

GAMCOTRAP TRAINED DISTRICT CHIEFS, VILLAGE HEADS, WOMEN LEADERS, COMMUNITY BASED FACILITATORS, AND GIRLS ON SEXUAL, REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH RIGHTS IN CENTRAL RIVER REGION AND NORTH BANK REGION OF THE GAMBIA.



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PRESS RELEASE

The Gambia Committee on Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children, (GAMCOTRAP) concluded a series of community sensitization and awareness creation activities in the Central River Region and North Bank Region of the Gambia. The activities focused on training of District Chiefs, Village heads, Women Leaders, Girls, and Community-Based Facilitators to reflect on the processes of change and the various perspectives on the law criminalizing and prohibiting FGM in the Gambia. The project is funded by **Canada Fund for Local Initiatives (CFLI)** through the Canadian Embassy based in Dakar. The theme of these activities is centered on **PROMOTING THE SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH RIGHTS (SRHRS) OF WOMEN AND GIRLS IN THE GAMBIA, THROUGH ADVOCACY AND RIGHTS EDUCATION WITH A VIEW TO ENVISION THE 2030 AND 2063 GOALS.**

In each of the sessions the Chiefs welcomed the GAMCOTRAP team and gave an opening statement showing their appreciation and timely intervention of the project in their communities. In the training of women and girls in the Central River Region, Chief Pierre Bah of Niami District acknowledged the presence of all the participants for answering to the call of GAMCOTRAP, he noted that, everyone in this country knows the effort GAMCOTRAP is making to promote the Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights (SRHRS) of women and girls, and this project is part of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. Chief Bah further cited that even though women constitute over 51% of the population, they are poorly represented in parliament. Therefore, those who are given the opportunity should promote and protect the rights of women and girls.

Similarly, in Farafenni, the District Chiefs and community leaders from CRR and NBR expressed their views and assured GAMCOTRAP and their partners that they will continue to support the law that forbids FGM. They also urged their people and women leaders to spread the word to other people that the law will not be repealed, as they have informed members of their National Assembly that, should they agree to do so, none of their people will cast ballots

for them in the upcoming National Assembly election. "Our goal is to support the rights of women and girls in The Gambia," they declared.

The Executive Director of GAMCOTRAP Dr. Isatou Touray acknowledged the presence of the participants of various target groups during the activities conducted in the Central River Region and North Bank Region. She gave a brief background of the project and the reason why it focuses on the CRR and NBR of the Gambia. In her statement she noted that this project is to ensure and promote the SRHRs of women and girls in The Gambia through advocacy and rights education, with a focus on envisioning 2030 and 2063 targets. She added that the project envisions a future where women and girls are allowed to reach their full potential and feel empowered to lead through comprehensive rights education and collaboration with diverse stakeholders. Dr. Touray reiterated that, FGM, child marriage and gender stereotypes are prevalent in The Gambia, and noted that women must not be deceived by our so-called religious scholars who do not have deep knowledge about the Quran and Hadith and no background on the health implications of FGM. She reminded the audience that GAMCOTRAP has been engaging the people in a series of advocacies in all the regions and educating the people about the effects of FGM on SRHRs of women and girls. She noted the current situation of the threat made by few parliamentarians and religious leaders to repeal the Anti-FGM Law in the Gambia. She reminded participants that the NAMS are representing the people, and they are the voice of the people and it's their primary responsibility to protect the rights of women and girls. She urge them to uphold their words and protect their women and girls. The District Chiefs from NBR and CRR expressed appreciation to GAMCOTRAP and affirmed their commitment to uphold the law. The District Chiefs agreed to have their voices shared with the public that they are calling for upholding the law.

Similarly the women leaders in appreciation had this to say "We thank GAMCOTRAP and their partners for coming to our aid, giving us support, and educating us on the rights of women and girls. We uphold our commitment to stand by the law banning FGM in the Gambia and if our National Assembly members agree to repeal this law, we will not give them our votes. We did not agree on the repeal of the FGM bill and it's against the rights of women and girls. Men must respect women and why do the NAMS want to repeal the law. This is an issue that affects Women's reproductive organs health and their body, it's violating our rights and there is health implication in FGM. We will not go back to the practices of FGM as we have given our word and have taken an oath not to go back to the cutting. We thank GAMCOTRAP for enlightening our people, especially the women in the rural areas who have little or no knowledge of reading and writing the women leaders concluded.

The young girls also expressed their opinion as follows "FGM violates the rights of women and young girls". We should stop the practice of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) in the Gambia. Child -Marriage also is not good we have to stop it. Our parents should allow their girls to reach the age of 18 years before giving their hand in marriage. We will remain obliged to GAMCOTRAP for giving us the knowledge that will benefit us in our lifetime."