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**Quarterly Newsletter
July – September 2018**

World Population Day 2018 Commemorated on the Theme: “Family Planning is a Human Right”

World Population Day is about countering any notion of “population control”, strengthening the global rights and development frameworks that support it, and ensuring that future generations never take a hard-won human right for granted.

On July 11th 2018, The Gambia joined the rest of the world to commemorate World Population Day, on the theme: “Family Planning is a Human Right”. This 2018 theme, came at a time when the world is reflecting on a decision made fifty years ago in Tehran, at the United Nations International Conference on Human Rights where world leaders proclaimed that, **“Parents have a basic human right to determine freely and responsibly the number and the spacing of their children.”** Despite tremendous progress since 1968, hundreds of millions of women, men and young people globally, are still unable to exercise their right to plan their families, and 214 million women, still lack access to modern contraceptives.



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The 2018 commemoration in The Gambia, took the form of a march past that brought together UNFPA staff, government and civil society partners, security personnel, young people and the media, among others. The procession was followed by an open conversation on the theme at the Youth Monument, which was hosted by the Lord Mayor of the Kanifing Municipality, Mr. Talib Ahmed Bensouda and was graced by the Minister of Health and Social Welfare, Permanent Secretary at the Office of the Vice President and

Ministry of Women’s Affairs, religious leaders and a host of other personalities.

Addressing the gathering the UNFPA Representative in The Gambia Mr. Kunle Adeniyi emphasized that, the right to family planning, permits the enjoyment of other rights, including the rights to health, education, and the achievement of a life with dignity. According to him, an informed rights-based approach to family planning is the most cost-effective intervention for tackling maternal death and illnesses. Ensuring universal access to reproductive health services, including family planning, can ultimately speed-up a country’s progress towards reducing poverty and achieving global development goals.



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It is important to remember that, the youthful nature of The Gambia’s population, coupled with the low Contraceptive Prevalence Rate and high unmet needs for family planning information, services and commodities, means that the population will continue to be a dependent one, making it increasingly unlikely to ever harness the Demographic Dividend in The Gambia.

Family Planning can therefore, greatly support the country in harnessing its Demographic Dividend and ultimately reducing poverty.

The Gambia Country Office Hosts UNFPA West and Central Africa Change Management Training and Regional Communications and Advocacy Retreat in Banjul

Country Representatives of UNFPA in West and Central Africa and staff of the Regional Office, were in Banjul for a Regional Change Management Training from the 27th to 29 August, 2018. The workshop held at the Kairaba Beach Hotel, brought together Representatives from 23 countries in the region.

The opening ceremony of the workshop was graced by His Excellency the Vice President of the Republic of The Gambia, Hon. Ousainou ANM Darboe, UNFPA Regional Director for West and Central Africa Mr. Mabingue Ngom, among other dignitaries.

Speaking at the Opening Ceremony, Regional Director Ngom highlighted that, “Africa is changing, the world is changing, UNFPA must change to deliver the results we desire as per Agenda 2030 and Agenda2063”.



Photo: ©UNFPA/StateOfMic



Photo: ©UNFPA/StateOfMic

These two meetings took place in a decisive context for UNFPA as the United Nations reforms are under way and UNFPA West and Central Africa has already anticipated the priorities of the region by developing rather innovative initiatives to address these priorities.

Along the margins of these very important events in Banjul, key engagements with stakeholders in the country also took place. At the peak of these engagements, was a courtesy visit to His Excellency the President of the Republic of The Gambia Mr. Adama Barrow.



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Photo: ©UNFPA/StateOfMic

Similarly, in the same week, from the 28th to 30th August, a regional communications and advocacy retreat was held, bringing together communication officers from the regional and country offices.



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The retreat was officially opened by the Honourable Minister of Information and Communications Infrastructure of The Gambia, Mr. Ebrima Sillah, who stressed the importance of communication in today’s world especially for development agencies like the United Nations Population Fund.

This beautiful evening, ended with conversations around strengthening interventions to better the lives of Gambian women and was graced by development partners in the Gambia.

