

# ActionAid's General Assembly holds Annual Meeting



AAITG staff and General Assembly Members

The General Assembly of ActionAid International The Gambia, AAITG on Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> June, held its Annual General Meeting, AGM. The Assembly is the highest decision making body for the organization and meets at least once every year. This is its 6<sup>th</sup> meeting since ActionAid became an affiliate of the global federation in 2010 and comes less than two weeks before the AAI's AGM in Myanmar, Asia.

The major highlight of this year's AGM was the presentation of the external audit reports, the report by the Treasurer, election of a new board member and new assembly member, the presentation of the Executive Director's report, appointment of external auditors and the review of AAI motions, among others.

equality and poverty eradication have been further strengthened and I can say without any iota of doubt that the same is true for my colleagues on the Board and Assembly," Mr. Cham stated. He described the mass exodus of half of the veteran AAITG Board members last year as a challenging and difficult moment for the organization, describing the outgoing members as the cream of the Gambian society, hardworking and visionary people. The members are the former chair Amie Bensouda, Vice Chair Dominic Mendy, Baboucarr Bouy, Naffie Barry and Ndey Secka-Sallah. "They served selflessly with courage and humility to steer the affairs of ActionAid The Gambia for six years going down in history as among the first Board Members of ActionAid," the Chair said. He underscored their

Prior to the presentations, the current chair of ActionAid The Gambia Board Mr. Ousman Cham congratulated a General Assembly member Ndey Secka-Sallah for her nomination by President Adama Barrow to the Gambia's National Assembly. Cham credited his long-term relationship with ActionAid for enriching his understanding of ActionAid as an organization and strengthened his commitment to serve this great organization. "During this period, my understanding and commitment to the principle of feminism, social justice, gender

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## ActionAid's General Assembly holds Annual Meeting

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continuous engagement at the levels of the Assembly and Board subcommittees as very important and further noted that with their departure our institutional memory would have been lost without Board Treasurer Ya Fatou Touray as his Vice Chair and Dr. Sana Ceesay as member both of them helping to steer the affairs of the Board forward. Mr. Cham welcomed the new Board members in the persons of Haddy Dandeh-Jabbie, Isatou Ndow, Satou Barrow, Maria Dacosta, Cherno Jallow and Yusupha Dibba.



The Board Chair also recognized the successful accomplishment of all the statutory obligations of the Board and its active

participation in the AAI new strategy development process. Two extraordinary Board meetings were also conducted. "As we roll out by unpacking the new global strategy for wider understanding by our partners and other stakeholders, the Board will also accompany Management in the development of new country strategy in 2017 for implementation come 2018."

On the national front, Ousman Cham commended the Executive Director and his management team for the professional manner in which they managed the operations of the organization during these difficult days in our political landscape, describing the open letter sent to President Barrow by the Executive Director as a clear demonstration of our courage of conviction as an organization committed to social justice in our fight to eradicate poverty.

In conclusion, Cham assured that the Board will continue to work with Management to train all the oversight team members for a deeper understanding of

the concept of Feminism, a key concept in the global strategy, which if not properly understood could be a cultural time bomb especially in communities in which our partners work. He expressed the hope that the New Gambia will not only provide us with the required democratic space but also a vibrant donor environment where we can mobilize the much needed resources to scale-up the impact of our work by reaching more people living in poverty.



Ms. Nenneh Ndiaye was elected as a new Board member and Bigay Jabang as General Assembly member at a brief ceremony presided over by AAITG's Legal Counsel Hawa Sisay Sabally.

## Interview with Janet Sallah-Njie, AAI Board Member



Janet Sallah-Njie

Janet Sallah Njie is an international board member of ActionAid International. She is a lawyer by profession and a

**Women's Rights Activist. Janet was recently in Mamuffana in the Central River Region, on an awareness campaign on Access to Justice and Legal Aid. Mamuffana is part of the Local Rights Programme of ActionAid in the Central River Region. Whilst there, she experienced at first hand, the impact of ActionAid's work in the area. She now shares this experience with us and also talks about her seeking for re-election to the AAI Board for a second term.**

**Janet:** The overall objectives of the awareness campaign on Access to Justice is to ensure that communities are aware of their rights, and are equipped to know where to go to seek redress and who to hold accountable. This objective is indeed synonymous with ActionAid's Human Rights Based Approach's objective of empowering citizens and building their capacities to

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## Interview with Janet Sallah-Njie...

