

ADDITIONAL SHADOW REPORT ON
THE LIST OF ISSUES AND QUESTIONS IN RELATION TO THE
COMBINED FOURTH AND FIFTH PERIODIC REPORTS OF THE
GAMBIA
SUBMITTED TO
THE CONVENTION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF
DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN (CEDAW) COMMITTEE ON
4TH AND 5TH STATE REPORT



PROTECT THE GIRL CHILD

June 2015

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Introduction

This report is a submission on the current situation on women's rights particularly in the area of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) of Women and Girl-children. It responds to some critical issues raised on the fourth and fifth periodic report of the Gambia and the concluding comments and recommendations emanating from (CEDAW/C/GMB/4-5) and Universal Periodic Review (UPR).

The report dwells on the fragmented nature of the women's rights movement resulting to groups who are not willing to address and open up to the real issues on sexuality matters. Also, the context in which women's rights issues are dealt with is politically charged and some women's rights organisations felt uncomfortable in addressing sexuality matters, resulting to the alienation of some women's rights activists who are constructively dealing with policy issues regarding matters of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights issues in the Gambia.

It also reflects the current situation with regards to a specific law prohibiting FGM and the negative attitude of the National Assembly Members (Parliamentarians) towards fulfilling their obligations to protect and promote the rights of the Girl-child from FGM and early marriage in the Gambia despite the enabling policy environment.

Given the current situation, GAMCOTRAP deemed it fit to come up with an "additional shadow" report to reflect issues related to Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights. There is resistance to sexuality matters such as FGM and early marriage and zero tolerance to other sexuality issues such as choice of sexual orientation. The public statements about homosexuality are not positive to human rights activities. In general the social and cultural perceptions and attitudes regarding FGM, Early marriage and sexual orientation tend to influence government policies to strategically address discriminatory practices associated to them and how they affect the sexual and reproductive health and rights of women. The report focuses on FGM and Early marriage to provide more detailed information on the situation, which may not be addressed adequately in The Association of Non-Governmental Organisations (TANGO) shadow report.

The Nature of the Women's Right Movement

There are a number of women's rights organisations working on various thematic issues emanating from the Beijing Platform for Action and other regional outcomes on Women's Rights. The nature of the movement is such that groups working on SRHR issues are faced with serious challenges because of the topics they cover, i.e. Female Genital Mutilation, family planning, early marriage, HIV and AIDS especially the gender dimensions, as well as laws, conventions and policy outcomes that promote the sexual rights of women. Openly showing partisan support is not strategic in the strive to serve the interest of all women, and it will be difficult to make any significant impact on women's strategic interests and concerns. There is also mistrust amongst the movement due to the fear that rules throughout the country.

On the List of issues and questions in relation to the combined fourth and fifth periodic reports of The Gambia

1. General Context

Our research has revealed that during the process of elaboration of the report not many Civil Society Organizations (CSO) were involved. There was selective invitation to this process. We are informed that the report was written in-house by the state and we could therefore not ascertain what the list of responses raised were. The contents of the convention is not disseminated to the public and the constituency of women. Although the National Women Council numbering 42 noted that they were informed of the convention, most of the women are not aware of the content of the convention because resources are not available to undertake activities to disseminate the information. With regards to the issue of Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRD) and women's rights organisations there are no measures taken to protect them and their protection is not given any attention. In fact some organisations working on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) are targets of harassment and intimidation. While efforts are being made to work at sectoral level with

relevant state institutions, efforts to engage with the state is rebuffed with arrogance from the legislature. The environment is still not enabling for WHRD.

Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRD)

Women Human Rights Defenders are faced with hate speeches because of the gender specific and responsive human rights work they do, including on sexual and reproductive health and rights issues. The President openly threatens women human rights defenders and is silent on the attacks and threats against them meted in the state-owned radio station, which often uses hate speech against women rights activists and human rights defenders.

