UNFPA
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
DR. NATALIA KANEM
VISITS THE GAMBIA
REPORT

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Youth Bantaba

Road to Nairobi Temperature Check With Dr. Natalia Kanem

Young people have always and continue to be the heart of the work UNFPA does. As 2019 is a milestone year for UNFPA as it marks the 50th anniversary of the agency’s existence and the 25th anniversary of the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo, Egypt, we are reminded that investing in young people, is the only way to sustainable development.

This is why, on 8 August 2019, immediately upon arrival in The Gambia, UNFPA Executive Director, Dr. Natalia Kanem, accompanied by UNFPA West and Central Africa Regional Director Mr. Mbingue Ngom and his team, engaged with Gambian young people, at a Youth Bantaba, dubbed “Road to Nairobi Temperature Check with Dr. Natalia Kanem”.

The Bantaba, an event organised by UNFPA The Gambia, the National Youth Council and AfriYAN The Gambia, brought together nearly 200 young people from various parts of the country, to discuss the ICPD agenda, the contributions of Gambian young people towards the realisation of the Programme of Action thus far, and the commitments required from the part of youth, in order to finish the unfinished business.

Hosted by a vibrant young woman, Ms. Fatou Lamin Jeng, the Bantaba was characterised by candid conversations and idea exchange, but also, created a fun environment for young people-led entertainment. The female D.J. Ms. Mariama Colley stunned the crowd with her ability to use music to entertain and engage young people like herself.
The Bantaba was also an opportunity to shed light on the vibrant work of young Gambian women entrepreneurs and provided a space for some of them to exhibit their Made in The Gambia products, with the aim of highlighting the linkages between women’s economic empowerment and the realisation of their sexual and reproductive health and rights and protection from all forms of gender-based violence.

Speaking to the gathering of young people, UNFPA Executive Director Dr. Natalia Kanem highlighted that, UNFPA stands ready to continue working with young people and other partners, to deliver this world – where every pregnancy is wanted, every child birth is safe and every young person’s potential is fulfilled.

Part of the interventions made during the course of the Bantaba was an appeal from a member of the Children’s National Assembly, that they be represented in the Gambian delegation to Nairobi.

At the end of the bantaba, a gift representing the country and its culture, was presented to the Executive Director, by Ms. Fatou Jeng of AfriYAN The Gambia, on behalf of young people of the country.
Government of The Gambia Hosts

UNFPA@50
Partnership Celebration Dinner
A highlight of the Executive Director’s visit to The Gambia, was the UNFPA@50 partnership celebration dinner, hosted by the Government of The Gambia.

This dinner was a gathering to celebrate an amazing story, shaped by our collective experiences and framed by our varied journeys towards ensuring rights and choices for all. It should be noted that, this story began 25 years ago in Cairo, where 10,757 people, motivated by the possibility of a future where the 10-year-old girl and boy would be safe and free to explore and achieve her or his full potential, engaged in a week-long deliberation to redefine what the world considered Population and Development. Today, as a result, their hard work is reflected in the International Conference on Population and Development’s Programme of Action.

Speaking at the dinner, UNFPA Executive Director Dr. Natalia Kanem, recognised the Government of The Gambia’s demonstrated commitment to the ICPD agenda, by its continuous promotion of Universal Access to Reproductive Health Care Services, the Provision of free Maternal and Child Health Services in public facilities and by respecting the rights of adolescents and youth to access information and services related to reproductive health. She went on to emphasise that, it is as such no surprise that, The Gambia has seen a significant reduction in maternal mortality, fertility and under-five and infant mortality rates and such progress excites us at UNFPA.
Her Excellency the Vice President of The Republic of The Gambia, Dr. Isatou Touray, reiterated that, Fifty years of leading the way in the area of population and development and forty-seven years in The Gambia is no small feat. According to her, in the past years, when the issue of women’s and girls’ rights was not fashionable, UNFPA kept the trail blazing, providing the oversight, coordination and necessary resources for countries like The Gambia, to ensure that everyone, everywhere, has equal access to sexual and reproductive health, rights, information and services.

Her Excellency the Vice President concluded her remarks by assuring the UNFPA Executive Director and the entire gathering that, the Government of The Gambia supports the match to Nairobi; a national ICPD review has been completed, currently, consultations are underway for the finalisation of the National ICPD commitments for the Nairobi Summit and the government will support a high-level delegation to the Nairobi Summit, to renew our national commitments to the ICPD agenda.

