

REPORT ON POLICY DIALOGUE ON UPHOLDING THE FGM LAW TO PROTECT THE GIRL CHILD IN THE GAMBIA



GAMCOTRAP



Protect The Girl-Child

Project Title:

Policy Dialogue on Upholding the FGM Law to protect the Girl-Child.

**GAMCOTRAP in Partnership with Ministry of Gender, Children
and Social Welfare and Child Protection Alliance (CPA).**

Implemented by: GAMCOTRAP

Venue: Bakadaji Hotel Bertil Harding Highway Kololi.

9th November, 2023

Time: 9:00am- 4:30pm



Cross Session of Different Stakeholders and Chiefs from different Regions of The Gambia

Funded by Equality Now

**Bakadagi Hotel, Bertil Harding Highway, Kololi.
9th November 2023**

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**#Endfgm
#protectthegirlchild
#Endchildmarriage
#EndSGBV**

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Preface

The Gambia is going through a very important phase of either putting it on the top agenda of nation states that have guaranteed the rights and welfare of its fifty percent of the population- women and girls who are currently facing eminent threat to realize there sexual and reproductive health rights.

I would like to appreciate the efforts done by the state over the years to promote, protect and advance the human rights of women and girls in the Gambia. Governments come and go but the state will always remain. The legacy that they leave is what will be accounted for by posterity. No matter the nature of the state.

We appreciate all the efforts made by all and sundry to put a law after many years of struggle to end FGM in the Gambia. We have transitioned from dictatorship to constitutional democracy which recognizes and respects the rule of law but there is an eminent threat undermining the efforts made to promote women's and children's rights.

We are concerned that the very institution under this fledgling democracy that should uphold and preserve the dignity of the person and its polity was the platform used to moot the repeal of the law playing on the ignorance of a few to advance their selfish interest.

We will fail to tackle equality and development as well as the SDGs without putting an end to Violence against women and girls. The effective implementation of policies and laws promoting women's rights will lead to progressive democratic societies and reaching the targets of the SDGs. I urge the government to maintain the progress made on advancing women's human rights. We appreciate the creation of a full Ministry and Gender, Children and Social Welfare dedicated to guarantee the rights of women and children, thus showing your unflinching commitment to advance gender Equality. Therefore silence on this matter is not an option. We must recognize that women played a critical role in ushering a democratic dispensation in the Gambia. They deserve better recognition.

We are currently, confronting emerging global challenges that have gender impact and the lives of women and girls are at stake. Hence the need to focus on strengthening our policies and laws to protect human rights issues in general and particularly women and children's rights including People With Disability.

We have been surprised by the negative and unprogressive approach of some religious leaders and National Assembly Members calling for the repeal of the Anti-FGM Law that protects the rights of women and girls from harmful practices.

I call on the government of His Excellency Adama Barrow of which I associate myself with to please consolidate the gains made over the years and move the agenda of protecting the vulnerable groups.

H.E Dr Isatou Touray

Executive Director, GAMCOTRAP

Acknowledgements

The Board of Directors of GAMCOTRAP would like to thank all those who have participated in this event: **POLICY DIALOGUE ON UPHOLDING THE FGM LAW TO PROTECT THE GIRL-CHILD**. We appreciate the collaborative process with the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Welfare as well as the Child Protection Alliance for being part of this constructive dialogue among different stakeholders.

To the various Government Ministries and Actors namely

The Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Welfare

The Ministry of Health

TANGO

The Child Protection Alliance

The National Human Rights Commission

The European Union

GIZ, Gambia Office

We wish to appreciate the participation of our various partners who have always supported government development agenda extending it to CSO/NGOs to complement its efforts to promote development in the Gambia.

Our sincere appreciation goes to the NGO Fraternity particularly those working on human rights and women and children's right in the Gambia. To The media Fraternity who took time to document all the proceedings.

To the Five Districts Chiefs coming from the Central River Region North and South of the Gambia to endorse the existing law and to all the other District Chiefs who endorsed their representation.

To the ex-circumciser, CBFs, Women Leaders, Youth Leaders across the country

We appreciate all the resource persons, contributors and the facilitators for their contribution towards the success of this event.

The program would not have been possible without the support of Equality Now, Regional Office in Nairobi with special appreciation Faiza Mohamed and her team for the technical guidance and support. We thank them for responding to the call when the Gambia was at a critical situation.

To the virtual Participants for taking part in this important event.

I wish to thank all the Partners, Staff and Volunteers of GAMCOTRAP for engaging and supporting the process from the beginning to the end.

Introduction

In the wake of the first successful application of the anti-FGM law in the Gambia after eight years of its enactment has created unexpected responses from some religious leaders and National Assembly Members who were calling for the repeal of the Law that sentenced three women who broke the law. This created tensions between pro-FGM advocates and Anti-FGM activists led by GAMCOTRAP working closely with TANGO and the Child Protection Alliance (CPA). Similarly, in the midst of this controversy we have witnessed silence from the ministry of Gender, Children and Social Welfare including some of the critical stakeholders from the State who could have come up with statements to strengthen the landmark achievements.

However, public opinion was in favor of the law being applied effectively. It was in the midst of this controversy that GAMCOTRAP, in collaboration with Equality Now, organized a policy dialogue inviting key stakeholders to discuss the matter and come up with recommendations and suggestions to move forward.

