INTERFACE FOR THE PROHIBITION OF FGM IN THE GAMBIA

INTENSIFYING GLOBAL EFFORTS FOR THE ELIMINATION OF FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION IN THE GAMBIA: RESPONDING TO THE GLOBAL CALL FOR A BAN ON FGM

TARGET: DISTRICT CHIEFS AND GRASSROOTS LEADERS

SOMA, LOWER RIVER REGION

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GAMCOTRAP in partnership with No Peace Without Justice and the support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Italy

“Effective national legislation is a vital component of efforts to accelerate the elimination of FGM. The enactment and implementation of legislation against FGM demonstrates a formal, explicit and lasting commitment by public authorities to turning the tide of social norms that perpetuate the practice and are detrimental to women and girls. Furthermore, the law can also provide the legal tools to legitimize and facilitate the work of anti-FGM activists and women’s rights groups, and to protect women and girls willing to challenge the social convention by refusing to undergo FGM.”
Context

Women are subject to various forms of violence, among which female genital mutilation (FGM), a violation of the human rights of women and girls that infringes on the bodily integrity and dignity of women and girls and also violates the sexual and reproductive health and rights of women.

In Africa, 23 out of 28 countries have adopted a law against FGM, while The Gambia is one of the 5 countries still without a law banning FGM. In the Gambia, the prevalence of FGM is still very high: 76.3% (MICS, 2010). This high prevalence rate is a key concern for human rights defenders, development workers and civil society organisations working to promote the rights of children and women, as FGM remains a fundamental human rights issue that calls for a holistic approach by all stakeholders, starting from a clear legislative framework.

As a women’s rights organisation GAMCOTRAP has engaged in a series of advocacy and social mobilisation creating awareness among the population about the effects of FGM on the sexual and reproductive health and rights of women and children in the Gambia. Through grassroots activism the population has responded positively to protect girls from harmful practices, and FGM in particular.

FGM has been a subject of debate at both the community and policy levels and since the establishment of GAMCOTRAP series of community sensitisations, dialogues and consensus building have been undertaken by women’s rights organisations and institutions. These have included culturally responsive approaches such as the Cluster Approach which resonates with the lived realities of the practicing communities. Adopting a law is a step towards protecting the human rights of children and women as enshrined in many international conventions and protocols to which the Gambia is party.

The impetus to protect girls from FGM initiated when GAMCOTRAP was supported by various partners to engage in constructive dialogue with parliamentarians on the issue. In 2009, GAMCOTRAP in partnership with the Government of The Gambia and No Peace Without Justice (NPWJ) organised a workshop for Parliamentarians which ended with a first call for a law. The Banjul Declaration began a process towards a more wide ranging discussion of the need for legislation.

Tremendous progress has been made over the years in advocacy on FGM. The advocacy at the community level is led by the chiefs of the various districts and the country is now poised to protect children from harmful traditional practices, such as FGM. As a result of the Cluster Approach, four public declarations in the Dropping of the Knife celebrations which included 128 FGM practitioners (‘circumcisers’) and 900 Communities in four regions of the Gambia (Upper River Region, Central River Region South, Lower River Region and Central River Region South).

At the policy level, GAMCOTRAP has taken the initiative to engage National Assembly members in training programmes leading up to the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa in 2006. These engagements resulted to the removal of the reservations made on the Protocol which was ratified after series of trainings and consultations were conducted with the legislature.

A comprehensive Bill for the Prohibition of FGM has been developed through series of consultations with Chiefs and Council of Elders, women leaders, security officers, organisations, community leaders, circumcisers and women of reproductive and young people who all called for a law against FGM. In a consultation held in 2012 the anti FGM bill was discussed by over
250 community leaders from all the seven administrative districts in the Gambia. The consultation ended with consensus that the Bill must be forwarded to the Vice President and Minister of Women’s Affairs.

As the current National Assembly Members (NAMS) are still reluctant to validate the contents of and subsequently pass the draft bill, the heads of districts who have been at the forefront of the work to bring an end to FGM in their areas decided to take more concerted action, as they have been very sensitive to the views of the population and have taken a realistic approach to respond to these concerns and engaged in advocacy and social mobilisation to address FGM.

This one day national dialogue is therefore geared towards creating the opportunity for discussions based on the voices of the people towards the formulation of a law against FGM in the Gambia. This consultation is also intended to ensure that with the support of the district chiefs, the proposed bill to be presented to parliament will be passed by the NAMS for the prohibition of FGM and protect women and children, thus moving from formal to substantive equality.

Aims and Objectives
The aim of the interface workshop of traditional structures and women leaders is to build on the momentum created by previous workshops and seminars, including also target groups such as local government authorities, FGM practitioners, security forces, women’s rights organisations and the media, who have all echoed the need for a law against FGM.

It is also meant to strengthen the understanding of traditional authorities, on communities’ perspectives regarding the abandonment of FGM in the Gambia in order to support the FGM Bill once presented in parliament.

Specific Objectives
- To promote and advocate for a specific bill and legal reform towards the eradication of Female Genital Mutilation.
- To report to the traditional authorities the work done by their various constituencies with regards to a Ban on FGM in the Gambia.
- To facilitate for 150 participants (mainly district chiefs, women leaders and selected circumcisers) across the country to have an interface to discuss the proposed Bill for onward presentation to the NAMs.
- To open up the space where the traditional authorities to dialogue with their women leaders.

Partnership
This project has been part of numerous efforts pioneered by GAMCOTRAP in collaboration with No Peace Without Justice. This is to build the confidence of the chiefs and other stakeholders at the grassroots to understand the readiness of the communities for a law against FGM.

Participants
The participants of this programme include the following:
- 42 District Chiefs
- 42 women Councilors,
- 10 media houses
- 4 representatives of the network of circumcisers
8 Community Based Facilitators
7 Civil Society Organisations
Selected National Assembly Members
10 Observers

Programme
The programme is scheduled for 21 May 2015 at Soma in the Lower River Region

Materials to be presented
- Draft Bill on the Prohibition of FGM
- Policy Briefing document on FGM
- Global Movement for a Worldwide Ban on FGM
- Resolution of African Heads of States on Banning FGM
- International Instruments on FGM
- Video on the Community perspectives on the abandonment of FGM
- The Kairaba Declaration of the elimination of FGM in 2009

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