



Welcome to this Edition



Welcome to the first Quarterly Newsletter of the UNFPA The Gambia Country Office. This newsletter, is meant to serve as a tool to share stories of our work in The Gambia for women, youth and adolescents and to create an opportunity for learning and sharing best practices from communities benefitting from our interventions.

UNFPA 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 by work centered around our three transformative results:

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

UNFPA The Gambia continues to recognise and commend the Government of the Gambia, for its efforts towards promoting, protecting and fulfilling its obligations towards young people and women of The Gambia.

In this issue, we bring you stories from our Annual Staff Retreat in Toubacouta, Senegal, the Launch of the FP2020 Working Group in The Gambia, our commemoration of the International Day to End Obstetric Fistula and other exciting stories.

Also, we are excited to introduce our interns who have been very instrumental in the production of this issue.

We hope you enjoy reading this issue and we look forward to your feedback on ways to improve the newsletter.

Kunle Adeniyi
Representative

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE...

PAGE 2

UNFPA Staff Head to Toubacouta for 2018 Annual Retreat

PAGE 3

3 Hearty Cheers for Midwives Everywhere!

PAGE 4

The Gambia Inaugurates FP2020 Working Group

PAGE 4

The International Day to End Obstetric Fistula 2018 - Gambian Women Educated on Fistula Signs, Prevention and Treatment

PAGE 6

Mothers' Day

PAGE 7

The Gambia Now Has a National Plan of Action for Youth

PAGE 8

The Country Office Launcchs the 1st Babatunde Osotimehin Esay Competition in The Gambia

PAGE 9

Meet our Summer Interns!

UNFPA Staff Head to Toubaouta for 2018 Annual Retreat



UNFPA The Gambia Representative, Kunle Adeniyi Leading a Session at the Staff Retreat | Photo: ©UNFPA/HJonga

A team that works together, wins together they say. This is why, in May, the Country Office decided to head to its annual retreat in Toubaouta, Senegal. Retreats may sound like fun only times, but for us, this was a period of reflection, of bonding and bringing everyone to the same level, to remember the reasons we deliver for our constituents – women, adolescents and young people - from the 9th to the 11th May, 2018.



L-R Ms. Jalang Conteh, Summer Intern - UNFPA The Gambia and Mr. Alieu Jammeh, Programme Analyst RHCS - UNFPA The Gambia Doing a Team Building Exercise at the Staff Retreat | Photo: ©UNFPA/HJonga

The three-day retreat took staff through UNFPA's strategic direction and enables each individual to identify how they can contribute to delivering a Gambia where

every pregnancy is wanted, every childbirth is safe and every young person's potential is fulfilled.

Added to the discussions, were team building exercises, led by the Representative, to strengthen bonding, and teach staff key lessons that are key to working towards one agenda. Key among these exercises was the blindfolding activity.



UNFPA The Gambia Programme Analyst Communication Participating in a Team Building Exercise at the Staff Retreat | Photo: ©UNFPA/LCamara

We travelled together from The Gambia right to Toubaouta in Senegal where the retreat was held, ate together and discussed work, country and development in general. Our take home was, a little time outside the office, reenergizes you and reminds you of a clear course to your direction.



UNFPA The Gambia Staff Participating in an Ice Breaker Session at the Staff Retreat | Photo: ©UNFPA/HJonga

3 Heart Cheers for Midwives Everywhere!

The process of childbirth has weathered many changes throughout history. With advancements and innovations in birthing practices and technology, the expectations of mothers in relation to the process has also changed. Whereas 50 years ago, a mother typically expected to endure labor alone, that is no longer the case in many parts of the world today, including The Gambia.

Population growth has come at a cost for us: more patients for doctors to see and therefore less time to spend with each patient. As a result, there will always be a desire for a human component/touch and compassionate care during such a delicate event; care that midwives provide. Even though the role of midwives has diminished in certain areas of the world, their presence is still considered a pivotal component of the birthing process in many places.