There was also, fervent call by the grassroots calling to express their views regarding the matter. In expressing their views, they noted that the religious leaders and National Assembly Members cannot speak for them on this matter. They appreciated organizing this important event to bring together different actors. The objective of the meeting was to bring the different key stakeholders who are the custodians of the FGM practice to share their opinion in the midst of the debate that affected them.

The Policy Dialogue on upholding the FGM Law to protect the girl child was a crucial event organized in response to attempts by certain religious scholars and some members of the National Assembly to repeal the FGM-specific law in The Gambia. The initiative was part of the global 16 Days of Activism celebrated annually from the 1st to 16th of November. The event was hosted by GAMCOTRAP and funded by Equality Now, a global organization dedicated to advocating for the rights of women and girls. The event was gracefully attended by key stakeholders from Line Ministries, CSOs/NGOs, Chiefs, Ex-Circumcizers and the international community.

Objectives of the Policy Dialogue

The primary objectives of the policy dialogue were:

- To bring together key stakeholders from various sectors to discuss the importance of upholding laws related to FGM.
- To address the looming threat of repealing the FGM Law by engaging in constructive dialogue with various stakeholders.
- To foster collaboration among government entities, non-governmental organizations, community leaders, and civil society representatives.
- To hear the perspectives of the custodians of the practice of FGM across the regions.

Target Persons/Participants

Key participants included representatives from the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Welfare, Office of The President, The Human Rights Commission, America Embassy to The Gambia, European Union, GIZ, German Embassy, Regional Chiefs, Ex-Circumcisers, Community-Based Facilitators, GAMCOTRAP Field Coordinators, and 12 Civil Society Organizations.

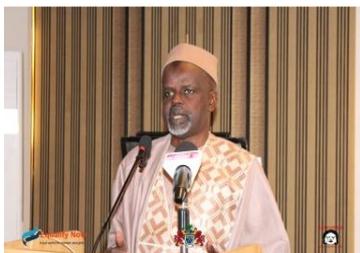
Funding Source

The event was funded by Equality Now, a global organization dedicated to advocating for the rights of women and girls.

Event Details

Opening Remarks and Prayers

The event was chaired by the Executive Director, GAMCOTRAP and Prayers were led by Imam Baba Leigh, a distinguished religious scholar and advocate for the rights of women and



Imam Baba Leigh Opening Prayers

children. Following the prayers, the Executive Director of GAMCOTRAP delivered the opening remarks. Acknowledging the esteemed presence of distinguished guests, the Executive Director of GAMCOTRAP extended a warm welcome to all attendees, including the Chairperson of TANGO, Board of Directors of GAMCOTRAP, the EU representative, the Honorable Ministers for Gender, Children and Social Welfare and Health, National Assembly Members, District Chiefs, Members of the Diplomatic and Councilor Corps, representatives from the UN system, and various other key stakeholders.

Expressing deep gratitude for the opportunity to address the gathering, she highlighted the significance of the occasion a policy dialogue on upholding the FGM law to protect the girl child. She emphasized the urgency in the context of the global call to end Female Genital Mutilation and violence against women and girls, and underscored the threat of repeal by some religious leaders and National Assembly members.



Dr. Isatou Touray Opening Statement

In response to this critical situation, GAMCOTRAP and its partners are strategically responding to uphold the law, which symbolizes a commitment to safeguarding the rights of every girl child. Upholding this law signifies a collective promise to ensure the girl child's rights, dignity, and limitless future. Despite challenges rooted in tradition, the comprehensive societal transformation required demands open dialogue, education, and compassion.

To succeed, a multifaceted approach is necessary. Education, formal and informal, is the primary vehicle for behavioral change. Parents, community leaders, and young people must be educated about the physical and psychological ramifications of FGM. The occasion focuses on upholding the law to protect the girl child, and engaging knowledgeable individuals to create awareness and catalyze positive change is equally essential.

She further noted that all individuals have a role in this enlightenment process. Together, collective efforts can amplify voices and reach every corner of the nation, offering pathways to healing and advocacy for victims. Gratitude was expressed to partners, particularly **Equality Now**, for funding the event. The call was made for continued resources for women's rights organizations.

The dialogue serves as confirmation of years of advocacy to end harmful practices and an opportunity to catalyze positive change. The future for Gambian girls and women depends on today's actions and words. A call was made for unity among young organizations and generations, guided by GAMCOTRAP, to move forward the agenda for sexual and reproductive health rights.

The vision is to create a Gambia where every girl child can grow up free, unburdened by tradition, and empowered to shape her destiny. The collective efforts of today should be the legacy for generations to come, recognizing that feminist energy is not a threat but recognition of women's rights as human rights.

Statement from the Chairperson of TANGO.

Honorable guests, I stand before you as TANGO's Chairperson to address the policy dialogue on upholding the FGM law, a critical event during the 16 days of activism. GAMCOTRAP, since 1984, has been dedicated to preserving and promoting the rights of girls and women. With our population tripling since then, the need for GAMCOTRAP's mission has grown



Yadicon Njie Eribo Board Chairperson TANGO

significantly. As part of TANGO, we support GAMCOTRAP's work, recognizing that any form of FGM violates the human rights of girls and women. FGM is not just a health hazard; it's a human rights issue under international laws. Despite our new democracy, existing laws remain, and we stand firm to protect them for the well-being of over 50% of the population-women and girls.

