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Message from the Representative

Each year, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in The Gambia recommits itself to delivering a Gambia where every pregnancy is wanted, every childbirth is safe, and every young person’s potential is fulfilled, through a dynamic team of staff and partners.

Our interventions in 2017 were majorly centered around UNFPA’s three transformative results:

- Ending the unmet need for family planning
- Ending preventable maternal death
- Ending gender-based violence and harmful practices

UNFPA The Gambia and its partners delivered life-saving work in the interest of women, youth and adolescents, including those in hard-to-reach communities. This effort was accompanied by the continuous advocacy for programmes, policies and laws that protect the reproductive health and rights of our constituents.

This 2017 report captures efforts UNFPA is taking to support sustainable development, by delivering life-saving interventions to women, adolescents and youth in The Gambia, and by highlighting major results registered through our programme interventions.

2017 was an exciting year for the country office. We launched the African Union (AU) Roadmap on Harnessing the Demographic Dividend through Investments in Young People in The Gambia. To wrap up the year, we engaged a sector of society, whose role in addressing gender-based violence and fostering family wellbeing, is often under-emphasized – religious leaders - through the International Consultation on Islam and Family Wellbeing.

I thank our government and civil society partners, the country office team and most importantly the communities we serve.

We look forward to intensifying our work in 2018 as we improve programme effectiveness and quality delivery of our interventions to reach those furthest behind.

Kunle Adeniyi
UNFPA Country Representative
The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) is currently implementing its eight Country Programme in The Gambia, which in the interest of maximal programme impact, concentrates programme efforts on two outcome areas namely:

- Sexual and Reproductive Health
- Adolescents and Youth

These outcomes, are in line with UNFPA’s strategic direction, the goal of which, is to achieve universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights, focusing on women, adolescents and youth.

Successive Country Programmes have been aligned to national priorities as articulated in national development plans and related development plan documents.

The eight CP priorities were aligned to those of the draft National Development Plan (2017-2021), Vision 2020, the UNDAF (2017-2021), the Sahel Regional Response Plan and the UNFPA Strategic Plan.
Broadly speaking, the Country Programme has been designed to support national efforts to capture the demographic dividend of a youthful population through high impact investments in sexual and reproductive health and the elimination of gender-based violence that hinder the potential of adolescents and youth, especially girls, to contribute to poverty reduction. Guided by the Sustainable Development Goals, the programme will mainly target highly vulnerable women and youth in selected regions of the country.

Where We Work

The Gambia with a population of about 2 million inhabitants, has a land area of 11,365 square kilometers. With a population density of 176 persons per square kilometer, the country is amongst the most densely populated in sub-Saharan Africa. Currently, the population is estimated to be growing at the rate of 3.1 per cent per annum with much higher rates of growth in urban areas.
Ending the Unmet Need for Family Planning
UNFPA is the main provider of contraceptives in The Gambia. Notwithstanding the low contraceptive use attributable to socio-cultural believes and practices, which promote pro-natalist attitudes, the current Country Programme continues to support demand creation activities aimed at increasing the uptake of contraceptives.

An integrated approach to service delivery is being implemented with family planning services provided through maternal and child health clinics and youth-friendly services being promoted. An annual Family Planning Campaign was initiated, to provide women the opportunity to be tested for cervical cancer and HIV, while also providing them with Family Planning Information and Services.

The Situation

Results

Community-based distributors were trained on family planning technology in a bid to reach the ‘Last Mile’.

New family planning acceptors were reported on SIS through the Health Management Information System, which reflects an increase of 9.7% from the 2016 figure which stood at 53,765.

Women were screened for cervical cancer. 791 among these, tested negative and 127 tested positive, during the FP Campaign.

People were provided with voluntary counselling and testing services on HIV.

