

GAMCOTRAP



Protect the Girl-Child

Project Grant Number: GNL_G1977-23

**REPORT ON CONSULTATIONS WITH COMMUNITY BASED FACILITATORS
AND EX-CIRCUMCISERS ON PLANNING FOR THE FGM CASE IN CENTRAL
RIVER REGION NORTH OF THE GAMBIA.**

FUNDED BY:

URGENT ACTION FUNDS AFRICA.

Date: July 2023

Introduction

With Funding from Urgent Action Funds-Africa Regional Office, Nairobi, Kenya, GAMCOTRAP continues its advocacy campaign in the Central River Region-North. This report is focusing on the funds received from Urgent Action Fund to follow up and prosecute the circumciser who flouted the law against FGM in the Gambia. On January 16 one of the ex-circumcisers was caught circumcising 8 children in Bakadagi Mandinka, a village within the Central River Region -North of the Gambia. An application was sent to UAF to seek for rapid response to the issue in order to pursue the case in court. UAF responded positively to the request resulting in the possibility to pursue the case in court.

The project consists of different stages namely,

- to mobilize action on the process to prosecute the circumciser. This require working with other actors such as CPA, FLAG and Ministry of Gender and others at the community level. The community actors include Community Based Facilitators, Ex-circumcisers, Chiefs and the local government authorities in the region.
- To go to court to protect the rights of the innocent girl-children
- To ensure the effective implementation of the law

GAMCOTRAP in collaboration with the various actors conducted consultative meeting on the matter and held meetings with the various actors. During the consultative meeting the matter was brought to the attention of the circumcisers and community based facilitators to discuss the case and issues affecting the sexual and reproductive health and rights of girls and women in the region. This activity created opportunities of bringing together over **60** participants during the quarter in the Niani Districts. Prior to the onset of the activity a three-day Pre-Logistics arrangement was undertaken. This is to get the right target group and identifying the training venue. These were done with the active involvement of their village heads, women leaders in various targeted clusters. It is during pre-logistics arrangement local resource persons are identified and community leaders are requested to identify participants from their communities to attend activities. Almost all the circumcisers of the region attended the meeting.

The consultative meeting has popularized the FGM Act 2015, denouncing the practice of FGM and all other abuses leading to violence against women. This has greatly contributed to the rationale for the sustenance of women's rights through grassroots activism. The Project is funded by the Urgent Action Funds-Africa Regional Office in Nairobi, Kenya. The activities registered great successes and commitment in the eradication of vices affecting women's health and violence against women was denounced. It was observed that while the prevalence of FGM is decreasing due to knowledge gained, early/forced marriages within the Mandinka, Fula, Serahuleh and Jahanka communities are ongoing practices and remain a concern. The activity was supported by the office of the Governor of the Region and the respective District Chiefs who are in consensus with community members and Circumcisers recommended that FGM must be stopped.

Consultation Sessions



Cross session of the consultative meeting with stake holders for the planning of the FGM Case in CRK

GAMCOTRAP conducted a day's consultation with Ex-Circumcisers and Community Based Facilitators on the recent FGM case at Bakadaji Mandinka in Central River Region of the Gambia. Participants were drawn from different communities and regions from both CRR south and CRR north to discuss the status of the case for the prosecutions by the police. The activity was held at Janjangbureh Community Center in CRR funded by Urgent Action Fund Africa. GAMCOTRAP acknowledges the support from Urgent Action Fund Africa for the effort over the years in the development and advocating for the rights of women and children and to carry out its responsibilities. After series of engagements with different sectors UAF was able to support GAMCOTRAP for the prosecution of the recent case in Central River Region north (CRR) for the violation of the law banning FGM. The eight children, who were scheduled for cutting on Monday the 16th of January 2023, were all found at the compound of the circumciser whilst three already been cut. The Kuntaur Police Station has been informed and are taking up the matter for prosecution. GAMCOTRAP is working closely with the Kuntaur Police and Child Welfare Unit in Kuntaur to make sure that the remaining children are safe and justice is done. The consultative meeting which was attended by high-level officers in the region started with welcoming the team from the headquarters and prayers by a religious scholar in the presence of the Deputy Governor of CRR, a Representative of the Chief of the region, a representative of the women's leader in the region, Kuntaur Police Child Welfare Officer and the GAMCOTRAP team.