While facing challenges, CSOs play a crucial role, and at TANGO, we commit to supporting and strengthening them. Collaboration is key to advocating for policies that empower civil society, secure funding, and create an inclusive environment. As responsible members of the international community, we are signatories to conventions protecting women and girls. Reversing laws meant to safeguard them contradicts our values. Together, we must address challenges faced by civil society organizations, ensuring an enabling environment for their work.

Let's collectively protect the rights of every child, fostering nations where all children can flourish, access education, healthcare, and live free from violence. Together, we build a brighter future, leaving no child behind.

Statement from MoH.

The representative for the Minister of Health, Mr. Musa Camara gave a statement on behalf of the Minister, he stated that, the protection of women and girls' sexual and reproductive



MUSA CAMARA Regional Director of Health Services

health rights is vital for overall well-being. Health, as defined by WHO, encompasses physical, mental, and social well-being. This holistic state is crucial for national development, impacting productivity and socio-economic factors. Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) poses severe health risks, adversely affecting women and girls. There are no health benefits, and the procedure often leads to life-threatening consequences like severe bleeding, postpartum hemorrhage, and infections. Complications during childbirth and increased newborn mortality further underline the gravity of FGM's health impact.

Recognizing GAMCOTRAP's pivotal role, stakeholders, through effective communication and collaboration, should work towards eradicating FGM. Utilizing diffusion of innovation theories, sharing relevant information can contribute to societal well-being. Considering the interconnectedness of health with all Sustainable Development Goals, prioritizing health and well-being is fundamental. The Ministry of Health appreciates the national dialogue on upholding the FGM law. As a representative of the senior management team, he extended his gratitude for addressing this critical issue and offering solutions to eliminate FGM practices in The Gambia.

Statement from Ministry of GCSW.

Madam Neneh Touray, representing the Minister of Gender, Children, and Social Welfare, addresses a gathering during the 16 days of activism against gender-based violence. The



Madam Neneh Touray Ministry of GCSW

focus is on female genital mutilation (FGM) as a harmful traditional practice with no health benefits and serious reproductive health consequences. She noted that the prevalence of FGM in the Gambia has decreased, attributed to efforts by government institutions, donor partners, and civil society organizations. Upholding the law on FGM is emphasized, along with the need for cross-border activities

to abolish FGM in the sub-region. Integration of FGM issues into health worker training and stakeholder activities is highlighted, with a call to mobilize communities and work with young people as agents of change. The importance of advocacy with National Assembly Members is stressed, and gratitude is expressed to GAMCOTRAP for organizing and supporters of the event.

The speech emphasizes the importance of upholding the law against FGM, mobilizing communities, integrating FGM issues into various activities, and working with young people as agents of change. Advocacy with National Assembly members is also highlighted as crucial. The overall message is a call to action to end FGM and protect the health and rights of women and girls.

Statement from the Human Rights Commission (HRC)

Imam Baba Leigh serves as a Commissioner under the National Human Rights Commission. As commissioner, he was delegated by the executive director of the National Human Rights Commission to deliver a statement on behalf of the Chairperson of the Commission. In his speech he stated that the National Human Rights Commission is fully committed to ensure that the rights of the Girl-child is protected from all forms of harmful practices, and noted that the Gambia is a signatory to several human rights instruments that promotes the rights and wellbeing of women and girls such as UDHR, CEDAW, CAT, CRC etc. He called on the government to uphold those laws and commitments made to protect girls from FGM and other harmful practices. He reiterated the National Human Rights Commission's commitment to collaborate and work with the Government for the progress made on women's human rights. He renewed the Commission's commitment to support GAMCOTRAP to protect the girl-child.

INTERLUDE-POEM by a young voice. Fatou Secka UTG Student.

The event was graced with the voice of a young upcoming poet from the University of The Gambia, who also serves as an intern at GAMCOTRAP. She passionately recited her poem titled 'Upholding my Rights; My Future,' shedding light on the intricacies of FGM, its enduring impact, and the current scenario in The Gambia. The emotional verses served as a rallying cry for activists, resonating with the commitment of GAMCOTRAP to continue advocating until the full recognition and respect of the rights of those affected by FGM are achieved.



Fatou Secka UTG Student. Intern GAMCOTRAP

Solidarity Statement from Partners

EUROPEAN UNION (EU)

Mr. BRIGANDI RAPHAEL Representing the European Union, he expressed his pleasure of the opportunity to address this timely initiative. The discussion arises amidst broader societal



BRIGANDI RAPHAEL EU Representative

debates on the potential repeal of the anti-FGM law, initiated around two months ago in the National Assembly. FGM is a complex issue involving health, cultural practices, religious beliefs, and human rights. The ban on FGM in The Gambia, resulting from a prolonged struggle by activists, leaders, and citizens, reflects the country's legal commitments under various regional and international instruments. He noted that

The UN General Assembly's unanimous resolution in 2012 and its integration into the 2030 SDGs further emphasizes the global consensus against this harmful practice. The Gambia's ban on FGM in 2015 not only advances girls' rights but also sets an example regionally, showcasing a commitment to human rights and the well-being of vulnerable members, particularly children.

As a partner of The Gambia, the European Union aligns with democratic values and human rights. We unequivocally commend the current anti-FGM law, expressing hope that the outcome of this national dialogue will be a consensus to maintain the existing law. Despite differing views, the paramount concern in this debate is the protection of children. Young girls lack the agency when FGM is performed on their bodies. Preserving the current law ensures that future generations retain the fundamental right to make decisions about their bodies freely.

