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# UNFPA The Gambia Newsletter



July/August 2016

## Towards Harnessing the Demographic Dividend in The Gambia

## Also In This Issue

# Welcome to this maiden Edition

After weeks of planning and consultation, the UNFPA Gambia Country Office is pleased to share with you the maiden edition of our bi-monthly newsletter. The main objective of this initiative is to connect with our partners and colleagues in the Gambia and globally by sharing with you the work of the Organisation and its implementing partners in The Gambia.

This and future editions will contain stories relating to our efforts and those of our partners in ensuring a Gambia where every pregnancy is wanted, every child birth is safe and every young person's potential is realized. The Country Office has made significant strides in the implementation of the UNFPA/Gambia Government 7<sup>th</sup> Country Programme 2012-2016. It is important to highlight the significant role played by the implementing partners in the success of the Programme. We have almost finalized the 8<sup>th</sup> country programme 2017-2021 which is focusing on mainly two outcomes: Sexual and Reproductive Health and Adolescent and Youth. We are looking forward to its successful commencement as we work towards creating the right strategies and initiatives to harness the Demographic Dividend in The Gambia.

It is important to acknowledge at this juncture the cordial relationship between the Government of the

Islamic Republic of The Gambia and UNFPA in our collective drive to enhance maternal health, develop a vibrant and productive youth populace, enhance quality health services for all and end all forms of gender-based violence.

UNFPA would like to commend the Government of the Islamic Republic of The Gambia for banning both Female Genital Mutilation and Child Marriage and enacting laws to that effect. These are bold steps in ensuring that the girl child reach her full potentials and significantly contribute to nation building.

In this issue we have a flashback on Banjul +10 and what it means for Africa's youth. We have also highlighted World Population Day 2016 activities and capacity building initiatives by our partners.

As this is our maiden edition, it is also a learning opportunity for the Gambia Country Office. We are very much looking forward to your useful feedback and criticism in ensuring that this initiative is a worthwhile venture. We hope you found the newsletter useful and enjoy reading it and look forward to continuously engaging with you to ensure we meet the Global Goals 2030.

**Kunle Adeniyi**  
Chief of Operations/Head of Office



### Banjul +10

Banjul opens her arms to Africa's youth to discuss their and the continent's future.

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### Human Interest

Meet a circumciser turned Anti-FGM advocate **Aja Babung** former Sidibeh

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## #Flashback: Banjul +10- An Opportunity to ignite the Power of Youth to Harness The Demographic Dividend

In May 2016 Banjul welcomed Africa's youth to celebrate the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the coming into force of the African Youth Charter. African Union Heads of State and Governments adopted the African Youth Charter (AYC) during the 7th Ordinary Session of the AU Summit in Banjul, The Gambia in July 2006). The Charter is a political and legal document which serves as a strategic framework that gives direction for youth empowerment and development at continental, regional and national levels. With 42 countries having signed the charter out of which 38 ratified it, the Charter is one of the fastest ratified legal instruments of the African Union.

The Theme for the commemoration is **10 Years Implementation of the African Youth Charter: Accelerating Youth Development in Africa.**



and Sports, members of AfriYAN and Rojalnu. UNFPA WCARO Regional Director also had engagements with media personnel.

Mabingue Ngom also on behalf of the Executive Director, delivered an opening statement during the official Opening Ceremony of Banjul +10 and made key note speeches to assert the importance of harnessing the demographic dividend on the African continent and investments in the sexual and reproductive health and rights of young people. He also engaged in advocacy activities for the End Fistula Campaign which was one of the flagship events of UNFPA during the celebrations.

Now that the dust has settled, the action has to start to ensure that Africa's youth are put first to ensure the realization of the commitments made to and for young people. Involving the youth as a major partner is important because as the saying goes "anything for the youth, without the youth is against the youth".

UNFPA The Gambia is committed to supporting national efforts that ensure youth reach their fullest potentials thereby ultimately helping the country harness the Demographic Dividend. This evident in the draft 8<sup>th</sup> Country Programme Document agreed with the Government of The Islamic Republic of The Gambia which has youth as one of the two outcomes of the Country programme for the next cycle 2017-2021.