Women's rights activists and Civil Society Organisations working on women's rights face systematic harassment from the state security agents such as the National Intelligence Agents (NIA) because of the human rights work they do. Sometimes their constructive engagement with the state to advance women's rights is misconceived to imply that they are interested in political positions such as presidency. As a result, some of them are targets for threats, harassment and abuse by the state. Similarly, the National Assembly Members send derogatory comments on WHRD and do not respond to the efforts made to support them to advance women's rights. This creates a disabling environment for human rights work in the Gambia, especially for women human rights defenders. Similarly, their families are also targets of harassment and attack by state security.

Similarly, we have observed threats posed against lesbians and same-sex groups despite those engaged do not openly express so and which does not seem to be a problem in The Gambia. This indeed is a huge human rights concern for us as women rights activists.

2. Constitutional, legislative and institutional framework

The Gambia is a signatory to almost all the human rights treaties and conventions that promote the rights of women and children. Therefore we appreciate the efforts made by the Government of the Gambia in advancing the human rights of women and children thus achieving formal equality. It has also created adequate provisions in the Bill of Rights, namely the Constitution of the Gambia, Chapter 4 respecting the rights of women. Also in response to these Bills of Rights, conventions and treaties, the government has come up with policies to promote the rights of women and children and has enacted some of these into laws such as the Children's Act 2005, The Women's Act 2010, and the Domestic Violence Act 2013 and the Sexual Violence Act 2013.

It has also created the relevant machinery to implement these policies such as the Ministry of Women's Affairs and the National Women's Bureau and Council. Thematic working groups and coalitions addressing violence against women and children have been created to encourage various actors working on such issues to come up with programmes and activities to promote women's and children's rights. These mechanisms are cosmetic to attract the funds in our opinion.

While these mechanisms and policies are in place, there are remaining challenges and gaps to advance women and girl-children's rights in the Gambia. These are both structural and legal thus affecting the extent to which women and children can enjoy these rights as individuals, groups and people in special circumstances. These gaps affect the attainment and enjoyment of their rights if they are not given the right attention and proper financial support.

We are concerned that since the ratification of these instruments progress has been limited to the policies developed and laws that have been enacted. These laws and policies are not popularised in a manner that will empower women to have the capacity to make use of the laws. It is also of concern that the Gambia is still not a party to the Optional Protocol to CEDAW, or to the Optional Protocols on Children in Armed Conflict and on communications to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. While Gambia has harmonised some of the Human Rights Instruments, implementing them is a problem. The human rights situation in the Gambia is very threatening and Women Human Rights Defenders are under constant surveillance and this has created an atmosphere of fear and distrust among the people.

7. Stereotypes and harmful practices

Female Genital Mutilation

The State has been supported for the implementation of the National Plan of Action to Accelerate the Abandonment of FGM through UNFPA/ UNICEF support to NGOs to engage in awareness creation. However, NGOs working on the elimination of FGM have been working tirelessly without the political will and support from the state. Due to lack of political will and a specific law banning it, Female Genital Mutilation continues to be practiced by a significant number of Gambians both in the rural and urban areas and this continues to affect the sexual and reproductive health and rights as well as the bodily integrity of women and girls.

The prevalence of FGM is still very high in The Gambia. Studies have shown that the types of FGM practised in the Gambia include partial or whole removal of the clitoris, total removal of the clitoris and the labia monora and sealing. These fall within the WHO definition of types I, II and III¹. About 76.3 per cent of women aged 15-49 have some form of FGM.² 42.4 per cent of women have reported that at least one of their living daughters aged 0-14 years has undergone FGM while 64.2 per cent approve of FGM the practice of FGM appears more common in rural areas at 78.1 per cent than in urban areas, at 74.6 per cent. The practice is done on innocent girl-children without their consent which leaves an everlasting and irreversible effect on their health and well being. We are of the opinion that the MICS Report (2010), did not apply gender responsive approaches to capture the reduction in numbers of children mutilated. Although we appreciate the statistics with regards to the changes taking place in communities after the 30 years of awareness creation and advocacy campaigns there is need to generate data that will capture the numbers in terms of the current prevalence.

