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Action Aid International The Gambia in partnership with the Child Protection Alliance (CPA) and FAWEGAM have jointly officially launched the project entitled “Empowering Child-focused Organisations to Promote Children’s Rights in 3 regions of The Gambia, LRR, CRR and URR”. The launching ceremony took place in Soma in the Lower River Region on Thursday 9th June, attended by the Governors of the three regions being targeted, traditional and religious leaders, and senior government officials from various sectors and students. The project worth 400,000€ (approximately D18 million dalasi) is co-funded by the European Union (EU) and ActionAid.

The Child Protection Alliance (CPA) and the Forum for African Women’s Education Gambia Chapter (FAWEGAM) will implement the project under the overall supervision and management of ActionAid. The three year project aims to contribute to the promotion of children’s rights in The Gambia to ensure that their rights and needs are respected and fulfilled in the 3 regions. The targeted regions of LRR, CRR and URR have the highest prevalence rate for child marriage, Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting, low birth registration rates and educational attainment for children well below the national average. (UNICEF 2010 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey) The project directly targets children in and out of schools including those with disabilities, religious/traditional leaders, women leaders, school authorities, parents, members of women’s groups and child protection committees, area Councilors, media practitioners, legal practitioners, law enforcement agents, female circumcisers/traditional birth attendants, policy makers and legislators.

At the launching ceremony, Mr. Josselin Amalfi Josselin Amalfi the EU Task Manager representing the EU Ambassador – HE. Mr. Attila Lajos. noted that the EU has a long standing relationship with civil society in a wide range of sectors and themes, including child protection, gender empowerment, economic development, education and health, among others. “ActionAid, the Child Protection Alliance (CPA) and FAWEGAM are reliable partners with proven excellent capacity to support and protect child rights in The Gambia”, he said.
The Governor of LRR Salifu Puye made mention of free education, the Children’s Act 2005 and international conventions such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the African Charter for the Rights and Welfare of the Child as testimonies of government’s commitment to the promotion of children’s rights. “The children in the rural areas are not exposed to opportunities like their peers in the urban areas. Therefore this project is indeed appropriate and timely to open up opportunities for children”, Governor Puye noted. He urged everyone to become involved in supporting and shaping children as they will become tomorrow’s future leaders.

Governor Puye delivering his welcome remarks

ActionAid’s Executive Director Omar Badji emphasized that his organization, as a duty bearer, does not want to be judged by posterity for not fulfilling its commitment and duty. “We are aware that promoting children’s rights should be critical aspects in our daily lives.

Not fulfilling these rights is a violation of our commitment and human rights”

In her vote of thanks, Isatou Kijera, a student from Pakalinding Upper Basic School urged her fellow students to be well prepared if they are expected to lead the country tomorrow.

It is expected that at the end of the project, civil society organisations will have the capacity to advocate, participate and monitor the provision and enforcement of policies and laws for child rights protection, children including girls and the disabled will be aware of their rights and how to seek redress, regional referral, documentation and monitoring mechanisms between key actors will report child protection concerns and policy makers, legislators, law enforcement agents, legal practitioners and women leaders become champions and public voices for the protection of child rights.

Participants at the launching

School children performing drama on the right to education at the launching

Omar Badji, AAITG Executive Director
Photos from the Launching
The General Assembly Members of ActionAid International The Gambia (AAITG) on Saturday, 11th June 2016 held their 5th Annual General Assembly meeting at ActionAid’s new conference hall in Kanifing. The Assembly has been having regular AGMs since becoming an Associate of the ActionAid International Federation in 2010. AAITG became an Affiliate of the global international federation in 2012.

The highlights of this year’s meeting were the holding of elections to replace several Board and Assembly members. The elections were presided over by ActionAid’s legal counsel Hawa Sisay-Sabally. There was also a presentation of ActionAid’s annual report by the Executive Director Omar Badji and the financial report by the Board’s Treasurer Ya Fatou Touray. The meeting was chaired by the convener of the 2016 AGM, Mrs. Maria Dacosta.

Having served the ActionAid Board for six years, the latter part as Chairperson of the Board, Mrs. Amie Bensouda used the occasion to deliver a reflection statement to the Assembly members. She welcomed and thanked everyone including her colleagues on the Board and Assembly, members of management and staff of AAITG. The outgoing Board Chairperson proceeded to highlight the key achievements during 2015 noting that ActionAid continued its fight to eliminate poverty and address injustice at local, national and international levels. This, she said was demonstrated through the implementation of policies and programs to achieve the goals and aspirations of the fourth Country Strategy Paper, CSP IV.