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ensure that they are able to hold duty bearers accountable. The work that ActionAid has been doing in Mamutfana as part of its Local Rights Programme (LRP) was evident from the onset of the Campaign. Prior to the commencement of the campaign, we had a Pre-implementation mission visit with the Chief of Niamina East, Chief Kebba Touray who lives in Kerewan Touray, to give him an overview of the campaign and to seek his blessing to launch the Campaign in his District. During our meeting he informed us with a great sense of elation that ActionAid and FLAG had carried out similar work in the District and that through that intervention, a number of people especially women are now aware of their rights; that more and more people are sending their children to school; and men are more aware that domestic violence is not acceptable and is indeed an offence. The Chief also reiterated that through ActionAid's intervention, he had undertaken extensive research in the Quran and Hadith and had safely concluded that FGM is not a religious prescription. He further added that, "I will challenge anyone to challenge me on this and In Sha Allah, if we start arguing in the morning, before sunset my views on FGM would prevail." As the first Board Chair of ActionAid The Gambia, and the Founder President of FLAG this was indeed a proud and rewarding moment for me. I was able to experience first-hand the real impact of our work in the communities. Normally the Chiefs

are the hardest to convince when we try to raise awareness on matters that are deeply rooted in cultural and customary practices like FGM, Child and early marriage, education of the girl-child etc. But here was a very respected and noble elder and Chief offering to be a HRBA champion and graciously attributes this to his study and knowledge of the Quran and to ActionAid's intervention in his Region.

The Chief's testimony was crowned by the testimony of a woman who approached me at the end of the face to face community meeting and said, "I am happy that you have come to our community because the messages you have delivered are very much needed here. In this village we do not practice FGM but we are plagued with child betrothal and early marriages, which have the same adverse effect on the health of young girls. Young girls are married off as early as age 12 and they go through the hazards of child birth at a very early age, which affects their health."

**AA: I understand you are standing for a re-election to the ActionAid International Board, why should you be re-elected for another term in office?**

I have had the opportunity to serve the federation in different capacities from some members of the elections committee, convener of Audit and Risk committee, to currently a convener of the Governance and Board Development Committee (GBDC). I am a Gambian citizen but my journey has transformed me into a global citizen. As a global

citizen, I identify with the struggles, the challenges and the experience of marginalized people and people's movements throughout the length and breadth of the federation. I am greatly humbled and inspired by the great work that our staff and volunteers do throughout the world. Through our innovative community visits during our meetings, I've had first-hand experience of the impact of our work, ranging from the good work we do in India with the homeless, slum dwellers and casual migrant labourers, to our women empowerment work in Mombasa in Kenya, and the Favelas of Brazil. I've also witnessed first-hand, the great work ActionAid Italy did with the earthquake stricken people of L'Aquila. These experiences have resolved my experiences and commitment to continue serving humanity by continuing the formulation and development of policies, programmes and strategies that enable us realize our vision and mission as a federation.

**AA: What do you hope to bring to the AAI Board when you are re-elected for another term?**

I am particularly interested in ensuring that these policies and strategies do have a positive impact on the lives of the people that we hold ourselves out to represent. As I renew my interest to continue serving on the international board for the second time I bring onboard the unique perspective of a global citizen with knowledge and experience of the realities of the context of our constituents. If given the opportunity, I'll be able to serve even better in this respect.

## Janjanbureh Area Council holds Interface with Taxpayers

The first ever interface meeting between partners of ActionAid and Jangjangbureh Area Council has ended with a series of recommendations aimed at making positive reforms to the council. The meeting, held in Kudang in the Central River Region on Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> May, brought together ActionAid partners, staff of Jangjangbureh Area council, the chiefs of Niamina East, Niamina West and Niamina Dankunku districts, ward councilors, alkalolu, religious and traditional leaders, women and youth leaders, VDC chairpersons and a cross section of community members from the Central River Region and other areas of the country.