Every year the world recognizes the importance and contribution made by midwives with the commemoration of the International Day of the Midwife on May 5th. For many women and their newborns around the world, midwives serve as not only their primary caregivers, but life savers. In The Gambia, 50% of all births are performed by a nurse or a midwife. Gambian midwives have been known to not be relegated to a single role. In many health settings, it is common to see a midwife taking on additional responsibilities beyond their typical job description and working despite lacking certain basic amenities and facilities (i.e. water supply, electricity, equipment, etc.) required to perform their daily duties. The day celebrates the achievements of midwives, but it is also a time to reflect on the progress that still needs to be made to ensure that all mothers have efficient and

sufficient midwifery care before, during, and after labour.

In many countries of the world, women continue to lack access to adequate midwifery care to ensure safe deliveries. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimated in 2015 that 334,000 additional midwives were needed to meet the goal of 72% births covered by a skilled birth attendant globally. Access to adequate midwifery care has been linked to reductions in maternal and child mortality. In comparison, The Gambia's maternal mortality ratio has decreased from 1,030 deaths in 1994 to 433 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2013. The caring approach and individualized care that midwives provide are among their most meaningful contributions. It is important, therefore, that

effort is concentrated on supporting them and increasing their capacity to assist mothers and their newborns through procurement of necessary equipment/instruments and availability of refresher trainings.

One of the goals of UNFPA is to increase and promote the capacity of midwives by elevating their voices, and ensuring they have adequate training to support women in low-income nations. UNFPA The Gambia, specifically, has provided training for basic emergency obstetrics care (EmOC) functions to increase capacity.

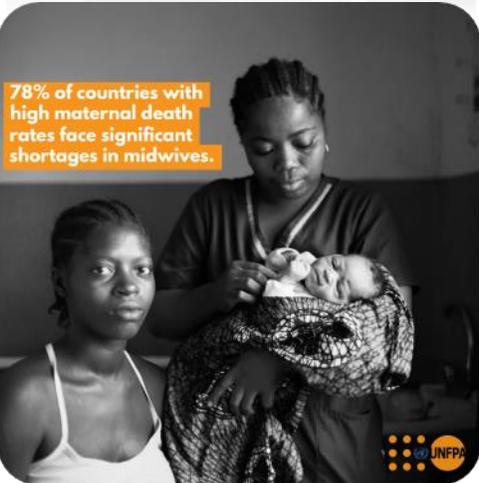
According to the State of the World's Midwifery report, about two-thirds of the world's maternal and child deaths could be prevented with the presence of well-qualified midwives. Midwives can provide antenatal, intrapartum, and postnatal care, and in some cases, family planning counseling. Part of the challenge faced in counseling is finding mechanisms to improve male involvement and interest in pregnancy. It is essential that health systems are strengthened to support and retain these qualified professionals. When midwives can perform their responsibilities to the best of their abilities, the result is safer deliveries, and healthier mothers and babies. Therefore, their importance cannot be



Midwives can help avert over two thirds of maternal and newborn deaths.



Midwives provide life-saving care to newborns.



78% of countries with high maternal death rates face significant shortages in midwives.

over-emphasized and they deserve to be celebrated.

The Gambia Inaugurates FP2020 Working Group

By now you must be aware that, UNFPA is the sole provider of contraceptive commodities for Public Health Facilities in The Gambia. Very impressive right?

UNFPA is committed to supporting The Gambia to address the unmet need for Family Planning and commends the government of The Gambia for recognizing the importance of family planning in improving maternal, new born, and child health as indicated by the development of the comprehensive RMNCAH policy for 2017 to 2026. However, strategic partnerships are needed to fully operationalize the strategies indicated in the national strategic plan and achieve Gambia's ambitious goal of increasing CPR to 35% by 2026.



UNFPA Representative, Hon. Minister of Health and Social Welfare and other Officials at the Inauguration of the FP2020 Working Group \ Photo: ©UNFPA/HJonga

The evident need to build partnerships to support this goal, inspired the beginning of a process to prepare the country to be eligible to benefit from support from the FP2020 Global Partnership. This led to the establishment and official inauguration of the FP2020 Engagement Working Group on May 16th.

The working group is meant to lead the process for the country to be part of the Global Partnership and to lobby government to commit resources to support the provision of Family Planning commodities and products – a requisite for benefitting from the Partnership.