“Despite all the work we have been doing however, poverty continues to be pervasive, mostly affecting women and youths. The unabated increase in the illegal migration of youths (the ‘Backway’ syndrome) poses serious challenges to our work. It is recognized that the perception of youths within our sub-region about Europe is, to a large extent, influenced by high unemployment rates, poor education and lack of personal growth opportunities, leading to loss of faith in their own future and that of their home countries’, Mrs. Bensouda stated. She emphasized that that there is no greater threat to our development efforts with

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such potential to derail our achievements than this ‘Backway’ syndrome. She advised that ActionAid as an Affiliate should, as much as possible endeavor to think outside the box and continually reflect on what we are doing, how we are doing it and be ready to position ourselves for the possibility of making fundamental changes that will make a difference to our local situation.

"After six years of voluntary service on AAITG Board, the latter part of which I served as chair, I will be leaving the board in June 2016. I can honestly say that I have enjoyed my time on the Board even though sometimes the expectations were over-whelming and I regret very much that I could not always satisfy them all due to other commitments. I have learnt a lot from ActionAid and made lasting friendships.

"As I hand over the baton to my successor, and step down with three other colleagues from the Board, I am confident that we are leaving ActionAid in good hands. We pledge to continue to dedicate ourselves whether in the Assembly or outside ActionAid to this immense task which is to try and lift our fellow human beings out of poverty, improve their lives and give them the opportunity to live a life of decency and dignity wherever they are."

Mr. Ousman Cham is the new Board chair and Ya Fatou Touray the new Vice Chair. During the meeting the following Board members retired:
1. Amie Bensouda
2. Baboucarr Bouy
3. Dominic Mendy
4. Naffie Barry
5. Ndey Secka-Sallah

Alhaji Ousman Jah and Fatou Bin Jobe-Manneh retired from the Assembly. The following new Board members were elected:
1. Cherno Jallow
2. Mamie Njie Dambell
3. Haddy Dandeh Jabbie
4. Maria Dacosta
5. Isatou Ndow
6. Satou Barrow

Kaddijatou Manneh was elected as a new General Assembly member while Jainaba Bah-Sambou was elected as the General Assembly Convener for the 2017 AGM and Yusupha Dibba the Vice Convener for the same year. Vote of thanks was given by Mr. Yusupha Dibba. Certificates and presents were awarded to the outgoing Board and Assembly members.

"My name is Mansata Fatty. I am a farmer and I live in Jareng Village in Niamina East District. I am 44 years old and married with five children – 3 boys and 2 girls. I was one of the lucky ones to attend the legal training conducted by ActionAid (EC Project) and became the first woman representative in the district tribunal of Niamina East District.

Prior to the legal training about 80 percent of the women here in my district did not know their rights. Women’s rights were less regarded until when the campaign for the inclusion of women in the district tribunal started in 2014. During the training, we were skeptical about being included in the tribunal because of the cultural setup. However, after the training I learnt a lot and I became more aware of certain things that I was not aware of particularly on women’s rights.

My inclusion in the district tribunal as the first woman is a great achievement not only for me but for all women in Niamina East. This is because sometimes when..."
women go to the tribunal, they are reluctant to state their problems in the presence of men. When the campaign for the inclusion of women in the tribunal was initiated, ActionAid also provided us with a vehicle to transport us to Janjanbureh where the campaign meeting was held with key Local Government Authorities (the Area Councilors). Many women were very active during this process because they believe that having women representatives in the tribunal will boost their confidence to narrate their problems without fear and have their rights safeguarded.

About 80 percent of the cases at the district tribunal are marital issues – between women and men, or their daughters’ marital problems. These are very common problems. Sometimes we do have challenges from our fellow women who often try to discourage us by saying that this is not the work of a woman. They have to stop that and change their perception. Both men and women are equal. We all have the same rights in decision making processes.

ActionAid’s support for the empowerment of women is very much appreciated. A majority of the women are now aware of their rights because of ActionAid. Therefore, I thank them for their good work. I am hopeful that there will be changes and women will have their rights”.