The interface, which was very lively and interactive, recommended greater people participation which should also include ward councilors and Village Development Committees in the planning process and implementation of development activities, the development of a strategic plan for the council, restructuring or downsizing the staff on payroll for quality service delivery, at least 30% of the total revenue collected to be given back to the districts for their own development initiatives. Other key recommendations are capacity building and awareness creation at community level especially for ward councilors on issues surrounding council's operations and for the council to engage government to negotiate other sources of revenue outlets.

Jangjangbureh Area Council has been faced with a lot of challenges of revenue



Participants of the Interface meeting in Janjanbureh

generation and utilization. The annual projected revenue for council is 2 million dalasi, yet it collects only 40% of that amount. The council's expenditure far exceeds what it generates, is overstaffed with staff not been paid salaries for the past 2 months. The non-participation of people in how council's revenue is utilized has led to some taxpayers refusing to pay tax because they claim they do not know how their money is spent.

At the interface meeting, the Governor of CRR Sulayman Barry commended ActionAid for organizing what he called a very important meeting as it facilitates a healthy exchange of ideas between Council and the communities. "There is a need for people to know where their money is being spent and the Area Council should tell them", he said. The Governor also called for greater people participation in how their money is being utilized.

The Executive Director of ActionAid The Gambia through the Programme Specialist for Women's Rights Fanta Jatta Sowe re-emphasized the importance of the meeting to the tax payers who have a right to know how tax paid is utilized. Part of the accountability process is to strengthen good governance and Fanta highlighted the Gambia's new democracy which she said we need to nurture. 'There is a need for the rights holders to pay taxes so that resources will be available to be utilized for the development of their communities as depending on outside resources is not sustainable' The LRP Manager Dr. Saikou Sanyang dwelt on the work of ActionAid, its four strategic objectives and their relevance to the lives of the people.

In a speech punctuated with loud applause, the Chief of

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## Janjanbureh Area Council holds Interface with Taxpayers

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Niamina East Kebba Touray commended ActionAid for its relentless and tireless efforts to eradicate poverty and injustice in the district. He advised people to pay their taxes regularly and for council to be more transparent on how revenue is utilized. The Chief was applauded for spearheading the first ever district tribunal to include women in the country.

The presentations that followed were made by the Chief Executive Officer, the Finance Director and the Development Officer of Jangjangbureh Area Council. It was revealed that Council's projected revenue is 2 million dalasi annually yet it collects only 40% of that amount. Moreover, council is not the only tax collecting body. Other players like Gambia Revenue Authority, National Road Authority, Gambia Tourism Board and Gambia Livestock Marketing Agency all collect taxes in areas where Jangjangbureh Area Council used to be the sole collector. The Ministry of Local Government and Regional Integration has commissioned a consultancy on local government reforms on decentralization and to come up with recommendations.

During the question and answer session, community members asked why it has taken so long for Jangjangbureh Area Council to conduct such an interface, what plans will be put in place to curb the council's high expenditure, why punitive measures are not taken against tax defaulters and whether the women district tribunal members are being paid by council. These were just some of the questions posed by members of the public for enhanced understanding of revenue generation and utilization.

Over the coming months, ActionAid will provide support to Jangjangbureh Area Council for the development of a five year strategic plan and Memorandum of Understanding. The council will also work towards implementing the recommendations made during the meeting.

## Kanny Sidibeh, the Female Head of Moriyaa Village, Niamina East CRR



**Kanny Sidibeh, Alkalo of Moriyaa**

My name is Kanny Sidibeh. I live in Moriya village in Niamina East. I thank God that today I am the village head (Alkalo). I am 57 years old.

This village was founded by my husband. We all came together in this village with our children and have been living here for the past 30 years. My husband died last year. I inherited my husband's position as the Village Alkalo because except for one, all my children were too young to take up the responsibility. My eldest child who is 42 years old is a teacher and does not have time. He is always busy at the school which is ten kilometers away from the village. I learnt many things from ActionAid. I learnt about the rights of people and human rights violation before I became the head of the village.

My work as an Alkalo includes maintaining peace and stability in the village so that people will live together in peace and harmony. I believe that any society must have a leader and people must listen to their leader's advice to maintain peace. Since I became the village head I have been advising everyone to be your neighbor's keeper, let us all live in harmony for the good of our village. We need to respect each other and know that we all have God given rights that others should respect.