We emphasize the importance of Gambians making informed decisions that prioritize the well-being and rights of their children.

Address by Equality Now

The representative from Equality Now through zoom, welcomed the participants and noted and dwelt on the Maputo Protocol which specifically noted that FGM is a violation of human rights of women and girls and calls on all countries including Gambia to eliminate FGM, including the prohibition through legislation.

She appreciated the role of the police for taking on their duty to implement the law prohibiting the practice to protect the innocent victims.

She further appreciated the progress The Gambian government has made as a major contribution in ensuring the protection of women and girls who are affected by FGM, and noted that in October, 180 Civil Society Organisations from the Gambia and across the world have also issued an open letter urging the Gambian government to uphold the landmark law against FGM.

In her speech she acknowledged the statement made by the African Commission on Human and Peoples Rights, and the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, who expresses their deep concern on the current regressive parliamentary debate

advocating for the repeal of the Gambia's law prohibiting FGM. She concluded by saying " as we convene for policy dialogue today, I want to welcome different countries from the continent and the region that establish fundamental principles for us in protecting the rights of all human beings, including women and girls.

And just to highlight a few, everyone has a right to a positive cultural context. Positive African values as a preamble of the protocol are based on the principles of equality, peace, freedom and dignity, justice, solidarity and democracy, and non-discrimination".

I look forward to listening and taking part in the discussions and meetings with TANGO and yourself Dr. Isatou, for your leadership in ensuring all women and girls are safe. We stand on the foundation that are on your shoulders today and hope to create an even brighter future.

GAMCOTRAP Board Representative

Mr. Ousman Touray, representing the chairperson, of the Board of Directors of GAMCOTRAP, Chief Yaya Jarjusey and the board, expressed gratitude for speaking at the



Ousman Touray Board Member GAMCOTRAP

policy dialogue on upholding the Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) law in The Gambia. Acknowledging the law as crucial for protecting girls' rights, he emphasized the need to safeguard the well-being of female children in the country. While recognizing FGM as a deeply rooted tradition, he clarified its non-religious nature. The event aimed to recommit to protecting girls, viewing the FGM law as both a legal obligation and a moral imperative, representing a milestone in ending the harmful practice. Upholding the law goes beyond compliance; it is about recognizing children's fundamental human rights and allowing them to grow free from FGM's physical and emotional scars. Mr. Touray stressed the importance of open discussions, raising awareness, and educating society about the severe consequences of FGM. Parents and guardians were urged to challenge harmful social norms, and collaboration between various entities was emphasized to create a supportive environment for girls' development. In conclusion, Mr. Touray urged active participation in the policy dialogue, framing upholding the FGM law as a step towards a Gambia where every child can dream, aspire, and contribute positively to national development. Collective efforts were encouraged to ensure a brighter and safer future for Gambian girl children. He emphasized the Board of Director's support and commitment to support GAMCOTRAP in this noble effort.

Key Sessions

Effects of FGM on the SRHR of Women and Girls.

Dr. Aboubacarr Jah, the CEO of Sharab, delivered a comprehensive and enlightening presentation on the Effects of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) during the event. With detailed visuals, his presentation not only refreshed the minds of all attendees but also provided a deep understanding of the immediate and long-term impact of FGM on women.



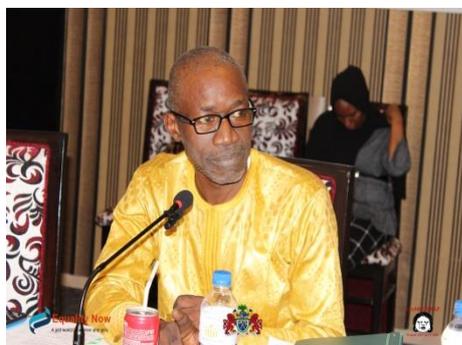
Dr. Aboubacarr Jah, CEO Sharab

Throughout his presentation, Dr. Jah emphasized the stark reality that FGM offers no health benefits, contrary to certain misconceptions. Instead, he shed light on the enduring suffering that women subjected to FGM experience throughout their lives. The poignant details presented by Dr. Jah served as a powerful reminder of the collective responsibility we share, bound by the oath to uphold the Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) of women and girls in The Gambia. By highlighting the negative effects of FGM, Dr. Jah's presentation served as a wake-up call for everyone present, reiterating the importance of prioritizing the well-being of women and girls. The images and information presented by Dr. Jah added a visual and factual dimension to the ongoing dialogue about upholding the FGM law. This session not only informed the audience about the harsh realities of FGM but also fueled a renewed commitment to the advocacy for SRHR.

Dr. Jah's presentation was instrumental in fostering a deeper understanding of the profound consequences of FGM, fostering a sense of urgency and responsibility among participants to contribute actively to the ongoing efforts to protect the rights and well-being of women and girls in The Gambia.

FGM and the Law.

Mr. Lamin Mboge, a senior Legal Expert, from the Mari Bantang Chambers provided valuable insights into the legal implications of repealing the FGM Law during the event. The discussion delved into the complexities of legal frameworks and their role in safeguarding girls from harmful practices. He highlighted various laws and sections pertinent to the issue, emphasizing the associated punishments for perpetrators. Mr. Mboge underscored a critical point, expressing concern about the potential ripple effect of repealing the Anti-FGM



Lawyer Lamin Mboge. FGM and the Law

Law. He argued that such a move could open the door for challenges against other existing laws, posing a significant risk to the political and socio-economic stability of the country. He

emphasized that repealing the Anti-FGM Law might lead to conflicts, disproportionately affecting women and children who could become victims of legal loopholes.