On her part, at the launch, the Honourable Minister of Health and Social Welfare, Mrs. Saffie Lowe Ceesay highlighted that, Family planning is a developmental agenda and pledged that, her ministry will commit a budget line for FP commodities in its 2019 budget. According to her, the ministry recognizes the importance of various stakeholders' involvement in addressing the challenge of accessing family planning services in The Gambia, and expressed hope that, the working group will serve as a medium of regular interaction between

policy makers and stakeholders, to support Family Planning initiatives.

She added that, family planning allows spacing of childbirth reduces risk of pregnancy complications and maternal deaths, and empowers women to be active members of the work force. Therefore, she said, to increase the acceptance of family planning, we must engage religious and traditional community leaders, encourage male involvement in FP, and increase community advocacy to raise awareness and address misconceptions regarding FP.



Photo UNFPA Representative, Hon. Minister of Health and Social Welfare and other Officials Following the Inauguration of the FP2020 Working Group \ Photo: ©UNFPA/HJonga

According to UNFPA Representative Mr. Kunle Adeniyi, the FP2020 Global Partnership is recognised as an integral partner identified to support The Gambia's realization of the rights of women and girls to their reproductive health and rights. He further emphasized that, the establishment of the working group for The Gambia, is instrumental in engaging FP 2020, maximizing resources and making the vision for young people and women in The Gambia, a reality.

The International Day to End Obstetric Fistula 2018 - Gambian Women Educated on Fistula Signs, Prevention and Treatment



UNFPA officials and staff of the Bundung Maternal and Child Health Hospital During the Health Talk on the International Day to End Obstetric Fistula \ Photo: ©UNFPA/HJonga

Pregnancy, childbirth and motherhood, are meant to be filled with beautiful memories, endless joy and intimate connection between mother and child. However, Obstetric Fistula has taken away this beautiful experiences from nearly 2 million women globally. Obstetric Fistula is a childbirth injury, obtained as a result of prolonged, obstructed labour. Each year, the 23rd of May, is commemorated as the International Day to End Obstetric Fistula. The theme for this year's celebration is "Leaving no one behind: let us commit to end Fistula now!"

To commemorate International Day to End Obstetric Fistula 2018, UNFPA The Gambia officials, along with the Reproductive, Maternal, Neonatal, Child and Adolescent Health Unit of the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, visited two local hospitals - Bundung Maternal and Child Health Hospital and Sinchu Baliya Health Post, to hold Health Talks with women about the condition. The Health Talks were aimed at sensitizing communities on Obstetric Fistula, and encourage potential patients to register, in preparation for UNFPA The Gambia's upcoming Fistula Camp, expected to take place within the next couple of months. Approximately 400 women attending antenatal visits or childhood immunization visits, were present at the Health Talks.



A Nurse at the Bundung Maternal and Child Health Hospital Addressing Patients During the Health Talk on the International Day to End Obstetric Fistula | Photo: ©UNFPA/HJonga

For most of these women, the Health Talk was their first time to hear about Fistula. It was therefore key, that the discussions detailed out the causes, signs and symptoms of fistula in the languages they understood – Mandinka, Wolof and Fula. From the discussions, it was highlighted that, teen mothers are especially susceptible to obstetric fistula, as their bodies are not fully ready for childbirth. Mr. Ivan Coker, Hospital Administrator at the Bundung Maternal and Child Health Hospital, echoed that, by encouraging all women, especially young birthing mothers, to seek antenatal services and hospital deliveries, they can be prevented from experiencing Fistula.

It was of significant importance, that the women present, were aware of the warning signs of Fistula, to increase

recognition not only in themselves, but in their neighbors, family members, and friends. Women showing signs, were urged to go to the hospital and register themselves in an effort to produce a Fistula count, that shows the magnitude of the condition in The Gambia. Currently, statistics regarding the issue are limited. Mr. Alieu Jammeh, Programme Analyst, Reproductive Health Commodity Security at UNFPA, encouraged the women to sympathize with fistula patients by exercising empathy and supporting them to access medical facilities, for treatment.