In one incident, two elders fought because of their

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## Kanny Sidibeh, the Female Head of Moriyaa Village...

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kids. I called them all and addressed the problem peacefully. They were both very happy. People do come to me at times to complain about others offending them, although this is rare. But you know if a problem happens and you judge fairly they will be careful not to offend each other again. My first priority is to maintain peace and stability in the village

A Village Alkalo is a watch man because if you have two or more people living together anywhere you should get a leader to see that justice prevails in order to maintain peace. That is the role of the Alkalo and also to bring development in the village.

The villagers – both men and women listen to me and respect whatever I tell them. The other day, I met with them and we discussed the need to clean the village. They all agreed and decided to do it in two days' time. The whole village was cleaned.

I always involve the village members in decision making processes and I am well respected and honored by the people. After last year's rainy season we met and decided to cut the grass surrounding the village because the grass was high and dry and bush fires can happen anytime. The people came out in large numbers to clean all the village surroundings and outside.

The people respect me and carry out anything I assign them to do. I will advise every woman who one day may become a village head (Alkalo) to exercise patience and tolerance. Alkalis have the voice but the power is with the people. She should listen to the people and allow them to take part in decisions affecting the development of the village. Her decision should take everyone's views on board. That is how I am working and so far, I have not faced any difficulties. So that is my advice to every woman who is or wants to become an Alkalo.

I involve my children in anything I am doing because the position I am occupying is their position. Whenever they are mature and are able to take on the mantle of leadership, I will relinquish the position to them. To me a female and male child are all equal to the alkaloship position. When I get old and can no longer carry out my functions as an alkalo, if my female children are married in this village and any one of them wants the position I will give it to her to play the role of her father because is not only the male child who should inherit their father's position.

I urge ActionAid to continue educating the people in my village the same way they did for me and I seek for any development in my village.

We don't have problems with women having their own farm land. Here women, like men can also own land. Our problem here is lack of farming materials. Any day that I see a woman without farm land in my village I will make sure that she gets land because women get all their basic needs from farming so I don't take farmland for women lightly.



**Kanny Sidibeh, Alkalo of Moriyaa**

Niamina East, we thank Actionaid for working very hard with us. If today, I am able to know such things and become an alkalo, it is because of ActionAid. We thank Actionaid for their support since they came in the Gambia.

## From the Struggle to Freedom: Role of Activista in the Birth of The Gambia's New Democracy

Activista the Gambia-ActionAid's Youth Network, played an immense role in restoring The Gambia's democratic state. Activista empowered and enabled young people to actively participate in decision making and political processes that affect our lives, built capacities to create social change for sustainable development, thus significantly contributing to ActionAid's efforts to end poverty.

Prior to the December 2016 Presidential elections, the network shouldered the responsibility of raising funds to educate the masses especially the youth and women on civic education and the importance of voting. Seven Activista volunteers were sent to neighboring Senegal to be trained as trainers and coaches on election and election processes organised by the International Republican Institute (IRI). Activista actively engaged hundreds of thousands of people on voter rights education and why young people should not be left out this time around as the country urgently needs change from dictatorship to democracy. The campaigners used different forms of communication: radio talk shows, community outreach, social media etc.

The series of radio talk shows focused on the importance of voting, election procedures and tackling the myths around voting. Most of the community



**Activista volunteers on a cross-country voter education**

radio stations were visited and lots of people contributed while others asked questions for clarification. This was coupled with a nationwide caravan to reach out to the major towns and villages, with a public address system to attract the attention of the people. Dialogues were held with women and youths in communities and some weekly markets "Lumo". Quiz programmes were held with electorates and T-Shirts given as rewards. Banners and posters with the message "**MY VOTE MY RIGHT**" were displayed throughout.

Our members through our affiliate groups participated as local election observers in different polling stations and regional tallying points during the elections.

Being a non- partisan group, Activista stayed neutral during and after the process. However,

a social media campaign was launched using twitter and Facebook when the former president refused to step down and announced on state television that the election results have been annulled accusing the Independent Electoral commission (IEC) of fraud. The Activista regional networks and the office unanimously mobilized members to take photo actions which went viral on social media, attracting thousands of comments and likes.