Despite that awareness about the effects of FGM on the sexual and reproductive health and rights of women and girl-children the state is not making an explicit call to end FGM. We note with appreciation that the Government of The Gambia has ratified most of the international and regional conventions/instruments regarding women and children's rights but the Political Will and commitment to advance the strategic interest and human rights of women and girl-children is lagging. There is no legislation to prohibit FGM in the Gambia. Since the last reporting the Gambia have legislated several laws relating to children and women but none have specifically called for the prohibition of FGM, including The Children's Act 2005. In the original draft bill on the Children's Act in 2003, FGM was included but along the line it was dropped and no official reason was given. CEDAW and the Maputo Protocol have been domesticated in the Women's Act 2010 however the Act does not elaborate on the provisions to prohibit FGM. Similarly, The Sexual Violence Act 2013 and The Domestic Violence Act of 2013 do not mention FGM as violence nor call for its prohibition. It is important to note that the original submissions had FGM but the contents were expunged by the National Assembly Members (NAMS) in consultation with some religious scholars who pro-FGM before the bills were ratified, thus are leaving them weak for manipulation with regards to FGM.

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is a violation of the human rights principles, as stipulated in Article 24.3 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), other International and Regional instruments such as the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, (Article 5) and the African Union Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa, 2004. The Constitution of the Gambia 1997 has guaranteed formal equality for women and there are various policy documents that have relevant provisions and commitments to promote women's rights. Thus the environment is positive for reform of laws or enactment of new laws to protect women and girl-children from Female Genital Mutilation which is inimical to the health, wellbeing and their human rights. Despite the state signing, ratification, and harmonisation of the conventions (CEDAW and the Maputo Protocol on Women into the Women's Act), members of the National Assembly are reluctant to legislate against FGM. It is time for the National Assembly to take its responsibility and not hide under the cloak of culture, religion and the assumed ignorance of people to perpetuate such a degrading practice. It is a well established fact that FGM is not a religious obligation and the women are aware of this fact. We appreciate the efforts and recommendation of the CEDAW Committee and want to express our appreciation.

¹ Female Genital Mutilation in the Gambia, Desk Review, 2002

² UNICEF-Banjul MICS IV 2010 Report, published in 2013

The efforts to raise awareness on the elimination of Harmful traditional practices such as FGM, are mostly undertaken by NGOs such as The Gambia Family Planning Association (GFPA), The Association for Promotion Girls and Women (APGWA), BAFROW, GAMCOTRAP and The Child Protection Alliance (CPA). GAMCOTRAP is leading the campaign to end FGM for the past 30 years with information disseminated to every region of the Gambia. However the political will is not publicly expressed to ensure the attainment of the statement made under Objective 4 of the National Gender Policy and Women's Empowerment 2010 -2020 which states: "to lobby for the elimination of all forms of discrimination and harmful sexual and cultural practices by 2015".

Efforts have to be made by relevant government departments and ministries to raise awareness in their public statements and actions to demonstrate the state's willingness to eliminate discriminatory and harmful sexual and cultural practices by 2015.

While the Ministry of Health has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with NGOs working to promote the Sexual and Reproductive Health of Women and girls, the Health Education Unit is silent on the advocacy to end FGM. FGM is not part of the mainstream health talks at ante-natal clinics during outreach.

In the National Gender Policy and Women's Empowerment 2010 – 2020 it states:

Objective 4: To lobby for the elimination of all forms of discriminatory and harmful sexual and cultural practices by 2015.

Strategies for Objective 4

Raise awareness on the advantages of birth spacing, good practices in nutrition, elimination of harmful traditional practices such as Female Circumcision and other misconceptions that negatively impact on the health of women (p.29) NGPWE 2010 -2020.

This policy statement calls for all stakeholders to lobby for the elimination of all forms of discriminatory, harmful sexual and cultural practices by 2015 through various strategies including awareness raising on 'female genital mutilation/circumcision' and other practices. This policy objective is not clear whether the state is committed to elimination through legislation.

It could also be noted that The Gambia has signed and fully ratified the AU Protocol in which Article 5 of this Protocol explicitly mentioned the roles of the State to legislate to prohibit FGM.