A Staff of the RMNCAH Unit Addressing Patients During the Health Talk on the International Day to End Obstetric Fistula at the Sinchu Baliya Health Post | Photo: ©UNFPA/HJonga

"Pregnancy comes with many challenges and labour in itself, is enough pain for us women. If bringing life to this world - a sacred responsibility bestowed on us women - demands that we deliver our babies under medical supervision and attention, we must adhere to this demand. Childbirth is a special experience that must not lead to any danger for neither mother, nor child. It is our responsibility to spread the word and ensure every woman experiences safe delivery." said Amie Bah, a participant at the Health Talk.



A cross-section of women, UNFPA officials and staff of the Bundung Maternal and Child Health Hospital During the Health Talk on the International Day to End Obstetric Fistula | Photo: ©UNFPA/HJonga

To wrap up the talks, women were urged to serve as advocates for their community by educating their fellow women on their rights. Those who have already received medical attention should receive



Photo: @UNFPA/HJonga

Do you know women living with symptoms of Obstetric Fistula?

If you do, share love with them - assist them to receive medical attention. We can end Obstetric Fistula. It starts with us!

Mothers' Day

On a Saturday morning in Serrekunda market, Mariama smiles and cradles her two-month-old baby on her back, as she sells her vegetables and chats with other market women. This is her fourth child. Mariama is at the market at 6am, every day to sell her produce, determined to support herself and her family. She is like the many Gambian mothers we know; strong, resilient, and hardworking.

Mother's Day is a day to celebrate women like Mariama, who's immense contribution, whether on the market, farm, or in the office, help sustain our communities and country. And as we honor and celebrate Gambian mothers this month, it is important to use this opportunity to highlight some of the maternal challenges that Gambian mothers face. Challenges that rob Gambian mothers of their bodily autonomy and deny them the right to safely give birth.

These challenges are perfectly summed up in Fadumo Dayib, Somalia's first female presidential candidate's quote: "What can I do to a woman who has born, I died when I was mutilated, died when I gave birth to my first child... I am not afraid of death." Her life experiences, sadly, reflect the realities of many Gambian women. The Gambia has a 75% family planning, and an estimated 433 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births. While these rates are heartbreaking, they can be largely prevented with effective gender-strategies, and adequate access to family planning and emergency obstetric care. There is no reason for a mother to suffer from gender-based violence or die from an unwanted pregnancy.



Photo: @UNFPA

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At UNFPA, we are committed to improve sexual and reproductive health in The Gambia. Our amazing staff and partners work tirelessly to ensure an end to FGM and gender-based violence, adequate access to family planning, and safe deliveries for all Gambian women. We provide capacity building and support health facilities to deliver emergency obstetric care in communities as remote as Baja Kunda. We procure family planning commodities and maternal lifesaving medicines, while successfully integrating FGM and GBV curriculum into health schools and facilities in The Gambia. Through our work we have contributed to the reduction of FGM, increase use of family planning, and improvement of service delivery in The Gambia.

compassionately working to



Photo: @UNFPA/HJonga

We understand that family planning and maternal health overlaps with many other women's health and development issues. As we celebrate Mother's Day, we re-emphasise our commitment to fighting for The Gambia. Our vision is a Gambia where all women are free from gender-based violence, every pregnancy is wanted, every child birth is safe, and all Gambian women are empowered to continue contributing their quota to national development.

The Gambia Now Has a National Plan of Action for Youth

In December 2017, the National Youth Council (NYC) and its partners, organised the 12th edition of the biennial National Youth Conference and Festival (NAYCONF) from the 15th to 22nd in Basse, the regional capital of the Upper River Region of The Gambia. The event brought together approximately 2000 delegates from all youth groupings, regions and sectors of the country, to reflect on the challenges faced and opportunities for young people in The Gambia.



Executive Director of the Gambia National Youth Council, Speaking at the Opening Ceremony of NAYCONF 2017 | Photo: ©National Youth Council

The event was also geared towards, discussing youth development and empowerment, giving consideration to the new democratic dispensation in the country and the fact that The Gambia launched the AU Roadmap on Harnessing the Demographic Dividend through Investments in Youth in mid-2017.

As an outcome of discussions held at the end of 2017 NAYCONF, part of the recommendations was to develop a National Programme of Action for youth. UNFPA The Gambia, being the agency for young people, supported National Youth Council to develop this programme of action and on May 31st 2018, the document was validated at the Friendship Hotel, in Bakau.