Activista became a key player in the movement #GambiaHASDecided whose aim was to ensure that former president Jammeh leaves power and gives peace a chance. This movement became very popular with posters, billboards and T-shirts with messages asking Yahya Jammeh to leave. A series of

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## From the Struggle to Freedom:

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arrests were made by the security forces while others fled to Senegal to seek refuge. Activistas engaged the social media, held meetings with other youth groups and the National Youth Council, asking for the immediate release of arrested youths.



Moments after Yahya Jammeh accepted defeat and agreed to step down after heavy pressure from ECOWAS and ECOMIG, Activistas again took to the streets with affiliate National Youth Organizations and the National Youth Council (NYC) with posters **"NO IMMUNITY FOR JAMMEH"**.



## Fatou Fatty, the Business Woman



**Fatou Fatty**

Fatou Fatty was born in Niamina Dankunku, a village about 260 kilometers from the capital Banjul. Fatou is a successful businesswoman who rears ruminants and poultry. A widow with seven children of school going age to take care, Fatou shares her experience about her successes, her trials and tribulations as a successful businesswoman.

"A livestock official observed my passion for rearing animals and informed me about a women's group in Central River Region south who are also engaged in poultry farming. My going there resulted in me eventually becoming a member of the association. We realised that we

needed funds in order to move forward and so we wrote to institutions like S.D.F, ActionAid and others. S.D.F and ActionAid eventually came forward and supported us.

We bought chicks with the funds that ActionAid gave us and shared them according to the capacity of our individual farms. Prior to joining the C.R.R. South women poultry farmers association, I had trainings on managing livestock under the EU funded project: Promoting women's socio economic rights in CRR also trained me twice. Now I take care of my poultry and livestock, feed them and look after their health.

On an ideal day when I wake up in the morning, my first concern is the poultry. I feed them and take good care of them because they pay the bills. I also feed the livestock and give them water before I proceed to my garden.

I have a lot of livestock and poultry. I started with fifty chickens and now I have up to five hundred. I thank God. For those of us who are doing well, we use the profits acquired and plough it back to the business. That is how I am able to achieve this much.

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## Fatou Fatty, the Business woman

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I cultivate groundnut and corn. The groundnut is used to feed the livestock whilst the corn, to feed the poultry. It is cheaper to make your own feed using groundnut and corn as the feed is very expensive. One 'fifty kilogramme bag' of feed costs about one thousand two hundred Dalasi. The only time I buy feed is when my corn is finished. For the livestock, I sometimes have to buy their feed from Senegal.



**Fatou Fatty inspecting her poultry farm**

When doing business there are a few things you need to consider; how much you invest, how much effort you put in and the output. Most businesses fail because of overpricing. If you inflate your prices then your products will not sell quickly and sometimes they will not sell at all.

Before the start of the EU funded project: "Promoting women's rights", I used to rare livestock, but when the project trained me on business management skills, I added ewes to my livestock so that they can breed, they will reproduce more. The training has helped me a lot because my business has grown.

We have registered great success, all thanks to ActionAid. We used to live in mud houses but now most of us have built houses made of cement blocks. This is an indicator that the project is for us and ActionAid is helping to alleviate our poverty levels. We are able to provide for our families and educate them so that we can have a better life.

Our main challenges are access to markets to sell our products. Transportation is also a problem because where I live in Dankunku is a remote

place. I put the poultry in cages, carry them to the highway to get transportation to go to the lumo (weekly market) or hire a tractor to transport the products to the lumo. If I can't sell all I bring them back. If I want to go to the town of Kaur I have to cross the river, I want to go to Jareng I hire a tractor and that's a problem. My markets are in Jareng, Kaur and Bureng.

I pay D150 for each sheep I want to transport and the transportation process for the poultry and livestock isn't an easy work. Sometimes they even die on the way especially for the poultry which if exposed to the sunlight brings them complications. It's just that we've seen benefits in the business but we face a lot of hardships in transporting them.