Statement by GAMCOTRAP Executive Director

The Executive Director of GAMCOTRAP Dr. Isatou Touray in her opening remarks thanks all the participants who have left their busy schedules, coming from far away to attend the meeting. The Executive Director further stated that she has finally returned to the



Dr. Isatou Touray E.D GAMCOTRAP

organization after serving the Government for five years to restore democracy and the fundamental rights of citizens of the Gambia from a dictatorial regime. She cited that, her coming back is to complete the mission she started in giving support to women and girls to end harmful practices, encouraging girls education and sensitizing the various target groups and promote rights of women and girls to end violence against women within their communities. The Executive Director also extends her condolence to the families of some of the Ex-Circumcisers who passed away recognizing their contribution in the fight against FGM and other harmful practices in the Gambia. In her statement, she reminded the participants that one of them has broken the oath to end FGM in their region resulting into 3 innocent girls being subjected to FGM among 8 slated to be cut. She further noted that the affected Circumciser who broke the oath was trained by GAMCOTRAP and was among the batch of 30 Circumcisers who abandoned the practice during the 4th Dropping of the Knife Ceremony in Wassu village in Niani District of the Central River Region-North in 2013. She was provided with a bakery and her son was trained to support her as an alternative employment opportunity to abandon the practice. She was given extra resources to address the challenges she was faced with in her bakery. In a recent joint monitoring visit by donors/partners she

informed the team that there has not been any circumcision in their community. She concluded that the case is now with the police and the Circumciser will be brought before the law because she has violated the law together with others who are involved in doing the practice. She informed the gathering that the organization stands for women and children's rights and GAMCOTRAP has nothing to do with this but to make sure the rights of women and children are protected and the law will take its due process.

The Deputy Governor of Central River Region of the Gambia, Honourable Sainey Mbye who was a former National Assembly Member acknowledged the presence of the Executive



Sainey Mbye Deputy Governor CRR

Director of GAMCOTRAP, and expressed his gratitude for her tireless work in educating women and girls about their rights and the effects of harmful traditional practices. He further stated that GAMCOTRAP is a well-known organization advocating and creating awareness about harmful traditional practices affecting the health of women and girls by educating the people about the laws that promote and protect women and children-particularly the girl child. In his statement he highlighted that the FGM law in the Gambia indicates if a person violates the law you will be liable to 3years in prison with a fine of **D50,000.00** or serve both charges. He reminded the participants that he was among the law makers who passed the law against FGM. He noted the efforts done by GAMCOTRAP to sensitize and create awareness about the issue reaching out to different target groups across the country. He also cited how the enactment of the FGM bill in the parliament in 2015 by the former regime was done. He continued by noting that the FGM law went through a series of consultations and when it reached the parliament it was a done document already there was nothing difficult for them to pass the bill to be a law in the constitution of The Gambia. The Deputy Governor further urges the participants to do away with the practice of FGM and be vigilant with their actions because if anyone caught doing the practice will be taken to court, FGM is a violation of women's and girl's human right and it's against the laws of the Gambia he concluded.

A representative of the district chief gave a statement on behalf of the chief of the district to the participants. In his statement he emphasized the decades of advocacy done by



Representative of the District Chief

GAMCOTRAP in ending FGM and other harmful traditional practices in the Gambia that affects health of women and girls. He went on to say that FGM has no health benefits on women but rather causing more health complications on women and girls. He further stated that over the years education and sensitization on the effects of FGM with the right information and the knowledge gained should stop any practitioner to revert to the practice. This case is an indication that GAMCOTRAP is monitoring the region especially the Circumcisers who have dropped the knife and are doing it under the carpets. He also urged the participants to work closely with GAMCOTRAP and the relevant stakeholders to eradicate the practices since it affects the health of women and it's a violation of human rights.



Gambia Police Child Welfare Officer CRR

The Child Welfare Officer of the Gambia Police Force in the Central River Region, who worked on the case with the regional coordinator of GAMCOTRAP, also gave a brief statement on the programme to the participants. He stated how delighted he is to be part of this consultative meeting. He thanked the Executive Director of GAMCOTRAP and the team for the work they are rendering to the people in their communities especially the women and girls who are the victims of the practice and their rights. He cited that the reason why GAMCOTRAP organized this consultative meeting is to give an update on the recent FGM case by one of you the Ex-Circumcisers who violated the Anti FGM law and the case is with the police currently preparing for the prosecution. The officer explained that the circumciser was caught doing the act by the regional coordinator for the region who arrived while the cutting of the girls was taking place and she was detained at the Kuntaur Police Station for further investigations by the police. He noted that the circumciser has to face the law because she has violated the law. He further stated that according to research FGM has health complications associated with it on women and girls as a result, medical doctors always gives advice not to subject girls on FGM. With this recommendation's by WHO and countries agreeing to sign laws that promote and protect the rights of women and children because FGM is a gross violation of human rights. He also asserted that the Government of the Gambia has ratified the law and if anybody found guilty will face the full force of the law and the penalties. He concluded by commending participants for turning out to answer to GAMCOTRAP call who have been empowering them with the right information about the health effects of FGM and supporting the Circumcisers with an alternative employment opportunity to support them on their livelihood to increase their income generation earning.