In emphasizing the democratic nature of the country, the legal expert urged the government to carefully consider the potential consequences before making any legal decisions. This nuanced perspective underscores the delicate balance between democratic principles and the need to protect vulnerable populations, especially women and children, from harmful practices. The insights from the legal perspective serve as a crucial foundation for informed decision-making and the continued pursuit of legal frameworks that prioritize the well-being of the citizens.

FGM and ISLAM:

Imam Baba Leigh a religious scholar and founding member of GAMCOTRAP, representing GAMCOTRAP, expressed deep concern about the potential repeal of laws banning harmful



Imam Baba Leigh FGM and ISLAM

traditional practices, particularly Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), in The Gambia. He recounted the historical efforts of past scholars and activists in the face of difficult circumstances, highlighting the significant achievements of GAMCOTRAP in elevating The Gambia's international standing in regards to human rights of women and children particularly, the girl-child. The urgency of the situation lies in the global call to end

FGM, and the speaker pledged to campaign against the repeal, emphasizing the need to protect the rights of young girls. The speech underscored the potential consequences, not just for FGM but also for other issues like education and child marriage, if the law is repealed. The speaker challenged arguments attempting to justify FGM within the context of Islam, emphasizing the need to consult medical professionals in matters related to health, even within Islamic practices like Hajj and fasting during Ramadan. The speech concluded with a firm assertion that purification in Islam is achieved through water, not through the cutting of body parts. Overall, the speaker passionately advocated for the retention of laws banning FGM and highlighted the broader implications for the country's reputation and the well-being of its girls.

FGM and Children's Rights



Lamin Fatty, Director of CPA

I have been invited to talk on Female Genital Mutilation and children's rights. If we take a deep look, law and religion are intertwined: law has been documented to protect the rights of every individual and as well religion through its teachings in the holy books (Quran & Bible).

Laws have been formulated to protect and respect the rights of every individual, being a child or an adult so it is

every one's responsibility to work collectively to ensure a society free from violation of human and child's right.

- ✓ Convention on the Right of the Child article 19 (protection from violence, abuse and neglect) states that, government must do all they can to ensure that children are protected from all forms of violence, abuse, neglect and bad treatment by their parents or anyone else who looks after them, so in 1999, Gambia has made a ratification to accept every law on this convention.
- ✓ African Charter on the Right and Welfare of the Child (recognizes the child's unique and privileged place in African society and that African children need protection and special care), Gambia has signed and accepted to respect this document to ensure the rights of every child. "I argued always that, if Gambia has to sign for the abandonment of FGM/C, it should not have been in 2015 but rather in 2005 since that's the year Gambia government signed these conventions".
- ✓ Also Gambia has made a law book call the Children's Act 2005 section 19 states that all harmful tradition practices that affect the health and wellbeing of women and children should be stopped.
- ✓ It furthers to the Maputo protocol section 5 which directs all state parties to the protocol to condemn and prohibit all forms of harmful practices affecting the enjoyment of human rights by women in society (Female Genital Mutilation).

Doctor Mboge has said it here that, despite all these laws, Gambia is still practicing FGM and GAMCOTRAP has played a vital role in ensuring the formulation of the FGM law in 2015 and it is still in its sensitization and campaign to end the act.

Chief has made it clear here that this movement or struggle is apolitical and there is no law in the constitution that is challenging our religion or tradition so let us try to protect and respect the law. In his presentation the Executive Director of the Child Protection Alliance (CPA) noted

"I stand to challenge the government on the basis of not respecting this law, since amendments have been made on the Women's Act 2016 that anyone found guilty of FGM will be imprisoned for 3 years or pay a fine of D50, 000 or both. I have argued with some National Assembly members that, their quest for the repeal of the FGM law is a setback and the FGM law was not formulated by the National Human Rights Commission or Dr. Isatou Touray but the Gambia Government so it is a collective responsibility to protect it as Gambians.

- ✓ *When this FGM law was first implemented in The Gambia the whole world applauded Gambia for this great achievement.*
- ✓ *We all know the negative effects and health consequences of FGM and I personally, my wife is a survivor and I know how she suffered during delivery.*
- ✓ *One thing is clear, if everyone presents here including the ex-circumcisers accept to continue abandoning and shaming the act of FGM, then it must stop.*

- ✓ *We will continue to fight for the Anti-FGM law to stay in order to protect our younger generation of girls and women”.*

Contributions from the Panel of Chiefs and Ex-Circumcisers

The regional Chiefs and Ex-Circumcizers in their various languages gave their own perspective of the situation as they have been yearning for their voices to be heard on this



Contributions from the Panel of Chiefs

matter. All the chiefs on the panel came to consensus that the Anti-FGM law should be upheld and they stand strongly on ensuring that anyone who breaks the law should be prosecuted. They noted that the National Assembly Member should look at what is the best interest of the child and promote that rather than promoting practices that are inimical to the health and wellbeing of their children and women. They noted that the mandate given to NAMS by their constituencies is as a result of the trust they had on them and they should be ready to guide them even if they find that what they are doing is not good. They noted that the National Assembly members are not speaking on their behalf and they as district chief stand behind the law to ensure that it is respected. They debunked the objections raised by the religious leaders and NAMS regarding the landmark case of the Bakadagi Mandinka incident