The Women's Bureau, which is the National Machinery of the state for the advancement of women's rights relies on conservative religious leaders in the Supreme Islamic Council for advice on matters relating to female sexuality, usually promoting conservative views in women's SRHR issues. The Women's Bureau respects the views of such religious leaders despite the policy commitments made by the state with regards to FGM and early marriage. These conservative scholars who want to maintain female subordination and control have allies in the Parliamentary Committees in the National Assembly that need to be lobbied for legislation, thus making it difficult to attain the policy objective.

NGOs such as GAMCOTRAP have made attempts to lobby different groups of National Assembly Members who were elected since 2005. The outcomes of the consultations made with the NAMS have come to consensus that FGM should be criminalised, but yet still there is no action. We have noted that the Women's Bureau and the Ministry of Women's Affairs did not give the right attention to the proposed bill for it to be tabled in the National Assembly for discussion. We have received comments from NAMS saying that "if the bill is tabled we will pass it". Also, the few consultations done by the Women's Bureau have resulted in religious scholars accepting and coming to consensus that FGM is not a religious obligation and yet they are silent about a law to prohibit the practice. **It is therefore imperative that the relevant state institutions should make efforts and ensure that they take the responsibility to test the NAMs opinion and present the bill.**

GAMCOTRAP, based on the recommendations coming from its social mobilization at grassroots level calling for a law, hired a legal consultant to develop a draft proposed bill to prohibit FGM in the Gambia. This draft was subjected to a National Consultation in January 2013. It was reviewed and recommendations were made by delegates. Over 250 delegates including the entire district Chiefs of the Gambia, Women leaders, village heads,

and youths participated. It had wide media coverage including the state media. Having facilitated this process in support of the Government of the Gambia, the revised draft which includes prosecution and punishment of offenders and a policy brief was sent to the Ministry of Women’s Affairs, Women’s Bureau and Ministry of Justice to take the next steps since 2013. However there is no official acknowledgement of the submission.

As key players in the advocacy to end FGM, GAMCOTRAP made efforts to consult with the National Assembly Members to support the process of informing them about the outcomes of the UPR with regards to FGM and Early marriage but this was turned down. The request to consult with them was rejected by the Committee of Five at the National Assembly. The response to GAMCOTRAP’s letter dated 1st April 2015 requesting for audience with the NAMS to update them about progress and support them to fulfil their commitment was responded to in a letter dated 9th April 2015 as follows;

“Subject: Re Request to Conduct a Day’s Consultation with National Assembly Members

Your letter on the aforementioned subject matter dated 1st April 2015 refers.

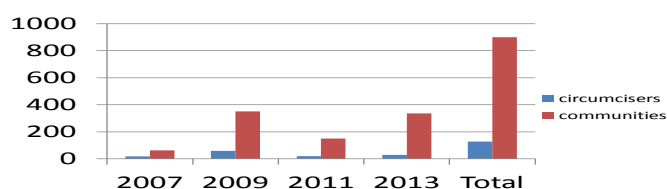
I am directed to inform you with regrets that your request thereto is disapproved. We reiterate that the National Assembly as a Legislative Arm of Government and the highest Oversight Institution cannot partake in a civil society/NGOs processes of law making, or modelling or drafting in any form or stage. Thank you

Kelepha Nyassi, For: Clerk of the National Assembly”.

As an alternative, in May 2015, GAMCOTRAP organized another National Consultation with Chiefs and National Women Councillors to lobby for a specific law to prohibit FGM. **There was consensus that a lot of awareness has been created and it is time to back it up with a law to prohibit FGM.** The State is yet to approve and publicize the National Plan of Action for Accelerated Abandonment of Female Genital Mutilation 2015-2017. However, one of GAMCOTRAP’s strategies is to work with local community leaders who influence the Parliamentarians during strategic political times such as election periods.

During the period under review, GAMCOTRAP directly reached (10,791 between 2011- 2013) and Communities have responded positively with public declarations.