As part of the commemorative event, about 600 young people from 53 countries and 100 representatives from international organizations, civil society and the private sector gathered in Banjul, The Gambia to reflect on progress made and challenges faced during the decade of existence of the Charter. The event presented an opportunity to chart out strategies to attain the Africa we want and achieve the vision set out in Africa's Agenda 2063 of a people and prosperous continent in which harmful practices are abandoned and the potential of all young people realized.

Sequel to the Banjul +10, the 27<sup>th</sup> Session of the AU Assembly of Heads of State and Government in Kigali, Rwanda, officially adopted the Demographic Dividend road-map and its accompanying matrix of activities as the main guiding framework for the commemoration of the 2017 theme of the year.

UNFPA was highly engaged and involved during the weeklong event with a series of consultations by the UNFPA Regional Director for West and Central Africa Mr Mabingue Ngom who deputized for the Executive Director and a team of eminent staff.

Bilateral meetings were held with key Government officials such as the Vice President and Minister for Women's Affairs of the Gambia Dr. Isatou Njie-Saidy, the Minister of Youth



## World Population Day 2016: “Investing in Teenage Girls”

*“...Marginalized girls are vulnerable to poor reproductive health and more likely to become mothers while still children themselves. They have a right to understand and control their own bodies and shape their own lives.”*

Dr. Babatunde Osotimehin, UNFPA Executive Director

Teenage girls around the world face enormous challenges. Many are considered by their communities or parents to be ready for marriage and motherhood. Many are forced from school, damaging their future prospects. Even among girls who stay in school, access to basic information about their health, human rights and reproductive rights can be hard to come by, leaving them vulnerable to illness, injury and exploitation. These challenges are exacerbated among marginalized girls, such as those living in rural areas and those living in poverty.

Yet when teenage girls are empowered, when they know about their rights and are provided the tools to succeed, they become agents of positive change in their communities.

World Population Day is commemorated every year on July 11<sup>th</sup> and the selected theme this year is “Investing in Teenage Girls”.

In the Gambia, the day was commemorated on August 4<sup>th</sup>, 2016 in a colourful event held at the Kanifing Municipal Council Grounds and attended by a cross-section of dignitaries, community leaders, women and youth leaders, school children and traditional communicators amongst others.



The potential of girls aged 15-19 in The Gambia is impeded by early marriage (23.8 per cent)

Credit: UNFPA/Kasandi Mulaa

In his remarks, the UNFPA Gambia Chief of Operations and Head of Office, Kunle Adeniyi indicated that the theme chosen for this year is very apt because teenage girls around the world face multitude of challenges as compared to their male counterparts. For instance many girls forced into marriage face a lot of consequences such as fistula and do not reach their full potentials.

The UNFPA Head of Office went to say that *“the capacity and ability of the teenage girl is limited with practices such as early marriage.”*

Mr Adeniyi said that the Gambia is endowed with a youthful population but

what we do with that opportunity will determine the future.

He congratulated the Gambia Government for banning both Female Genital Mutilation and child marriage and said these bans are forward thinking and will go a long way in ensuring that the investments made on teenage girls yield a positive dividend.

Momodou Jaiteh, the Deputy Mayor of KM, read a statement on behalf of the Vice President of the Republic of The Gambia Ajaratou Isatou Njie-Saidy. In her statement, Dr Njie-Saidy said that millions of teenage girls face deep discrimination and exclusion that prevent them from claiming their rights and living out their true potential.

According to the Vice President, The Gambia in its various development policies and programmes upholds the right of adolescents and youth to access information and services related to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health.

The event was punctuated by singing and dancing and a drama on the need to invest in teenage girls in order for them to reach their fullest potentials and thus harness the Demographic Dividend in The Gambia.



24 per cent of girls aged 15-19 get pregnant in rural Gambia

Credit: UNFPA/Lamin Camara ©

## International Youth Day 2016- Postcards from The Gambia

## Fatoumatta Cham Jammeh

22 years old

Reporter at Gambia Radio & Television Services  
**The Gambia**

"I have through my work come to recognise and appreciate the power of the social media in bringing about change through effective communication, outreach and coordination of efforts. I want global leaders to commit to putting young people in key political decision making positions.