Similarly, the ex-circumcisers who were present also gave their views about the FGM case and noted that they all agreed to put a law in place to protect the rights of the women and girls and they still stand by the law. They all came to consensus that whoever breaks the law must be prosecuted. They recalled the trainings they have undergone for several years including the Dropping of the Knife Ceremony where they took an oath supported by their cluster communities to abandon FGM and other harmful practices which they still uphold. They noted that it was a big disappointment for them to see that one of those who took the oath has defaulted. They concluded that they would strengthen the network and called for a quarterly meeting to discuss progress and assured their continuous support to uphold the law. (Refer to videos)

Reflections on Laws and Policies That Gambia has signed:

The Executive Director of GAMCOTRAP, Dr Isatou Touray, reflected on the laws and policies that the Gambia has signed to promote and protect the rights of women and girls in the Gambia. She reminded the participants that the Gambia has achieved formal equality and this had placed the country on top for promoting women and children’s rights. It was noted that the enabling environment has been created looking at a list of all the existing laws that the Gambia has signed and ratified. She noted that FGM is one of them and the law specifically refers to those protocols in the protection of girls from Harmful Practices. Noting

that the current government led by His Excellency Adama Barrow made a speech upholding the law when he assumed power and called on the public to respect the law.

She noted that GAMCOTRAP's role is to work closely with the state to advocate on matters that falls within its mandate to create awareness, lobby policy makers and empower various target groups to end harmful practices. She reminded the participants that the great effort of GAMCOTRAP has resulted in many gains made over the years. She also, noted that more women and young people should be empowered to take leadership on a matter that affect them and that is why the organization is working with other NGOs and CBOs to achieve the goal and objectives of ending Harmful practices. She informed the gathering that The Gambia is the primary duty bearer to uphold its commitment to protect the girl-child.

Outcome

The event successfully achieved its goals by fostering open dialogue and collaboration among stakeholders. Awareness of the threats to repeal the Anti-FGM Law was heightened, and participants gained a deeper understanding of the legal and societal implications. There was a unanimous call by all the participants that the Anti-FGM Law should be upheld to protect the girl-child from harmful practices.

Consensus Reached

The event was a very successful one resulting in all participants reaching consensus that the law should be upheld to protect the girl-child from harmful practices such as FGM, Early marriage and other forms of violence against women and girls.

The District Chiefs who are the heads of the District in their region asserted their authority to ensure that the **law should not be repealed** and noted that the National Assembly Members should advance the rights of the girl-child and ensure that decisions made as law makers should be **in the best interest of the child**.

Similarly, all the statements delivered during the event emphasized the need to uphold the Anti-FGM Law to protect the women and girls from FGM.

It was agreed that GAMCOTRAP should intensify the outreach work across the country and ensure that the Community Based Facilitators are supported to monitor their cluster communities in all the regions and report back to the concerned authority.

The participants noted that the organization should work closely with the Gambia Police Force who are the law enforcers to ensure the effective implementation of the Anti-FGM law. That the police should be targeted and trained about the effects of FGM on the health and well-being of women and children in order to empower them to play their part efficiently in ensuring that the law is applied where it is flouted.

They should be trained using the rights based approach and share any relevant information that will empower them to fulfill their duties.

Next steps

Building on the recommendations and suggestions emanating from the event the priority to move forward with this process are as follows;

To focus on the police who are the law enforcers who might be influenced by cultural dictates resulting in reluctance to pursue cases if reported.

To organize a Refresher course with existing Community Based Facilitators and discuss how to move forward and continue engaging in grassroots work.

To increase the numbers CBFs at the regional level

To strengthen the network of ex-circumcisers to serve as agents of change and checks among themselves to continue the advocacy in their cluster communities

To focus on the young generation especially in hard to reach areas where the tendency is to take the kids in such areas and subject them to FGM.

Lessons Learned

- The policy dialogue underscored the importance of continuous advocacy, collaboration, and legal reinforcement to safeguard the rights of girls.
- It came to a full realization of the immense implications and the effects it will have on other Enacted Laws protecting the rights of women and girls if the Law is repealed.
- The District Chiefs from the Central River Region asserted their authority to uphold the law in the presence of the ex-circumcisers and advise them to uphold the law.
- The ex-circumcisers reiterated their commitment to uphold the law and support their District Chiefs and to strengthen their network.
- It also highlighted the need for ongoing education to dispel misconceptions surrounding FGM particularly on young ones and women of reproductive age .

Recommendations

Based on the discussions, the following recommendations were proposed:

- Strengthen legal frameworks related to FGM to ensure enhanced protection.
- To build the capacity of the law enforcers to be able to prosecute FGM cases
- To build the awareness of the Police Force on the effects of FGM on the health and well-being of women and children across the regions
- To build the capacity of existing Community Based Facilitators and increase their numbers across the regions to continue to monitor their cluster communities
- Intensify community-based education and awareness programs especially in hard to reach areas that hardly get information.
- Foster collaboration between government entities, NGOs, and communities to combat the repeal efforts.

- To urge partners to commit funds for the advocacy work of GAMCOTRAP and other organizations.