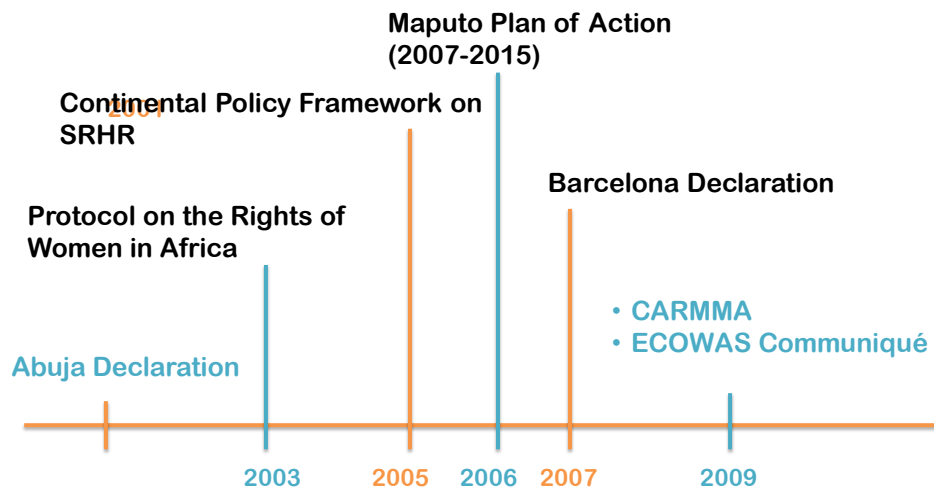
Impact of the Advocacy to end FGM



As indicated in the above graph, GAMCOTRAP having engaged in raising awareness, 128 Circumcisers and 900 communities have made public declarations to end FGM between 2007 -2013. This momentum is progressing and more communities are taking a lead to end FGM and making public declarations through a dropping of the knife ceremony.

These are some of the Instruments that The State has committed itself to promote women’s sexual and reproductive health but implementation of the provisions still remains a dream for many advocates.

African Regional Policy Frameworks



Early and Forced Marriages

The Constitution of the Gambia 1997, Children’s Act 2005, Women’s Act 2005 have all stated the child as a person under the age of 18 years, however, the state is yet to enforced these provisions through registration of marriages to provide evidence of the age of the couples at marriage in the bid to prevent early and force marriages. The 2010 (MICS) states that “8.6 per cent of women aged 15-49 married or in union actually marry before their 15th birthday whereas 46.5 per cent are married or in union before they reach the age of 18 years. The proportion of women in polygamous marriage/union accounted for about 41 per cent.” There is male resistance because they are the perpetrators of early and forced marriages. There is also pressure from some religious scholars and during their sermons on different radios stations it is emphasized that there is no age limit for marriage in Islam and justifying early marriage to prevent promiscuity and pregnancy outside marriage. This moral policing of young girls leaves the burden on them rather those men who impregnate them. This also contributes to the cycle of sexual and domestic violence. Meanwhile NGOs are raising awareness on the definition of a child as stated in the National laws and in line with CEDAW and other international Conventions and advocate for minimum age of marriage 18 years and above during community Sensitizations and media advocacy campaigns. Early marriage is address along with other harmful traditional practices through rights education.

Recommendation: We recommend that the state harmonizes the provisions in the international conventions adopted in the Children and Women’s Acts vis-a-vis the Constitution.

18. Data collection, monitoring, and evaluation

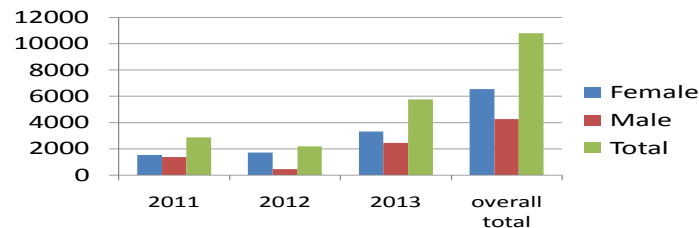
While there may be sectoral data with state institutions and individual CSOs, data collection and access continue to be a challenge.

GAMCOTRAP contribution to data collection on the FGM, Early Marriage and Women Rights debate

To address this concern, GAMCOTRAP has provided available data from its work in reaching out to communities. The data focuses on outreach activities to men and women during a period of three years. Between 2011 and 2013, the number of people directly reached through awareness creation raising was 10,791 and this was disaggregated according to sex. The data generated from our community outreach activities is corroborated by the recently published official data from the Gambia Bureau of Statistics 2013.