I want global leaders to encourage investment in education of young people and influence the re-direction of the education system that is relevant to the felt needs of their countries.

Most importantly, I want global leaders and change makers to make sure world reverse the trend of carbon emission and commit to keep global warming below 1.5°C for the remainder of this century".



#PutYoungPeopleFirst #YouthDay #YouthVoices



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## Isatou Jeng

28 years old

Feminist, Women human rights defender volunteering with The Girls' Agenda and also the Advocacy and Campaign Officer for Network against Gender Based Violence, the Women Deliver Youth Scholar,  
**The Gambia**

"We should never relent in our efforts to promote and protect the rights of women and girls because as the saying 'there is always a light at the end of the tunnel.

I will relate this to the case of the Gambia where the government enacted a legislation prohibiting female genital mutilation just five months ago after 32 years of massive awareness campaigns and education.

Young people must always be at the center of all programs and activities geared towards bettering lives not only for us but also for everyone else. Our leaders should be accountable at all times in fulfilling their obligations for young people. Bettering the lives of young people means progress for all."



#PutYoungPeopleFirst #YouthDay #YouthVoices





## NYC Trains Demographic Dividend Champions



Credit: UNFPA/Kasandi Mulaa ©

The National Youth Council as part of its 2016 Annual Work Plan under the UNFPA country program organized a two-day training of Youth Champions on Demographic Dividend at the Independence Stadium and Friendship Hostel, Bakau from the 26th – 27th July 2016.

The event brought together 45 participants ranging from Regional/Municipal Youth Leaders, representatives of youth organizations, media personnel, representatives from satellite institutions under the Ministry of Youth and Sports and staff of the Council. Speaking at the opening ceremony, the Executive Director of the National Youth Council highlighted the objectives of the training as first to fostering better understanding of the Demographic Dividend among

young people and establish a network that will champion advocacy towards achieving a Demographic Dividend. He thanked the UNFPA for their continuous support to the Council and commended their relentless efforts towards harnessing the Demographic Dividend.

For his part, the Chief of Operations of the UNFPA Gambia Country Office Mr. Kunle Adeniyi applauded the Council for the impressive work they have been doing with UNFPA.

*UNFPA Gambia Chief of Operations and cheerful Young Women Demographic Dividend Champions*

He reiterated UNFPA's continuous support in youth empowerment, education, employment and civic engagement for their positive involvement in National development. He reaffirmed the UNFPA's continuous support in investing in youth to attain their full potentials.



Credit: UNFPA/Kasandi Mulaa ©



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## Training of Youth Advocates against Gender-based Violence



Credit: UNFPA/Kasandi Mulaa ©

which would be utilized during advocacy against all forms of gender-based violence, with specific focus on Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR) in particular FGM and child marriage. During these trainings, the newly amended Women's Act, prohibiting the practice of FGM, was popularized and youth advocates were made aware of its provisions among others, protecting women from GBV and FGM. A total of 40 young people were trained to serve as youth leaders and advocates on FGM and GBV in their regions and would in turn pay it forward by helping reach and train approximately 250 more young people on the dangers and effects of the two subject areas.

Over the Past few months Think Young Women has engaged in a few capacity building programs supported by UNFPA The Gambia under TYW's 2016 project "Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights Education and GBV." These programs are part of their ongoing project on gender-based violence with a special focus on FGM and include two Training of Advocates as well the recently started monthly radio program on Paradise FM. The two trainings of advocates were held in the Lower River and Central River Regions of The Gambia.

Each training targeted 20 youth advocates from the above regions on advocacy and communication skills



Credit: UNFPA/Kasandi Mulaa ©

## Madrasa Engagement Project on Gender-based Violence

With funding from the UNFPA-The Gambia, the second edition of the Madrasa Engagement Project on Gender-Based Violence was implemented by The Girls' Agenda from 14th to 17th July, 2016 for the first batch and from 20th to 23rd July, 2016 for the second batch at the Regional Educational Directorate, Brikama. The activity is part of the strategic commitment of the organization to raise awareness on issues of gender based-violence, most especially, child marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM). Young people are the major victims of FGM, forced and early marriage. Despite this vulnerability, they are also a strong force to rely on for changing the status quo of gender inequality and women's subordination.