Nearly a hundred young people, development partners and government officials attended the validation workshop, to support the process of producing a document that captures all issues of youth development and empowerment in The Gambia and to guide interventions in this regard.



L-R Ms. Haddy Jonga, Programme Analyst Communication – UNFPA The Gambia, Mrs Fatou Sosseh Secka, Deputy Permanent Secretary (Ministry of Youth and Sports) Mr. Dembo Kambi, Chairperson - National Youth Council and Mr Lamin Darboe, Executive Director - National Youth Council | Photo: ©National Youth Council

The Country Office Launched the 1st Babatunde Osotimehin Essay Competition and Annual Lecture in The Gambia



PROFESSOR BABATUNDE OSOTIMEHIN

Essay Competition and Annual Lecture
The Gambia

Marking the one-year anniversary since the passing of its late Executive Director, UNFPA The Gambia launches the First Professor Babatunde Osotimehin Essay Competition and Annual Lecture in The Gambia. In honour of the life, times and work of the late Executive Director of UNFPA (2011 - 2017) - Professor Babatunde Osotimehin, young people of The Gambia, are invited to submit essay entries on the theme - **“Comprehensive Sexuality Education: A Case of National Investment”**.

The competition, seeks to enrich conversations and research, on the continual quest for brilliant solutions, as a means to drive the much desired demographic dividends. The young people with the three best entries, will be awarded during the lecture to be held in The Gambia, during the International Youth Day commemoration, in August 2018.

Essay Topic: “Comprehensive Sexuality Education: A Case of National Investment”

Professor Babatunde Osotimehin (February 6, 1949 – June 4, 2017) was a Nigerian physician, who served as the head of the National Agency for the Control of AIDS (NACA) and later as Minister of Health in Nigeria. In 2011, he became the Executive Director of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), until his death in 2017. During his time at UNFPA, Osotimehin pursued three goals: to end preventable maternal deaths, to end the unmet need for family planning and to eliminate gender-based violence against women and girls.

He was a champion for youth and women issues. Despite his self-effacing mien, Professor Osotimehin was resilient in seeking sustainable solutions to reproductive health issues facing young people and women. He was keen on adopting local solutions to address global challenges like access to family planning, unintended pregnancies, STIs, Maternal Mortality, etc., without deflecting attention from other possible solution sources. He provided a strong voice on issues of Child Marriage and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM).

Professor Babatunde Osotimehin, doctor, public health administrator and champion for humanity, born 6th February 1949, passed away on the 4th of June 2017.

His legacy lives on.

MEET OUR INTERNS

Jalang is pursuing an MPH in Maternal, Child, and Adolescent Health at The University of California at Berkeley. She received her B.S in Human Biology with minors in Global Public Health and Epidemiology and Women and Gender Studies.

Her interests lie in global public health through a women's empowerment lens, with specific focus on family planning, emergency obstetric care, adolescent sexual and reproductive health and maternal mortality.

She is excited to be interning with the UNFPA Gambia Country Office this summer as their vision aligns perfectly with the work she is hoping to do in the future. She hopes that this internship will provide her with an opportunity to apply knowledge gained from prior MPH coursework in a working environment while developing new skills and broadening her understanding of sexual and reproductive health.

In her free time, Jalang likes to read African feminist literature.

Fanny recently joined the Country Office as a summer intern for a period of 8 weeks from May to July.

Fanny Njie is a first year student at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill's Gillings School of Global Public Health in Chapel Hill, North Carolina in the United States. She is currently pursuing a Master's in Public Health (MPH) degree with a concentration in Maternal and Child Health. She previously graduated from Meredith College, an all-girls school in Raleigh, North Carolina, with a Bachelor of Science degree in Biology and two minors in Environmental Sustainability and Sociology.

Due to her interest in family planning and women's health in international settings, she is hoping that through her internship, she gains knowledge on Sexual and Reproductive Health programmes and interventions in The Gambia.

In her free time, Fanny enjoys spending time with her family, watching Netflix, and exploring the streets of The Gambia.





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