Year	No. of Males	No. of Females	Total directly reached
2011	1362	1511	2873
2012	450	1719	2169
2013	2445	3304	5749
	4257	6534	10,791

From commitment to Action GAMCOTRAP's Outreach 2011-2013



Similarly, the efforts to raise awareness on FGM have been further corroborated by recent statistics on Knowledge on FGM from the DHS Survey from the Central Statistic Department in 2013. There is high level of awareness amongst people between the ages of 15-49. Amongst a total 10,233 respondents, 99.2% have heard about the campaign for the elimination of FGM in the Gambia. The sample represented all the regions of the country.

Table FGC.1 : Knowledge of female circumcision

Percentage of women 15-49 who have heard of female circumcision, according to background characteristics, The Gambia 2013

Background characteristic	Women	
	Have heard of female circumcision	Number of respondents
Age		
15-19	99.4	2,407
20-24	98.9	2,125
25-29	99.0	1,822
30-34	99.5	1,504
35-39	99.1	1,056
40-44	99.2	761
45-49	99.3	559
Religion		
Islam	99.3	9,793
Christianity	96.3	427
No religion	-	6
Missing	-	6
Residence		
Urban	99.4	5,730
Rural	98.9	4,503
Region		
Banjul	98.5	225
Kanifing	99.6	2,342
Brikama	99.4	3,550
Mansakonko	99.9	490

Kerewan	96.4	1,107
Kuntaur	99.9	526
Janjanbureh	99.3	739
Basse	99.8	1,254
Education		
No education	98.8	4,757
Primary	99.1	1,405
Secondary or higher	99.7	4,071
Wealth quintile		
Lowest	99.1	1,745
Second	98.6	1,882
Middle	99.6	1,927
Fourth	99.0	2,135
Highest	99.6	2,545
Total 15-49	99.2	10,233

Recommendations and Suggestions

We recommend that the State:

1. The primary duty bearer takes a clear policy and legal stance to protect the innocent girls from FGM and early marriage. Ensure that the Office of the Vice President and the Ministry of Women' Affairs takes a lead on the preparation of a cabinet paper as did with the other bills to prepare the NAMs to legislate against FGM..
2. Ensures that the National Women's Bureau and Council follow up on the Policy on Women and monitor its implementation.
3. Donor partners to provide more resources to Women's Rights Organisations to engage in advocacy and awareness creation on women's rights issues. CSOs/NGOs are complimenting the effort of the state to advance the policies and laws it has committed to advance women's rights.

The State to provide protection for Women Human Rights Defenders promoting human rights

4. State give priority for data collection to inform policies and programmes

Response to the UPR recommendations on Female Genital Mutilation

During the recent Universal Periodic Review (UPR) meeting in Geneva 2014, after The Gambia made its presentation series of recommendations were made. The UPR recommendations to the Gambia with regards to FGM is yet to be implemented even though NGOs have made strides in supporting the state to fulfill its obligation and to respond to the UPR recommendations.

Public Awareness-raising campaigns:

The relevant State institutions have done limited masses awareness raising on FGM and early marriage though the media. Even where the state has undertaken measures to increase awareness on the effects of HTPs such as FGM and early marriage among all sectors of society they have not been well publicized to create public debate on the policy stand of the government.

Due to women's lack of awareness of the laws and policies, NGOs are addressing access to information through awareness raising amongst various target groups about discriminatory practices and their legal rights. NGOs

and Women’s rights organizations in particular have done quite a lot of work reaching out to communities to create awareness about the effects of FGM and early marriage on the SRHR of women and girl-children.