In addition, we have no storage facility to slaughter the chickens and freeze our products and there is no electricity. If I want to get a generator it would not be good for my business as it will be very costly and I will be running at a loss. If I was much stronger financially I could have bought a generator.

The money we realise from the poultry and livestock business depends on how many we take to a lumo. Those days we used to sell the poultry for One hundred and twenty five dalasi but the chicks were not expensive. Now we buy broilers for forty five dalasi. If you buy a broiler for that amount considering the cost of feeding and taking care of their health, it's a lot of money. That's why we now sell (chickens) at D200.

The sales we realise depend on the type of transportation used and its capacity. Most of the time we use tractors and our sales amount to D15, 000. For the livestock, I leave them here and when the Muslim festivities (Tobaski) approach, people call and make demands. The sale of the livestock depends on how much I have got. Sheep use to be very cheap and used to cost about D3, 000 to D4, 000 but the price increases every year and now a sheep cost about D10, 000. During festivities I would sell about ten sheep and would have up D50, 000 to D60, 000.

Around this community, very few of us are engaged in this business. People have built

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## Fatou Fatty, the Business woman

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poultry houses to start poultry production when they saw our businesses thriving, but business develops slowly when there is no help. I am successful today because I had support from ActionAid and the EU funded project. My hard work has earned me the award of Best Woman Farmer in C.R.R. south.

Last year I harvested 21 bags of maize and sold 6 bags of sesame for D18, 000. Every day, I walk about 10km from here to my farm and back. The money I derive from this farm helps me a lot because my husband has died and I use the proceeds from my farming activities to pay for my children's schooling, feed the family and take care of the other needs.

Now I am able to claim my rights and make changes in my life and the lives of my family members. In events where there are development initiatives being brought here for women, I am called by the Alkali because I am one of the leading business women in this community and my business has had a great impact in this community. If there is a visitor in the community or a village activity people buy chickens from me or when there is scarcity of meat people come to me.

The main reason behind the success of my business unlike other businesses run by my fellow women is that I don't spend money extravagantly or make unnecessary spending on festivities. I also don't buy extravagant clothing. My focus is on my family and my business.

My advice for women is that if there is someone out there helping you, you must know that the person wants you to become successful. Don't waste the money on extravagant spending because if the helper finds out that you are mismanaging the funds, then the funds will stop.

I am engaged in all these activities to make sure my children have good education so as to have a good future.

## AAITG Celebrates IWD



Women of ActionAid posing for the camera

Women staff of ActionAid in solidarity, participated the commemoration of International Women's Day this year. In a statement to mark the occasion, the Executive Director Omar Badji noted that the women's day is worth observing and celebrating the achievements of women over the years. 'As we celebrate we must however be cognizant of the enormous challenges that lie ahead in terms of ensuring that women take charge of their destiny. **Be Bold for Change** is therefore quite pertinent as a theme to further enhance women's self-determination and courage. It is only when the women are bold that they will not fear to speak out; it is only when they speak out that they will be heard; it is only when they are heard that their issues will be taken into consideration in policies; and it is only then that we will begin to see lasting positive changes in their lives', said Omar. There is no doubt that society at large stands to benefit from women's advancement. He therefore urged everyone to be bold and be part of the change process.

International Women's Day is a day chosen by the United Nations to focus attention on the plight of women and their challenges, and seek ways of addressing them. In the Gambia, the day was celebrated this year in Basse in the Upper River Region on 20th May, 2017, spearheaded by the Women's Bureau. The event was marked with a parade of the security forces and voluntary organisations. Thousands of women attended the celebration. It was addressed by the overseer of the Vice Presidency, Madam Fatoumatta Jallow Tambajang on behalf of the First Lady, Fatoumatta Bah-Barrow. She reiterated the need for concerted effort in uplifting the socio economic status of the rural woman.

## Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

The Network against Gender Based Violence in partnership with ActionAid International and member organisations joined the rest of the international community to commemorate International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation and 16 Days of Activism against Gender Based Violence in February. The celebrations were motivated by the global commitment to end FGM by 2030 and are observed across the world through diverse approaches and initiatives. In The Gambia, both activities were conducted under the AmplifyChange project and in the form of caravans which traversed the length and breadth of the country. The theme for the commemoration was: 'End FGM, Child Marriage and Sexual Violence'. The caravans were also used to popularize the anti-FGM and child marriage laws. Communities were sensitized on these laws and encouraged to report cases of violence whenever and wherever they occur in order to help protect the rights of women and girls.