Conclusions

The Policy Dialogue on upholding the FGM Law served as a crucial platform for stakeholders to unite against the threats posed by attempts to repeal the existing legal framework. The event emphasized the importance of collective action in protecting the rights and well-being of the girl child in The Gambia. This report stands as a testament to the commitment of all participants to advocate for the rights of women and girls, ensuring that existing laws are reinforced and strengthened to create a safer and more secure environment for all.

That the voices of different stakeholders are heard and the ex-circumcisers were given the platform to express their views in support of upholding the law on FGM and to dissociate themselves from the breach of the law. They vowed that happened at Bakadagi Mandinka, at the central river region of the Gambia will not be repeated.

The five District Chiefs from CRR-N and South who attended the event noted that they are representing all the chiefs of the country noted that they are speaking on behalf of the others across the country. In their Panel they committed themselves to uphold the law and advice the Ex-circumcisers that they must uphold the Oath they swore to and continue to protect the girl-child in their cluster communities.

Annex

List of Participants



GAMCOTRAP IN PARTNERSHIP WITH EQUALITY NOW, MINISTRY OF GENDER, CHILDREN AND SOCIAL WELFARE AND CHILD PROTECTION ALLIANCE (CPA)

NAME OF ACTIVITY: POLICY DIALOGUE ON UPHOLDING THE FGM LAW TO PROTECT THE GIRL-CHILD

LOCATION / VENUE: Barkadaji Hotel

DATE: 09-11-23

REGISTRATION - REGISTRATION FOR PARTICIPANTS, DAY (DAY#.....)							
No.	Name	Designation	ID #	Cell #	Organisation/Pr object	Location of Participant	Signature
1.	Maniana Kummeh	Finance Asst	811296-020-00	2669957	Safe Hands	Tranquil	[Signature]
2.	Nafa S Jubai	CBF GAMCOTRAP Sudako St	150-497-610-001	2169150	GAMCOTRAP CBF	Wuli East	[Signature]
3.	Jannah Bahaw	Chief/Inspector Police officer	240364-020-001	7776983 3043147	Police	Sanehaha	[Signature]
4.	Musa Camara	Regional Director Health Services (M)	R 01453	3665673	MOH	Kanifing	[Signature]
5.	Ousman Touray	Board Member		3303260	GAMCOTRAP	Tyoreng	[Signature]

6.	Faboumatta Jagne	Program Manager	271194-020 003	7439499	WILL	Manjai	[Signature]
7.	ROPHUEL B. N. I. W. D. I.	POLITICAL OFFICER CHANGE OFFICERS	777 2571		EU		[Signature]
8.	Fatou E-H. Jagne	Participant		3936860	Student Voluntary Organisation	Busumballo	[Signature]
9.	Amie Jahaeh	Business Civil Senat	ID no. 110672.02000	320489 7792846	under Privilege	Sukuta Nema	[Signature]
10.	Binta D. Bojang	Intern	200299-020-002	3524216	TGA	Brikama	[Signature]
11.	Pierre Bah	chief	140463-010 002 7740966	7940366	District chief	Niani	[Signature]
12.	Demba H. Sey	chief	1506 55-510 001	7724469	District chief	Upper saloun	[Signature]
13.	Mam Demba Sallow	Chief	010161-110 015	93961934	District chief	Saneh district	[Signature]
14.	Omar Touray	Chief	140281-510 001	7076918	District chief	Niaming East	[Signature]
15.	Nigima Dramneh	CBF	130495-120 004	7884349	GAMCO TRAP	North Bank	[Signature]
16.	Mantama Jaa	Women Leader		2628119	Nyadema Korfo	North Bank	[Signature]
17.	ra.						

18.	Kumba Dilla	Alkali		7406049	Alkali	North Bank	AD
	Adama Jallow	Former Circumciser		010558-120 002	AMCORAP	North Bank	AD
19.	FATOU SAHO	CEO WAEA	PC 638281	2044445	CEO	BANJUL	Fuchschi
20.	Aisha Jabe	AFW		7642028	P M	Basse	AD
21.	Faloumata J. Camara	Reporter		5898924	voice	Serekunda	AD
22.	Falou Sanka	Intern		3811136	GAMCO TRAP	Kanifing	AD
23.	Neneh Taring	NGEWE		9917338	NGEWE- MOGOSW	Bankan	9917338
24.	Momodou B. Bamba	Chief	121268 510-001	3476700	District Chief	Lower Fullanah	AD
25.	Binta Cham	Senior Researcher NPCS	2202920- 20002	3795141	NPCS	Subida	AD
26.	Amet Jatta	reporter	26999	2340128	Banaka	Bundung	AD
27.	Jamkey usay	Reporter	07119802201	7097027	AMCORAP	Talinding	AD
28.	Mudropha Jasin	Reporter	0801099	3719001	AMCORAP	Serebunda	AD

29.	Aminata Jang	Researcher		8998818/ 2323360	NGEV	Kanifing	AD
30.	Achima Barrow	Asst. Finance officer	240871-010-001	7188674	Gamcotrap	Kanifing	AD
31.	Musa D. Jallow	Head of finance		7120569	Gamcotrap	Kanifing	AD
32.	Hon. Sainey Jatta	Participants		2111615	" "	Serekunda	AD
33.	Sainey Jatta	Participants		3146218	" "	Serekunda	AD
34.	Imam Malick N'yang	Imam		7722077	Kanifing Mosque	Kanifing	AD
35.	Yadison Njie Eribo	Chairperson	210961- 020-001	7333820	TANGO	Kanifing	AD
36.	Amun Jabore	CIPIT	PC070572	8145061	C. pm	Satotel	AD
37.	Mustapha Jallo	Reporter		7117010	Tarayag	Serekunda	AD
38.	Sanyo M. Camar	BM		7701873	Gamcotrap	Buedalai	AD
39.	Julius David	ICT officer		51309389	Gamcotrap	Kanifing	AD
40.	Tyfen Boyang			8463073	Gamcotrap		AD