One hundred and twenty security personnel across the country have received training on HIV and AIDS prevention and control. The series of trainings were held between 21st March and 30th April 2016. The idea behind the trainings was to sensitisate and raise the critical consciousness of security personnel and staff across the country by providing them with relevant information on HIV and AIDS prevention and control mechanism in the country. The ultimate goal is to enable security personnel and staff in all the regions to understand and appreciate their role in the national HIV and AIDS response; for meaningful contribution toward the reduction of new HIV and AIDS infection.

According to Almamo Barrow, ActionAid’s Head of Programmes and Policy, the National HIV&AIDS response has benefitted a lot through the financial support from the Global Fund to Fight HIV&AIDS TB and Malaria over the past eleven years.

The support amongst other things he said facilitated the mainstreaming of HIV&AIDS work into many important sectors in the country which is now paying dividends. The country is able to keep HIV prevalence below 2% for over ten years. He further said that NAS in collaboration with AAITG is committed to ensuring the achievement of the three zeros new infection during the course of the current strategy. Barrow highlighted the critical role Security forces have to play in the national response especially in ensuring HIV prevention for key populations. ‘To do this, he said AAITG and NAS value the participation of security forces in a training of this nature, thus the reason for organising it so that
Security personnel trained on HIV and AIDS

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they will be better able to play their roles in the national response efficiently. Almamo Barrow was deputising for the Executive Director of ActionAid International The Gambia Omar Badji at the start of a series of HIV sensitization programmes at the Paradise Suites Hotel. At the opening ceremony, the Commissioner of Police represented by SP Lamin Jaiteh and Chief Superintendent Kaaty Harding also spoke urging their colleagues to make the best use of the training.

Almamo Barrow, Head of Programmes, AAITG

The Deputy Director of the National AIDS Secretariat Alpha Khan officially opened the programme. He said that HIV and AIDS is not only a health issue but a global security concern. Where it reaches epidemic proportions, AIDS can devastate whole regions, knock down decades off national development and destroy what constitutes a nation; our communities, our economies, our political institutions, and even our military and police forces. ‘The Police, especially young men and women, are highly vulnerable to HIV/AIDS because of their work environment, mobility, age and other factors that expose them to higher risk of infection than their civilian counterparts’, Mr. Khan warned that if left unchecked, HIV/AIDS will impact on the readiness of personnel and compromise national and internal security. Mortality and Morbidity reduce total troop strength, deployment strength and the recruitment pool for enlisted personnel. Presentations focussed on an overview of the Global and National HIV and AIDS Situation, the HIV and AIDS Prevention and control ACT, STI and HIV and AIDS infection prevention and high risk groups, HIV and AIDS prevention and its social dynamic. The resource persons were the UNAIDS Country Director, NACP, Lawyer Dawda Jallow, Dr. Sabally of Hands On Care and ActionAid’s Programme Manager for the Global Fund. After the initial training of 40 security personnel, eighty others from the Lower River and North Bank Regions received similar training.

Bai Cham, Global Fund Project Manager presenting

Alpha Khan, Deputy Director, NAS

Police Officers from different units of the Police
“The law from Koina to Kartong states that women can be whatever they want to be or can hold any position just like men.”

“My name is Sariba Kassama. I live in Jafai Kuta, Niamina East. I am married with seven children - two females and five males. I am the Auditor for Nyodema Kafo (Self-help Group).

I attended the legal training with the Female Lawyers' Association (FLAG) held at the Community Centre in Jareng. There are great benefits from that training because I have learnt things that I have never known before from childhood till the time I got married. As an old woman, I have learnt a lot of things from that training.

I was taught from the legal training that the law is applicable to both females and males at the age of 18 and above. When you are below the age of 18 the juvenile law is applicable to you.

I have also learnt that women have rights. They have right to education, right to healthful living, the right to decent housing and clothing.

We have learnt that women have rights to be part of the decision making process like men. Previously, based on traditional practices, women were not allowed to get closer to where men are making decisions. When a woman gets closer they would ask: 'what are you doing here where we are making decisions'. Those practices are now a thing of the past. The law from Koina to Kartong states that women can be whatever they want to be or can hold positions just like men. In addition to that, we were taught that we cannot get married without witnesses. Even though traditionally a man has to ask for a woman's hand in marriage, that can never happen without witnesses.