The Regional Coordinator of GAMCOTRAP Momodou Keita also reminded the participants, especially ex-circumcisers of their Oaths they made during the dropping of the knife celebration in-front of their village heads, district chief, governors, youths leaders, women leaders, religious leaders and other important personalities that they have stopped the practice. He added that as a result of agreeing to drop their knife, GAMCOTRAP and Partners supported the Circumcisers in various forms to improve on their life and disengage themselves from practice of cutting girls. He reminded participants that several awareness raising programmes and trainings were conducted in many cluster communities about the effects of FGM and the legal instruments banning FGM in the Gambia was also made available during these meetings and trainings.



Momodou Keita Regional Coordinator
GAMCOTRAP

He noted, *“the circumciser was warned several times and I constantly visit their community if I hear of any suspicious act, I make sure that I visit them. I asked her grand-daughter, if her grand-mother is still doing the cutting, the answer was yes her grand-mother is still practicing FGM and she is about to cut some girls these days. I did not believe her at first but I make sure that I closely monitor her activities in their area. The day she slated to cut the*

girls was on a Monday. It is a very busy day being one of the biggest weekly markets in the area where many people gather to sell and or buy goods’.

The Coordinator further revealed thus *“I did advice the circumciser that I have received information that you are about to circumcise some girls and you know there is a law banning FGM in the country now and you are trained by GAMCOTRAP, you know the consequence behind the practice. Over 3 times they are postponing it until finally the Circumciser had to do the cutting after I left”*.

One of the ex-circumcisers also gave her own contributions stating how they felt about their



Kanny Sidibeh Ex- Circumciser

mate who disregarded the vow she made and revert to the practice with the believe that it will not be known to the public. Kanny Sidibeh, an Ex-Circumciser stated *“that GAMCOTRAP has educated us about the negative effects of FGM and the health complication it has on women and during childbirth. So many of us have under gone series of modules of training with GAMCOTRAP and we have seen and know the negative effects of FGM and we agreed to abandon the practice within our communities and regions, she stated. It was our source of income where we earned little to support ourselves and families from the practice but when we were empowered by GAMCOTRAP with the right information about the practice and other harmful practices we came to realize that the practice should stop because of the health complications in has on women and girls. After many years of advocacy and social mobilization, GAMCOTRAP and its donors/partners supported us with source of income for abandoning the practice and some of us engage in different types of small scale business enterprises such as Sheep Rearing, Goats, Bakery and etc that make a big difference in our lives to the extent of paying our children’s school fees up to University level. I felt so bad after receiving such bad news saying that one of the Circumcisers have reverted to the practice after all the support and the empowerment given to us I felt we are not sincere with GAMCOTRAP”*.

There was a consensus among the participants that this was a cause for concern . They noted that among the 30 circumcisers in their batch only one broke the Oath and vowed that it will be the last in the region and pleaded with GAMCOTRAP for support and more community sensitization and engagements.

Lessons Learnt On the FGM Project

Sessions were interactive and lots of testimonies made by participants on the painful nature of the practice with lots of consequences on women. However, having exposed participants to all the modules, many reached consensus that FGM is bad and should be eliminated.

There was agreement among most of the participants that the law must take its full course to deter others who might be doing the same under the carpet.

This was demonstrated by their understanding of the consequences of FGM and quickly came up with a recommendation to do more finding on the issue.

The change of attitude was significant. Being aware that many women are affected either directly or indirectly, these women are sensitive to the issues on sexuality matters discussed.

Recommendations:

The following recommendations were presented in order to help facilitate greater adherence to the law.

- Participants recommended that GAMCOTRAP must continue its advocacy surrounding the FGM Act especially at grassroots level because its contents are not known by a good number of women who are the perpetrators.
- To closely monitor the activities /movement of the Circumcisers in their various communities in the Region.
- The need to work with other communities to support the Circumcisers and to provide them with small scale businesses.
- That sensitization awareness should continue and to target communities along the border side also;
- It was recommended to continue supporting the Circumcisers
- It was recommended by the participants in the region for GAMCOTRAP to support the victims of FGM.
- More awareness needs to be raised about the existing legislation on FGM in the country.
- To organize a convergence of ex-circumcisers across the country to network and share experiences and strengthen the advocacy to protect the girl-child.