41.	Arian K. H. Stevens	MTE office		294027	GAMCOTRAP	Pipene	Q
42.	Dominique Buchet	Political Affairs and Public Relations		741 659	German Embassy.	Kolohi	OR
43.	Lain K. Wape	Legal Practitioner		726786	Meri Bankang Clabon	Kairasa Avenue	OR
44.	Manama Bde	Legal Counsellor		7007655	Meri Bankang Clabon	Kairasa Avenue	OR
45.	Famara Toding	President of Fisheries (Sany)		9856613	(Kaiti) Sanyang	Sanyang	KUP
46.	John Paul	Driver		7406488	GAMCOTRAP	Sukubaly Kunchi	R
47.	Ernina P. Beh	Driver	02-11-110-001	2118282	" "	Sanyang	
48.	Awa Kumbally	Field Officer	080997-030 008	3324355	Bramatrap	Bundung	OR
49.							
50.							
51.							
52.							

53.	Larmin Faltis	National Coordinator PCMYAS		33555	CPA	KM	OR
54.	Wapam Bde High	Member High Commission	KHL	3353103		KMC	OR
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GAMCOTRAP IN PARTNERSHIP WITH EQUALITY NOW, MINISTRY OF GENDER, CHILDREN AND SOCIAL WELFARE AND CHILD PROTECTION ALLIANCE (CPA)

NAME OF ACTIVITY: POLICY DIALOGUE ON UPHOLDING THE FGM LAW TO PROTECT THE GIRL-CHILD

LOCATION / VENUE: Rakadaji Hotel

DATE: 09/11/2023

REGISTRATION - REGISTRATION FOR PARTICIPANTS, DAY (DAY#.....)

No.	Name	Designation	ID #	Cell #	Organisation/Project	Location of Participant	Signature
1.	SIRA Camara	Women leader	016172620-410	2640797	GAMCOTRAP	Tabanding UKR Kulu East	[Signature]
2.	SIRA Damba	Ex-Circumciser	180200-620028	7180646	" " "	Bimifun UKR Kulu East	[Signature]
3.	Maimuna Radeh	Women leader	100680-620066	7206227	" " "	Ciro BR UKR	[Signature]
4.	Manama Samina	Ex-Circumciser	100171620002	2625336	" " "	Kabakama UKR	[Signature]
5.	Amie Jallow	Women leader	100581420028	7944649	" " "	Kerni Kagi Niama BR CRP	[Signature]

6.	Fana Jobe	Women leader	281436200003	3783672	" " "	MJa Sawane CRK	[Signature]
7.	Kani Sidebel	Ex-Circumciser	281436200001	7958079	" " "	MORIYA CRK	[Signature]
8.	Hana fatumatah Reih	Ex-Circumciser	016-165-420026	7954497	" " "	Saje Saje Jarakel CRK	[Signature]
9.	Satang Trana Uleh	Ex-Circumciser		7087124	" " "	SANJA CRK	[Signature]
10.	Mama Sanna	Women leader	06026-9-91542	3188448	" " "	lalassy CRK MATH	[Signature]
11.	Malie Baldeh	C.B.F.	200272610002	7795634	" " "	BASSE	[Signature]
12.	Nyarandj Konta	Ex-Circumciser	260-157-420001	3418604	" " "	Syutukung Jarakel	[Signature]
13.	Momodou Keita	Research Coordinator		7050517	" " "	Dackel	[Signature]
14.	Bassin Njie	Reporter		3089866	" " "	GRIS	[Signature]
15.	Mustapha Njie	Camerman	80796-010-002	2686116	" " "	GRIS	[Signature]
16.	Olimedu	Reporter	DC:148870	3150501	" " "	the Standard	[Signature]
17.	Nyima Touray	Intern		3860997	" " "	kanifing Gamcotrap	[Signature]

18.	Faton Njic	Regional Coordinator		010266-720-001	2001975	Soma LRR	Fee
19.	Dr. Alankaraj	urologist			8331100	Kangj	
20.	Famara Jadama	Participat	Sungay fishinj		9856613	Sungay	TRP
21.	Foday Daramah				2486931	Tamji	Fee
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Newspaper Cuttings and Links

NEWS PAPERS

<https://foroyaa.net/gamcotrap-stakeholders-discuss-anti-fgm-law-after-repeal-calls/>

<https://thepoint.gm/africa/gambia/national-news/gamcotrap-urges-govt-to-uphold-law-against-fgm>

<https://www.voicegambia.com/2023/11/10/gamcotrap-upholds-dialogue-in-favor-fgm-law/>

Twitter Link

<https://twitter.com/GamcotrapG/status/1724025996867715122/photo/2>

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Facebook

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<https://www.facebook.com/100064108072534/videos/6640882412674122/>

Instagram

https://www.instagram.com/p/CzIb-KhIQnH/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igshid=MzRIODBiNWFIZA==

Annex of the Pictures