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Strategy

The Journey to Harnessing the Demographic Dividend in The Gambia
The Gambia has a very young population, with the 2013 census results indicating that, 42.7% and 64% of the population are below the ages of 15 and 24 years respectively, with young people aged 15-24 years representing 21.4% of the population. Between the 2003 and the 2013 censuses, the youth population increased from 489,666 to 690,836, representing an increase of 41.1%, or an annual growth rate of 3.4%, which is slightly higher than the national annual growth rate of 3.1% over the same period. High youth unemployment however continues to pose a national challenge. Over the past few years, it has been observed that young Gambians are disproportionately represented among young African migrants crossing the Mediterranean, to travel to Europe in search of better lives. The mass migration of young Gambians to Europe through Libya has resulted in heavy loss of lives and suffering of many young people. This undesirable development has contributed to the rekindling of national efforts related to investing in young people to harness the demographic dividend of a young population. In support of national efforts to meet the African Union objective of member countries’ implementation of the 2017 theme of “Harnessing the Demographic Dividend through investments in Youth” as enshrined in the AU Demographic Dividend Roadmap, the Gambia UNFPA Country Office supported the launch of the roadmap on 30 June 2017.
Ending Preventable Maternal Deaths
The rapid growth of the urban population in The Gambia, has resulted in more than 50 per cent of the population now residing in urban areas. Despite the decline experienced in mortality rates in the recent past, they remain among the highest in the world with infant mortality estimated at 34 per 1,000 live births and under-five mortality at 54 per 1,000 live births. Maternal mortality is estimated at 433 per 100,000 live births. Some of the factors that influence the high maternal mortality rates relate to low contraceptive prevalence rate (9 per cent) and limited access to maternity services (64 per cent of births attended by skilled health personnel).

Results

15,288 Unintended pregnancies were averted. 33 Maternal deaths were averted.

188,938 Couple years of protection were generated. 5 Facilities are currently providing BEmONC services.

50,960 Deliveries took place in health facilities, of which 46,081 were conducted by skilled personnel.
‘Kabilo Baama’

Through a community-based initiative the Country Programme continued supporting the implementation of a community-based initiative, that combines women’s economic empowerment, sexual and reproductive health and male involvement in reproductive health issues. The initiative has resulted in increased awareness on reproductive health issues and has also raised awareness on the importance of nutritive food for pregnant and lactating women for the health of women and their children. As a direct consequence of this intervention, a rapid increase in health facility-based deliveries was registered in target communities and men’s support to expectant wives, has also increased which has been associated with improved pregnancy outcomes in those communities.

Results

16 New communities, implemented the ‘Kabilo Baama’ initiative in Kiang East and Kiang Central.

256 Deliveries were recorded in the Health Facility in the area, leading to an increase in facility-based deliveries from 38.41% in 2016 to 61.6% in 2017.
Health System Strengthening

At the beginning of 2017, the Country Office embarked on a needs assessment with a country-wide tour targeting Government operated health facilities. Based on this needs assessment and following consultations with the Ministry of Health officials, equipment were procured to facilitate the provision of basic emergency obstetric care services, in four health facilities.

Cognizant of the need for continuous staff training, the Country Office supported Government in undertaking in-service training of various cadre of service providers, in the health system. Maternal death audit reviews have been institutionalized in the health system to better understand its causes and inform national efforts aimed at averting the high rate of maternal mortality.

Results

68 Service providers have been trained on the use of the partograph in 2017

30 Supply Chain Managers trained on Supply Chain Management

12 Maternal death audit reviews were conducted across the country and reports compiled
Ending Gender-Based Violence and Harmful Practices
The Situation

The UNFPA The Gambia Country Office has been at the forefront of national advocacy efforts, which resulted in the enactment of the law banning FGM in 2015. To have the desired impact on attitudes to the practice, a multi-prong approach has been adopted for the campaign against the practice.

Whilst health service providers are being trained on the negative health and social consequences of the practice, similar messages are being disseminated through community engagements by targeting young people, in and out of school for sensitization on the negative consequences of FGM.

Results

18 Radio talk shows on GBV were supported.

Cases of GBV were registered by the police.

175 Health service providers were trained on the management of FGM complications.

299 Traditional communicators from 30 groups, were trained on FGM, Child Marriage and other harmful traditional practices.