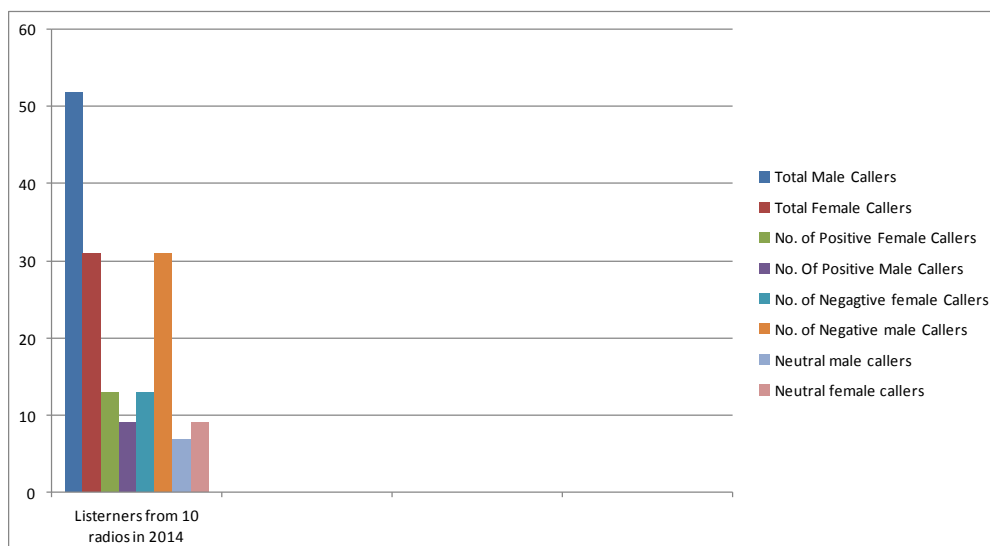
GAMCOTRAP as the leading Women’s Rights Organization working on the Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights of women has covered almost the whole country with information resulting to 128 circumcisers and 900 communities making a public declaration in a “Drop the Knife” ceremony between 2007 and 2013. In 2015 another 107 communities and 30 circumcisers are working towards a public declaration. The target groups covered are Community leaders, Religious leaders, security forces, Women Leaders, Women of Reproductive Age, Circumcisers, Traditional Birth Attendants, Traditional Communicators, young people and professional bodies such as teachers and journalists. The Governors of all the regions and their Chiefs have taken leadership in supporting the campaign but the NAMs are reluctant. Furthermore, the organization has used the opportunities available to share its work through the print media –working with local newspapers, community radios, and social media to reach out to the larger masses.

Gender and the Media

There are barriers to reach women through the media because some women in the media are faced with challenges to bring out critical issues affecting women’s rights. The national television in particular has selectively chosen what women’s issues are to be aired. This could be associated to limited representation of women in decision making positions in the different media houses. The representation of professional women in decision making positions in the Gambian media is still low compared to their male counterparts. At the state media, (GRTS) television, only 2 of the 11 units are headed by women and in the print media, there is no female editor in the 7 local newspapers surveyed. Also in the Gambia Press Union, there are 9 males and 2 females in its board; and one is elected and the other female co-opted in the board.

Name of Unit	Male	Female	Total
Development	0	1	1
Youth	1	0	1
Gender	0	1	1
News room	1	0	1
Editing	1	0	1
Technical	1	0	1
Camera Department	1	0	1
Library	1	0	1
Director General	1	0	1
Deputy Director General	1	0	1
Director Radio Programmes	1	0	1
Total Gender Representative	9	2	11

Male resistance continues to be a challenge in the media as indicated in data collected from 10 radio stations in 2014 (source: GAMCOTRAP Report on Radio programmes 2014.) In the case of FGM, Activists and Women’s Rights Defenders are insulted and threatened for raising issues affecting women in the media.



Conclusion

This shadow of shadow report is taken up by the organization because of its leading role in the advocacy in raising awareness on the rights of women and in particular the campaign to eliminate harmful traditional practices that violate the sexual and reproductive health and rights of women and girl-children in particular. The reports gives a situational update on the critical issues that are avoided in mainstream reports on the Gambia as they affect the rights of women. It provides more detailed information to help make informed decisions.

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DHS Survey on FGM 2013

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<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/protocol/sigop.htm>

http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CERD/C/GMB/CO/14&Lang=En

Field notes of GAMCOTRAP on advocacy and social mobilization across the regions