At the celebration dinner, paintings reflecting the work and interest of UNFPA, were exhibited and a beautiful spoken-word poetry flash mob, was performed by members of AfriYAN The Gambia. This was the climax of the evening and gave each guest, something to think about as we head to Nairobi and as the world prepares to renew its commitment to finish the unfinished business of ensuring rights and choices for all.
AUDIENCES

Courtesy Visit to the President

Being her first official visit to The Gambia as Executive Director of UNFPA, Dr. Natalia Kanem, paid a courtesy visit to His Excellency the President of the Republic of The Gambia, Mr. Adama Barrow, where they discussed issues around UNFPA’s support to the government and people of The Gambia, and the country’s commitment to the ICPD agenda.

His Excellency the President, used the occasion to congratulate UNFPA on its 50 anniversary and commended the agency for the life-saving work it continues to lead in the country, in the area of sexual and reproductive health and rights, addressing gender-based violence and harmful practices and empowering young people to reach their fullest potential.

On her part, the Executive Director, expressed UNFPA’s appreciation to the government of The Gambia, for creating an environment that is conducive to enable the agency perform its mandate in the country.

The meeting was also used to inform His Excellency the President about the Road to Nairobi and the significance of having national commitments to take to the summit, come November.
Delivering as One on the Road to Nairobi

Partnership for the Goals (SDG17) is crucial, if we must attain sustainable development, but also, if the ICPD Programme of Action is to fully realised. This is why, the UN in its work for people and planet, must always work together in order to deliver results as one.

This is why, UNFPA Executive Director Dr. Natalia Kanem, had to as part of her engagements in the country, meet with the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) in The Gambia, under the leadership of UN Resident Coordinator, Ms. Seraphte Wakana.

The ED used the meeting to understand UNFPA's partnership with other agencies in The Gambia and to lobby their support to the ICPD Programme of Action, in their various interventions in the country.

Meeting with The National Population Commission

UNFPA The Gambia has been working in The Gambia since 1972 and currently supporting its 8th Country Programme. The results that have been realised in the country in the area of population and development thus far, are owed to the tremendous work of all partners and stakeholders working on the population programme.

Thus, the National Population Commission, plays a critical role in the work of the agency. As a result, UNFPA Executive Director, Dr. Natalia Kanem, met with the National Population Commission, chaired by Her Excellency the Vice President of the Republic of The Gambia, Dr. Isatou Touray, to discuss the population programme.

Graced by the UNFPA team led by the Executive Director, cabinet ministers; Minister of Basic and Secondary Education, Minister of Health, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Gambians Abroad and the Minister of Women, Children and Social Welfare and the Implementing Partners of the Population Programme, the meeting was an opportunity for the partners working on the population programme, to highlight the work they have been doing with support from UNFPA and some of the results realised over the years.

The UNFPA team led by the Executive Director, also emphasised the importance of population and development in the growth of any country and that all sectors of government, must support the population and development agenda, as population is never just about numbers, but about people and these people are those whom governments must serve. Therefore, their wellbeing, their rights, their choices and their lives, must always be prioritised.
ED Meets with Gambian Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs

In search of more opportunities for the country’s population and development agenda and recognising the need to invest in key populations; women, youth and adolescents, the UNFPA Executive Director, had an audience with the Honourable Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs of The Gambia, Mr. Mambury Njie.

Accompanied by the Honourable Minister of Foreign Affairs and Gambians Abroad, Dr. Mamadou Tangara, the meeting was an opportunity for the Executive Director to advocate for more strategic investments by government, in key populations and to recognise the urgent need to prioritise young people in the country’s development agenda.

Additionally, the significance of the country's contribution towards the procurement of sexual and reproductive health commodities was underscored by the UNFPA team, highlighting that, the current fertility rates and the contraceptive prevalence rates recorded in the country, call for more decisive action and investment, in order to ensure very member of the population, is adequately catered for.

The UNFPA Executive Director, urged the Finance Ministry to continue working with UNFPA in taking advantage of existing opportunities for support in curbing maternal mortality, ending the unmet need for Family Planning and preventing gender-based violence in The Gambia.
ED Meets with Country Office Staff

In recognition of the efforts of UNFPA The Gambia and the results it has supported the country to achieve over the years, the team of staff at the Country Office, are the engine through which, our life-saving work is pushed forward.

On the afternoon of 9 August, the Executive Director, accompanied by the Regional Director of UNFPA West and Central Africa and his team, had a working lunch with the Country Office staff.

This meeting was aimed at giving staff an opportunity to share the work they are doing and for the Executive Director to congratulate the office for its incredible work in the country.