Therefore the legal training has great benefits in my life and it has brought changes to me and my family. I have enlightened my children and those under me that once you reach the age of 18, when you break the law the punishment meted out for an elderly woman like me shall be applicable to you because you have reached the age of maturity. This is what I keep telling my children. Even if there is an argument between you and someone if he or she didn't insult you, you should not insult him or her. If he or she didn't attack you shouldn't attack him or her.

I also attended the business management training under the EC Project. I was identified and selected by ActionAid (officers in Kudang) to be part of the training in Jareng. That is how I attended both the legal and business trainings.

In the business training I learnt that you cannot keep your money in your house and be spending it anyhow you like. Instead you should invest it in your business so that it can bring benefit for you and your family.

We used to have bumper harvest in rice. After the training, I took two bags of rice to the threshing machine and after it was threshed I sold it. I used the money to buy oil and soda and then gave it to my daughter to sell. When she came I put the profit aside and then bought oil and soda again, put them in her to sell plastic bags for

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again. That is how I was doing it gradually.

When I gathered some money I bought some livestock. As a farmer I was unable to combine my farm work with buying other things and then selling them at the 'Lumo' (weekly market). So I decided to buy two ewes and started rearing them with the help of my children. Animal rearing is also a business. When the ewes matured they started delivering. Right now I have 17 sheep. It was 18 but I slaughtered 1 for the 'Eid' festival (feast of sacrifice) because I know fully well that rams are very expensive as the price ranges from £100 and above. That is one benefit I realised from the livestock business. In addition to that, I have also realised that when my daughters are getting married I can give them some of the livestock I have. That is part of our culture practiced by our elders. As part of our culture also if there is a festival I can take some of those livestock and slaughter them.

The (EC) project has brought a lot of benefits and success in my life. The way I was before the project and the way I am right now are quite different. My income has increased. Prior to venturing into this business if you had called me for a meeting or interview I would not respond to you because my only hope lies on my farming. But now I know even when I don't go to the farm I have another source of income which is the business. I can get something from the business without going to the farm. Therefore the training has taken us forward. If the project is going to be extended, we will need a garden because apart from the monetary benefits, consumption of our garden produce can improve our health condition.

“The law from Koina to Kartong states that women can be whatever they want to be or can hold any position just like men.”

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Sariba and her livestock
After hearing and documenting the issue, Activista the Gambia promised itself to reclaim the land for these poor farmers. Activista, accompanied by small holder farmers including Aja Fulo Drammeh, put forward the documentation of the Campaign and demands of the smallholder farmers to the honourable deputies of the National Assembly for consideration. Aja Fullo Drammeh was given the opportunity to once again defend her case in the National Assembly. Deputies acknowledged the efforts of Activista and the smallholder farmers in their campaign for a Hunger and Poverty FREE World and promised to revisit some of the policies that are making access, ownership and control over land by women a problem.

On the 9th October 2013, Activista launched its Right to

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Food Campaign” whose overall goal is to work with smallholder farmers, youth and Ward councillors in order to create a forum that enables a platform for dialogue. This platform is expected to address issues of hunger by empowering young people and women farmers to engage with policy makers to claim their rights, and to be given the opportunity to speak openly about their needs and rights. The intended impact is to ensure that there is regional budgetary allocation on farmers needs increased national budgetary allocation for agriculture by Government in order to fulfil the Maputo agreement by at least allocating 10% of national budgets to agriculture.

Activista the Gambia Campaign team again visited Aja Fulo Drammeh to see the impact of the campaign on her group in recovering the 100 hectare land taken away from them. She said: "It is indeed a joyous moment for me and my group in responding to Activista ActionAid youth network in its campaign for us to claim our rights and become custodians of what is rightfully ours. I fearlessly face the President of The Gambia in his Dialogue with the Farmers countrywide tour to claim what is rightfully ours, thanks to Activista for being the driving force behind this confidence in me. In putting our challenges to the President and telling him about the deprivation of 300 women smallholder farmers and 4 men over a land that rightfully belongs to us, the President never hesitated to call the Governor of our region to send for the chief and the Alkalo. They were both dismissed from their jobs and we once again have full control over the land that is rightfully ours. The importance of Activista’s work and campaign strategy cannot be over emphasised. This 100 hectare of land cultivated by these poor people is indeed reducing hunger and poverty in our community. I therefore call upon all smallholder women farmers, youths and other donor agencies to support these young people in their fight against Poverty, Hunger and Social Injustice".

Aja Fulo Drammeh and members of her women group at their rice field