The caravan, in its three day tour, afforded the team the opportunity to sensitize communities and share IEC materials on FGM, child marriage and sexual violence to intensify the call for an end to these practices. A series of activities ranging from community dialogues, school outreaches, film shows, radio talk shows to sporting activities among others, were held. During the interaction with communities and students, some of them shared their thoughts on why FGM and child marriage should stop:

**'We hope to see more of these activities. They do not only inform us about a critical reproductive health matter such as FGM but also prepare us to form a strong voice against the abuses we encounter', a student explained.**

A young woman in one of the forums said: **'Our dreams become distant ambitions because girls and young women's academic and professional goals are often crushed with the obligation of marriage, which are often arranged and characterized by dependency, violence and loneliness in most cases'**. In response to the laws meant to protect children, she stated, **'children are denied the enabling environment to report**



**rights violations because of ignorance of the laws meant to protect them, and even when they are knowledgeable of such laws, cultural factors become barriers to gain legal assistance.'**

**A glaring example is an old man in Kartong who confessed that he regretted mutilating his daughters. 'I would have protected them from FGM if I had known the consequences this team just mentioned to us. You have to keep doing this, it will protect many from torture and pain'** The caravan for the 16 Days of activism took a wider coverage in 5 regions namely, NBR, LRR, CRR, URR and the Fonis of West Coast Region. Its theme was 'From Peace in the home to peace in the world- End FGM, Child Marriage and Sexual Violence'.

During one of the community dialogues, one of the girls echoed: **"The law on Forced/ Early marriage is here to help our parents. How can a child discipline another child? If your girl child is less than 18yrs and married off, she will become a young mother thereby making it difficult for her to equally take care of another child"**.

The radio program conducted in Basse attracted a wide range of listeners who called to share their views on the topics of discussion. One of them said: **"I am so happy to listen to young people discussing issues that used to be a taboo publicly on a radio, keep up the good job and be rest assured that FGM is no longer celebrated here as it used to be"**.

The caravans served as catalyst to engage communities and individuals on very critical

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subjects such as the law and its enforcement at a time when the majority of FGM-practicing communities expect the immediate withdrawal or non-enforcement of the law that criminalizes a strong social norm.

This situation complicates our work but it is hopeful that more intensive community and social mobilization efforts will take place by specifically popularizing laws meant to address GBV and urge the government to maintain its strong stance to address all forms of Gender Based Violence.



Initiated girls in Upper River Region of The Gambia

## AAITG bids farewell to two of its staff



Lamin Barro (L) presenting a certificate of appreciation to Haddy Sanneh



Amie Bojang (L) presenting a gift to ML Cham

ActionAid bade farewell to two members of staff in June. M&E Manager, Haddy Sanneh and Head of Finance, Momodou Lamin Cham, are leaving the organization after 2 years and 13 years of service respectively. At a farewell reception in the office, Haddy commended ActionAid for improving her skills and knowledge in development work and her colleagues for the support. "It has always been my ambition to do development work to make changes in people's lives. I regret leaving at this point in time due to personal reason." She said.

The Head of Finance Momodou Lamin Cham said, "I'm happy but with a heavy heart that I'm leaving ActionAid after working here for 13 years". Cham joined the organization in January 2004 as an accountant. He gave a brief background on the different places he had worked in but singled out ActionAid and how it has affected his life. "ActionAid affected my life and profession more than anywhere else. ActionAid is the first organization that taught me how to use a computer. I had the opportunity to work with different people and to discover different villages and communities in The Gambia. Therefor I owe ActionAid a lot."

Cham thanked the finance staff for the support over the years and welcomed the new Head of Finance Ramatoulie Nyang. He pledged to offer his support whenever the need arises.

Many staff members expressed their thanks and appreciation for Haddy Sanneh and ML Cham, both of whom had served the agency and worked extremely hard to contribute to the strategic objectives of ActionAid towards poverty eradication.

We wish them success in their future endeavours.