8,944 Peer Heath Educators in schools trained on FGM and other Harmful Traditional Practices.

31,453 People were reached with messages on fistula, family planning and gender-based violence.

500 Madrassa students and their teachers, trained on FGM and related GBV issues.

120 Adolescent girls graduated from a mentorship programme that equipped them with life skills, educated them on FGM and Child Marriages and provided them with information on reproductive health.
In 2017 UNFPA supported the development of a curriculum for comprehensive sexuality education. The new curriculum has been developed and integrated into selected taught subjects in basic and secondary schools.

In addition to the curriculum development, life lessons have been planned to compliment the teaching of the subject in schools. One lesson was prepared and pre-tested in 2017. The life lessons will be delivered in selected days in schools across the country. Materials developed for the comprehensive sexuality education are expected to be utilized by implementing partners to reach out to young people outside the classroom.
Engaging Religious and Traditional Leaders for Improved Reproductive Health

Gains related to the national campaign against harmful traditional practices such as FGM, Child Marriage and Gender-based Violence, have largely been impeded by the fact that most of these practices are premised on religious arguments. Similarly, opponents of contraception are mainly of the view that it is forbidden by religion. National campaigners against harmful traditional practices and family planning are often faced with the challenge of having to lose ground to religious leaders who in their sermons contradict messages disseminated by these campaigners. To build partnerships with and gain the support of religious leaders, UNFPA in collaboration with UNICEF Gambia and the Government of The Gambia, organised a consultative forum bringing together about 600 personalities including religious leaders from The
Gambia and other Sahel Countries, on Islam, Family Wellbeing and Traditional Practices.

The key feature of the Consultation was a high-level interactive panel on Investing in Girls and Young People, with the participation of the Vice President of the Republic of The Gambia, Her Excellency Aja Fatoumatta Jallow-Tambajang and the UNFPA Regional Director for West and Central Africa, Mabingue Ngom. The panel deliberated on young people as our present and future, and the need to put them first to ensure harnessing the Demographic Dividend. Specific focus was placed on the necessity of investments in women and girls, with the Gambia Vice President highlighting priority areas of her government. Maternal health, women’s and girls’ empowerment, traditional practices such as FGM and Child Marriage and the role of religious leaders as key actors for change, were also discussed during the consultation. The emerging trend of youth migration and the potentials for radicalization, and the need to put in place strategies and programmes to engage our young people, to ensure a brighter future for them and for The Gambia and Africa were also discussed. The Consultation was significant in identifying key allies in the religious fraternity and offered the need to re-strategize approaches in dealing with less receptive religious leaders to turn them into actors and allies. An outcome document in the form of a declaration, highlighted the need for empowerment of in-school and out-of-school adolescents, for sustainable livelihood and ensuring their active involvement and participation in the socio-cultural and economic development of The Gambia. Religious leaders and stakeholders including traditional leaders, committed themselves to end Child Marriage and Female Genital Mutilation and called for the promotion of women’s empowerment, to enhance family wellbeing.
In 2017, UNFPA The Gambia provided technical and financial support to the Government of The Gambia, particularly the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs, in the development of the National Development Plan for The Gambia, with a focus on the youth component. A significant achievement, was identifying youth development, as one of the eight strategic priorities, and the inclusion of a whole section on investments in young people, to harness the Demographic Dividend in The Gambia. This has spurred the Country Office, to plan for the development of a National Country Profile.
Humanitarian Response

UNFPA were the first responders during the last emergency situation in The Gambia as a result of Flashfloods and windstorms. In anticipation of the humanitarian needs, the Country Office ensured the availability of reproductive health kits.

Results

1390
women and girls received Dignity Kits

1000
reproductive health kits were positioned in 8 major health facilities
2017 at a Glance in

- Ending the Unmet Need for Family Planning
- Ending Preventable Maternal Deaths
- Ending Gender-Based Violence and Harmful Practices
- Programme Enablers
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