to participate in the conceptualization, elaboration and implementation of development projects at all levels. It makes it Government's responsibility to ensure that these rights are realized.

ON LABOR LAW

The Gambia has an equal work for equal pay policy; on the protection and other types of social domestic services in the informal sector. There is a national social protection policy which seeks to address most of the social protection including maternity leave which is encapsulated in the Labour Act 2007. The Domestic Workers Convention of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) is yet to be domesticated into the national laws of the Gambia.

On the protection and other types of social or other services available or envisaged for women in the informal sector especially for those in the informal sectors.

There is a national social protection policy which seeks to address most of the social protection including maternity leave which is encapsulated in the Labour Act 2007. The Domestic Workers Convention of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) is yet to be domesticated into the national laws of the Gambia. Notwithstanding the integration of such workers in the formal sector is being put into consideration by the Government.

HEALTH

Adolescent fertility and early child bearing stand at 19% and 118/1000 respectively (MICS 2010) Measures envisaged to further increase availability and accessibility of age appropriate comprehensive sexual and reproductive health and rights education and family planning and contraceptive use are

- Production of services manuals on adolescence and family planning for services providers
- Awareness creation in communities using community radios and traditional communicators
- Expansion of services delivery points (outreach services, clinics & health centres) in the communities to improve access to family planning and adolescent health services
- Maintaining uninterrupted supply of method mix contraceptive at various levels of care including the community.
- Making major health centres functional by providing Comprehensive Emergency Obstetric care services
- Training of service providers on contraceptive technology.

¹⁶ Source: National Review Report by Mrs Janet Sallah Njie

HIGH MATERNAL AND INFANT MORTALITY

Progress though small but significant has been registered in the areas of maternal and infant mortality as revealed in the 2013 demographic and health survey conducted nationally. Maternal mortality reduced from 730/100000 live births in 2001 to 433/100000 live births in 2013. The maternal mortality of 360/100000 Live Birth was a projection of the joint UN report. Infant mortality is reduced from 75/1000 live births in 1999 to 34/1000 live births in 2013 demographic and health survey (GDHS)¹⁷

Measures taken-

- In addition to all the hospitals that are providing comprehensive (EMONC) services, three Major Health centres have started providing these services in 2 regions of the Gambia. Renovation works including the operating theatres are almost completed for 2 other Major Health centres namely Essau and Kuntaur to offer the same services
- Doctors are now being posted to health facilities in the regions for timely interventions and provision of quality care in rural areas
- Pronouncement by H.E of free maternal, newborn and child health services
- Institutionalization of Advanced midwifery program in the training school for skill improvement in the provision of basic obstetric care services in all the health facilities in the country
- Training of Peri-operative and anaesthetist nurses to make operating theatres operational for obstetric care services in the rural areas
- Training of service providers on Focused antenatal care
- Training of nurses on emergency maternal, newborn and child health
- Neonatal care training for services providers
- Provision of vaccines and maintenance of high immunization coverage
- Provision of life saving equipment

PROGRAMMES TO SUPPORT WOMEN LIVING WITH HIV AND AIDS

The National AIDS Secretariat (NAS) based on the 'three ones principles' is responsible for the overall coordination and management of the national HIV response. Programmes to support women living and affected with HIV are not stand alone but integrated in the comprehensive HIV interventions and in Sexual and Reproductive Health Services.

The NAS just concluded the review and update of both the National HIV Policy and National Strategic Plan (NSP) for the period 2015-2019, with an overall goal: **To achieve zero new HIV infections, zero AIDS-related deaths and zero stigma and discrimination in The Gambia.**

One of the objectives is: To reduce mother to child transmission of HIV at 6 weeks from 10% in 2013 to 3% by 2019

¹⁷ Source: Africa Gender Index & The national Review Report on The Beijing Declaration and Platform

PREVALENCE OF HIV IN THE GAMBIA AS OF 2013

Demographic Health Survey+ was conducted in 2013 for the first time in the Gambia and the report shows that the adult HIV prevalence (HIV1&2) has reduced drastically to 1.9% among adults 15-49 years. Furthermore there is no legal framework but there is a draft bill still under consultation

CONCLUSION

Chairperson: Despite of all the progress made, there is no “fix quick” solution, and The Gambia recognizes the complexity and causes of violence against women and girls, due to patriarchal structure of societal norms and values. However there are challenges of human resources and financial constraints, the problems need both short term and long term planning and cooperation among all sectors.

Once again the Government of the Gambia reaffirms its commitments in promoting women’s rights and ending all forms of discrimination against women

Thank you

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