Peer Health Educators Trained to Reach the Last Mile

With support from UNFPA, the Gambia Family Planning Association (GFPA), from the 2nd to 4th August, conducted a three-day training of 60 Youth Peer Health Educators (YPEs) coming from the 5 Administrative Regions of The Gambia, on Contraceptive Technology, STI/HIV/AIDS Prevention and Treatment, Teenage Pregnancy, Family Planning Counseling and Human Anatomy and Physiology.

Participants were introduced to regulations of being a YPE and why they volunteered to be Youth Peer Health Educators and what is expected from them.



Photo: ©UNFPA/GFPA

Following the completion of the training, the YPE were certified and recognised for the key role they have to play in ensuring that their people in their communities especially youth and adolescents, have access to information and services to meet their sexual and reproductive health needs and concerns.

The Country Office Supports a Comprehensive Assessment of the Ministry's Health Information System

Following the development of a National Health Strategic Plan (NHSP 2014-2020) and the signing of the Country Compact to guide health stakeholders' implementation of the NHSP in the Gambia, the Development Partners expressed willingness to assist the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare (MoHSW) accelerate the achievement of the strategies outline in the plan towards the establishment of a responsive and functional health system. In order to begin this process, there was consensus for a review of the current status of the health system in order to obtain a comprehensive diagnostic of the constraints and challenges.

The District Health Information System (DHIS2) platform was customized and implemented as an integrated Data Warehouse in the Gambia from 2009. While this was part of the HIS strengthening efforts following a HIS assessment led and funded by Health Metrics Network, the DHIS2 implementation since then has had no reliable source of funding.

Despite this seeming improvement in technology and the perceived HMIS unit role vis-à-vis data management and its dissemination, utilization of information products has been poor. HMIS unit continue to act as data holder serving processed data to health actors. The sparse capacity of the HMIS unit has rendered it incapable of producing and disseminating quarterly and annual reports with regularity and consistently for stakeholders.

A consultancy was commissioned by the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare in Gambia to provide a comprehensive assessment of the Health Information Systems including Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) in the health sector. This assessment, being supported financially by UNFPA, was a component of a larger Health Systems Assessment (HSA) carried out in The Gambia.

The selected modules assessed are in accordance with the World Health Organization (WHO) organized health systems building blocks covering:

1. Leadership and governance
2. Health Financing
3. Service delivery
4. Human resources for health (HRH)
5. Medical products, vaccines and technologies
6. Health information systems (HIS)

UNFPA Supports the Development of The Gambia's National Family Planning Policy

The total fertility rate in The Gambia is high as each woman has an average of 5 children during her reproductive life. The population grows very rapidly (3.01 percent, 2018). The population is mostly young (63.55 percent are under 25 years old). A demographic structure that suggests the need for the country to invest intensively in youth employment, education, health and empowerment to harness the demographic dividend.

The high fertility may be attributed to the low utilization of family planning in the country. Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) is fundamental to individuals, couples and families, and the social and economic development of communities and nations. However, the burden of reproductive ill-health in terms of both life and economic losses are enormous in most of the low-income countries, including The Gambia who puts SRH issues among the top priorities on its development agenda.



Photo: ©UNFPA/StateOfMic

The need for a comprehensive, integrated and culturally appropriate Family Planning Policy in Gambia is vital. Family planning is a public health intervention that promotes well-being for all families. The availability of family planning services allows everyone, married couples, couples and individuals to achieve desired family size by assisting with pregnancy planning, birth spacing, and preventing unintended pregnancy. Family planning contributes also to the empowerment of women and young people, thus to unleash their potential.

Further to a request from the Government of The Gambia, the UNFPA Country Office, this quarter hired an international consultant in order to provide technical assistance to the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare to develop a comprehensive National Family Planning Policy. Currently in its final stages, the policy will support the country to address the high unmet need for Family Planning in the country, while supporting the realising of universal access to sexual and reproductive health information and services for all, especially those in the remotest parts of The Gambia.