As a result, young people are creating and leading organizations that address violence against women and girls, mobilise for social protection of these vulnerable populations by advocating for gender-friendly laws and changing mindsets regarding gender roles and expectations. It is therefore crucial to engage young people outside the conventional educational system to raise their awareness on GBV.



Through this engagement, they are prepared as young leaders who will engage their peers and communities to end FGM, child marriage and sexual violence, and uphold the values of equality, respect and freedom for every girl and woman.

Out of the two hundred trainees, one hundred and fifteen are females and eighty five are males. 66% are within the eighteen year age bracket and 44% are more than eighteen years old. As a result the targeted age bracket for the activity is achieved. The very young people in madrassas who are most vulnerable to GBV yet some of them support and accept it have been reached. More importantly, these are the people we want to turn into actors/supporters of our campaign to end GBV practices.

## Aja Babung Sidibeh- Former Circumciser turned Champion Anti- FGM Activist

***'If we never go out of the dark, we will never see the lights'***

Five years ago, she made the decision of dropping the knife. For years, the Sidibehs (the clan she belongs to) were custodians of both male and female circumcisions in the Central River Region (CRR) of The Gambia but one day everything changed.

After cutting a group of girls, two of them became very sick. *"It is witchcraft,"* people said. When they were taken to the medical facility the infection had spread and they suffered greatly.

*'In the hospital, they explained everything to me. It was the cutting that made them sick and I knew they were right about it. After that, I gathered all circumcisers in the region and shared my experience with them. I told them to drop the knife'*

Since then, Aja Babung Sidibeh has been a staunch advocate for the banning of the practice of FGM through sensitization of religious and other opinion leaders, circumcisers and every community member. *'Only by working together can we end FGM'* says Madam Sidibeh.



Credit: UNFPA/Kasandi Mulaa ©

*'We know it is part of our culture but it is not in accordance with Islam and it is against our rights as women'*

Right now she is committed to stopping child marriage. *'It is very linked to FGM. Some of the girls who are being married off without their permission also need to deal with the fact that they have been sealed. Each circumciser has her own way of sealing so sometimes when they want to remove the seal, they don't know how to do it again, so the little girls suffer double pain'*

*'Moreover girls whose husbands passed away are on the risk of losing all their inheritance. I have signed an agreement with the government to protect these girls and their properties. Because when you inherit, you inherit all, STIs included'-* comments Madam Sidibeh sarcastically.

Madam Sidibeh is committed to fight against gender inequality in every way possible. She is the key person behind the movement towards FGM eradication in the Central River Region. The region's circumcisers and communities have all publicly abandoned the practice of FGM.

GAMCOTRAP and UNFPA have worked with her to support her advocacy initiatives in the field and joined efforts to fight against women's rights violations.



Credit: UNFPA/Lamin Camara ©

## Country Office Finance and Admin Associate Clocks 10 in UNFPA

Meet our new number 10- Yusupha Jarjusey. Well we are not talking in football terms but if you are wondering then wonder no more. The UNFPA Gambia Country Office Finance and Administrative Associate Yusupha Jarjusey has clocked 10 years as a UNFPA Staff member.

Yusupha joined the organisation in 2006 and has served for a decade with great distinction and an enviable record. He is the second longest serving member of the Country Office Team.

In recognition of his contributions to the mandate of UNFPA, Yusupha was presented a personalized certificate of appreciation signed by Executive Director Dr. Babatunde Osotimehin. In addition to the certificate, he also received a small token of appreciation from Headquarters and from his Country Office colleagues who held a surprised presentation ceremony for him graced by the UN Resident Coordinator to the Gambia and UNFPA Representative Ms Ade Mamonyane Lekoetje, UNFPA Gambia Chief of Operations and Head of Office as well as colleagues.

The Resident Coordinator congratulated Yusupha on behalf of the Executive Director and thanked him for his immense contribution to the organisation.