Conclusion

A series of consultative meetings were held in the central River Region North of the Gambia regarding the case of FGM by an ex-circumciser. Discussions were centered on the case and to inform the target groups that the case will be prosecuted to promote and protect the rights of the young children who were subjected to the practice despite the existence of a law. The participants acknowledged that FGM violates the rights of the child and the full course of the law must be applied. With sustained funding, the organization will continue its sensitization campaign to create awareness to communities yet to be reached as well as advocate for the total eradication of the practice. The reflections coming from most of the participants noted that progress has been made and people are giving up the practice. However, GAMCOTRAP need to monitor the regions and follow up on ex-circumcisers.

In communities in the Central River Region of the Gambia, the organization is putting a lot of efforts ensuring that people have the right information to make the right decision. They committed themselves to campaign against FGM and other harmful traditional practices. Participants reiterated that a change in attitude can be achieved through increased knowledge. It was noted that culture should not be used as a vehicle to abuse women and girls, therefore, everyone must be prepared to be agents of change in order to ameliorate the situation of

women and girls. They welcomed the return of Dr Touray and noted that they will do all they can to make sure that no circumciser breaks the oath and called for a convergence of all ex-circumcisers to discuss progress, constraints and share information across the different regions.

Challenges/Constraints

It was noted that some Pro FGM campaigners and some religious scholars are involved in promoting the act and the government must take a stand on the matter since there is a law prohibiting it.

The slow pace of the progress of the case beyond our control.

GAMCOTRAP's worn out vehicle can no longer plough the bad roads in the rural and hard to reach areas.

There is unusual silence from most of the organizations who profess to be doing advocacy work to end FGM.

Partners are shifting responsibility to each other as to who should fund the prosecution of the case.

ANNEX 1: News Paper Publications and Website Information Links

<https://twitter.com/GamcotrapG/status/1677033410768822273?s=20>

[https://l.facebook.com/l.php?u=https%3A%2F%2Fyoutube.com%2Fwatch%3Fv%3Dy36yW6XubmM%26feature%3Dshare%26fbclid%3DIwAR1EubpqXM51TX_5dboxDKnD3bGBfNix21fcaEPvnlxgFQI72mrNVj48new&h=AT0eh3vI5G8wINEJd0-K5rEjYxgpqtLg8dwuH2e9hClCN7Im8k9qNrq6rrdLwOtwFBOH65plbjpNFCNnAT1K0QFYJawgN6C8VGKGFyWbo215Vs5-BTVV-ZWaXPcVYwGQ64X3&_tn_=-R&c\[0\]=AT3lQeEBTUIz9oL2RlbsQCqw1OBlbiuy_SOa6Wtpc0LjGVbP8KDOCAItxbVV6YqKG0XTAdLLFBb66YEgn3jX-KVuXM0095Jlb5gV12X2oTq1tTpyywBal721PjT6_oSdb8eOYTGF0ealRiqajk9oFNFFlkzggbyP2bQAw3WmFWEQts4h1VTcCIAjetl_B39ySFEpTQXQfflpYLOR1b5sD8GbU_1A12hpBBx7](https://l.facebook.com/l.php?u=https%3A%2F%2Fyoutube.com%2Fwatch%3Fv%3Dy36yW6XubmM%26feature%3Dshare%26fbclid%3DIwAR1EubpqXM51TX_5dboxDKnD3bGBfNix21fcaEPvnlxgFQI72mrNVj48new&h=AT0eh3vI5G8wINEJd0-K5rEjYxgpqtLg8dwuH2e9hClCN7Im8k9qNrq6rrdLwOtwFBOH65plbjpNFCNnAT1K0QFYJawgN6C8VGKGFyWbo215Vs5-BTVV-ZWaXPcVYwGQ64X3&_tn_=-R&c[0]=AT3lQeEBTUIz9oL2RlbsQCqw1OBlbiuy_SOa6Wtpc0LjGVbP8KDOCAItxbVV6YqKG0XTAdLLFBb66YEgn3jX-KVuXM0095Jlb5gV12X2oTq1tTpyywBal721PjT6_oSdb8eOYTGF0ealRiqajk9oFNFFlkzggbyP2bQAw3WmFWEQts4h1VTcCIAjetl_B39ySFEpTQXQfflpYLOR1b5sD8GbU_1A12hpBBx7)

<https://thepoint.gm/africa/gambia/national-news/crr-communities-urged-to-drop-fgm-knife>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y36yW6XubmM>

ANNEX 2: Facilitation Team

Dr. Isatou Touray
Musa Jallow
Awa Krubally
Tijan Bojang
Momodou Keita
Baboucarr Bah

ANNEX 3: Programme Pictures

Photo Gallery of the Consultative meeting with Ex-Circumcisers and CBFs