The Gambia Participates in CSO-Pre Conference on the AADPD+5 Review Process

Civil Society Organisation has an important role to play in promoting the population and development agenda. This is why, commencing on September 30th, the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) and the Africa Coalition of CSOs for Population and Development (ACCPD) in collaboration with UNFPA, convened a wide and representative array of CSOs to contribute to the assessment of progress on the Addis Ababa Declaration on Population and Development (AADPD) at its five-year mark, and to provide recommendations on its further implementation at national level.

With support from UNFPA The Gambia, Ms. Isatou Jallow, Acting Vice Chairperson of AfriYAN The Gambia and Mr. Momodou Njie, Programme Manager of the Gambia Family Planning Association, joined CSO representatives from across the continent and from various thematic constituencies, to participate in the two-day CSO pre-conference ahead of the Experts and Ministerial segments of the review in the Ghanaian capital city, Accra.



Photo: ©UNFPA/Hlonga

The objective of this pre-conference, was to identify achievements and gaps with respect to the development needs of societies, and as such:

- Review progress on implementation of AADPD with a focus on gains, gaps, lessons learned using the Africa Population and Development Index as a substantive basis;
- Provide a space for the consolidation of key messages that will be shared with AU Member States on the way forward for the implementation of AADPD;
- Review roles of CSOs as collaborative agents in the full implementation of the AADPD and make recommendations on how to better support implementation;
- Build the capacity of CSOs on the African Population and Development Index.

Quarter 3 in Pictures!



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Quarter 3 in Pictures!



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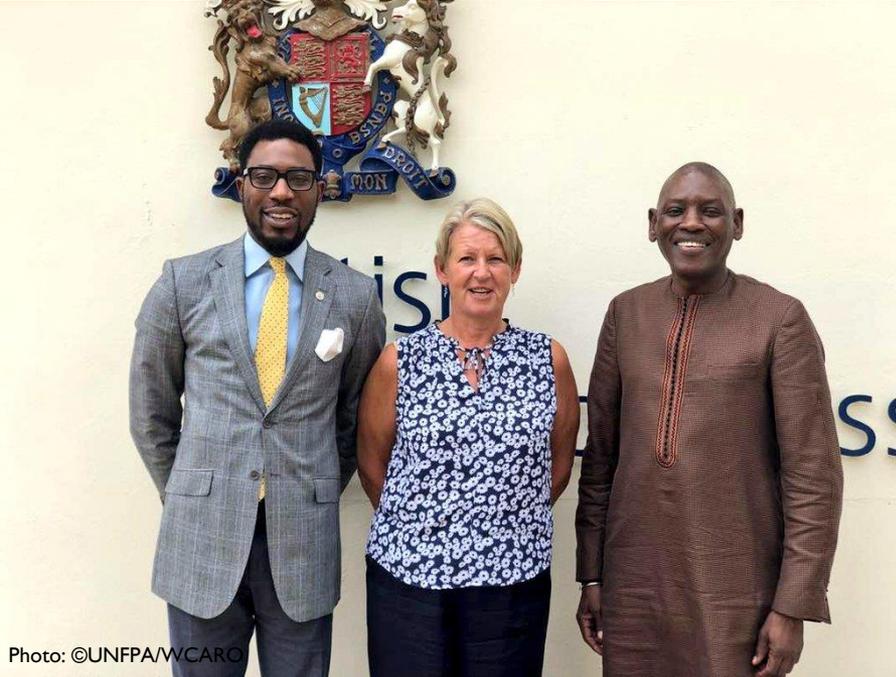


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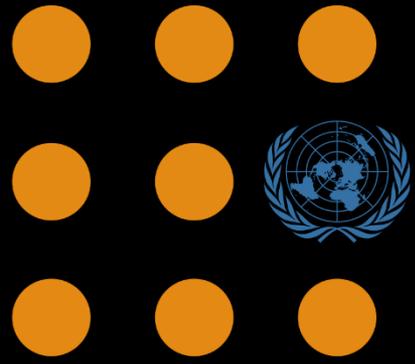
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