Credit: UNFPA/Lamin Camara ©

He further called on him to continue the good work and wished him well in all his endeavours and career aspirations.

The Chief of Operations/Head of Office expressed similar sentiments and conveyed the Executive Director's personal best wishes to Yusupha.

In receiving the certification of appreciation and recognition, Yusupha said it was an overwhelming surprise to receive the certificate and gift from colleagues and expressed appreciation of the gesture. He thanked everyone of his colleagues for the support.

He also profoundly thanked the Executive Director for the recognition and the token of appreciation and assured him of his commitment and dedication to the service of UNFPA. He thanked the UN Resident Coordinator for her genuine and continued support to the cause of UNFPA.

He finally thanked the Chief of Operations and colleagues for making the day a memorable one for him. "I believe strongly that without your encouragement, reliability and team spirit in the office, this achievement would not have been possible", he added.



Credit: UNFPA/Lamin Camara ©



Credit: UNFPA/Lamin Camara ©



## Meet our Interns and UNV



Credit: UNFPA/Kasandi Mulaa ©

### Alba Sierra Rodriguez

Alba Sierra joined the Country Office Team as an International UNV initially for 1 year in April 2016 and is working on Gender-based Violence and related issues

**Alba Sierra Rodriguez** is an International UNV funded by the Spanish Government to support UNFPA in The Gambia. Alba currently works in Gender and Women's Rights component of the Programme. Alba has a Master's degree in Interdisciplinary Gender Studies and a Bachelors in Social Education.

Alba decided to work with UNFPA because of its commitment to promote social justice and equality especially as it relates to women and girls. Alba is excited about UNFPA because "the programmes and projects are respectfully adapted to the cultural practices of the community. They try to change those social problems through empowerment processes. Promoting human rights advocacy and supporting capacity building processes."

Alba Sierra is interested in knowing all the projects UNFPA is supporting in The Gambia such as Reproductive Health, Family Planning, Population and Development and Gender. More significantly, she would like to know and get involved in those projects where female economic empowerment is promoted.

In her free time, Alba likes reading, jogging and walking on the beach.



Credit: UNFPA/Lamin Camara ©

### Kasandi Mulaa

Kasandi served as Communication Intern for a period of one month from July to August and supported the management of the Country Office Social Media platforms.

**Kasandi Mulaa** is a second year student in the school of Arts and Sciences of the University of Pittsburgh, in Pennsylvania in the United States. She is pursuing a degree in liberal arts with core courses including psychology, sociology and economic courses. According to Kasandi, an internship with UNFPA will broaden her experience and prepare her for a career in international development. Her particular interest in UNFPA is because of the important work the organisation does in sexual and reproductive health, young people, gender equality and human rights. Therefore pursuing an internship with UNFPA would expose her to key aspects of Public Health which is an area that she would like to pursue in graduate study to help improve the lives of people especially those in poor and disadvantaged circumstance.

Kasandi has a strong passion in photography and has photo editing skills which she has utilized to support the Country Office during her one-month internship. She has left the Country Office with a photo bank of high quality photos and helped to maintain our Social Media platforms.



### Ebba Myrsten

Ebba recently joined the Country Office as an Intern for a period of four months and will be working on Youth and Gender issues.

**Ebba Myrsten** is currently pursuing a master in Human rights at Gothenburg University, Sweden. She graduated from Uppsala University with a bachelor's degree in Social psychology and a minor in Gender studies. Ebba is passionate about helping and empowering marginalised groups such as women, children and people with disability whose rights often go unfulfilled. She believes an internship with UNFPA will broaden her knowledge and understanding of issues surrounding women and girls to further empower them and advocate for their rights. Her interest areas are gender and sexual education, more specifically women's rights and sexual and reproductive health.

Ebba has experience working with young people and education issues and has served as a mentor and teacher in Swedish and other languages. With skills in communication, interpersonal and interpretative Ebba is confident that she can work in a multicultural environment and maintain valuable relationships at UNFPA. According to Ebba, this internship will provide her a unique opportunity to further develop her master's thesis which will focus on children's and women's rights in relation to female genital mutilation.



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