The Executive Director, seized the opportunity to commend the staff under the leadership of the Country Representative, Mr. Kunle Adeniyi and encouraged that now more than ever, all hands are brought on deck to promote the ICPD agenda and ensure that as we deliver results for women, young people and adolescents, no one is left behind.

The Representative, also took the Executive Director and her delegation through a synopsis of the Country Office’s Road to Nairobi activities.
Dr. Kanem Wraps Up Her Engagements in The Gambia by Meeting with the Ministry of Youth and Sports.

Of course, the first engagement the UNFPA Executive Director had in The Gambia was with young people and it is only right that her final engagement was also with young people. As it is always emphasised, youth are at the heart of what we do at UNFPA.

On Saturday 10 August 2019, prior to leaving the country, the UNFPA chief together with the West and Central Africa Regional Director and the UNFPA Country Representative, met with the Honourable Minister of Youth and Sports Mr. Hadrameh Sidibeh and the Executive Director of the National Youth Council, Mr. Lamin Darboe.

This meeting was an opportunity to highlight the work of the Youth Ministry and how UNFPA has been strengthening the Ministry, while identifying challenges and opportunities for more strategic intervention.
NEVER LET THE TEARS WIN
THIS IS WHY I MARCH

**Female Voice**

As a young person, able to make informed choices, I march to ensure the enjoyment of essential sexual and reproductive health and rights for all young people.

--- Female Voice

To realize my full potentials as a youth and effect change for the next generation to thrive, I march for sustainable development.

--- Female Voice

**Male Voice**

For me and all young men around the world, I march to create a world where men champion gender equality and fight the good fight for our women and girls.

--- Male Voice

When I tie my boots and head to Nairobi, I march for Sexual and Reproductive health and rights in humanitarian and fragile contexts.

--- Male Voice

I march for an end to Gender-based violence and harmful traditional practices, because like me, women and girls around the world are still victims.

--- Female Voice
Smile often my girl, they told her
Don’t you ever let the tears win
Lift your head up, baby girl
Don’t let them see how much you’ve been hurt
Wear your strength on your back
Don’t let them see how deep you’ve been cut
Wrap a bandage around that bleeding self-esteem
Don’t let them see you break down
Force a smile if you must
Blind them all with your glittering white teeth and the shine from your eyes
But remember
Don’t let them see you cry
Never let them see you struggle.
From breastfeeding with one arm, while cooking with the other
Hurt deep inside and still bearing another
Taking care of more kinds than I can count in both hands
Because the choice was never hers to make.
See you are a slave clothed in an angel’s clothing
Which makes you a beautiful angelic slave
Sent right from the clouds of heaven to up-under us
So you’ve got to be perfect
For this world.

So never let the tears win, they told her.
So she spread apart her thighs
Watched them take her chastity away
Each piece of her existence dripping out with the blood
That gave birth to her growth
She was only 3 But she didn’t cry
For she was reminded to never let the tears win.
Stay silent my child, they told her
A child isn’t one to speak before her elders
So keep your ideas in your head.
See they stabbed her generation
Dragged them through the mud of injustice
And drowned them all in the pool of inequality
Chained them with the shackles of child abuse
Threw them behind bars of malnutrition
Packaged their rights, and sent them straight to a bottomless pit of inequity,
But Mother Nature came to their rescue
Packaged all the dumped rights
Tied a bow around it and handed this over to them with a smile
Forced them back to their rich lands
Uplifted and fed their malnourished souls.

Nature taught her
The future is today, so they aren’t just children
She was more than the blade that sliced through her soul
More than the nights she starved to sleep
More than the long nights of watching over her dying child
More than the silence she was forced into, her voice lost
More than the dependence on man’s benevolence
More than the longing and the suffering
In the end, she understood she was more than just broken pieces.
She, is why I march.

__ Isatou Jallow
"I am positive that in the spirit of celebrations we will renew our partnerships, grow our networks and find renewed strength to keep pushing the reproductive health agenda. For 50 years, we at UNFPA have dedicated our lives, time and resources to delivering a world where every pregnancy is wanted, every childbirth is safe and where every young person’s potential is fulfilled. And as I look forward to the next 50 years ahead of us, I extend an arm to all of you here tonight to come on board and work with us to achieve this mission together. Because as the African Proverb says ‘Two ants do not fail to pull one grasshopper’, let us wine and dine tonight and in unity take the world by storm tomorrow!"

– Dr Natalia Kanem
UNFPA Executive Director