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ActionAid International The Gambia Signs Agreement to implement AmplifyChange Project.

ActionAid International The Gambia has signed an agreement with the Network Against Gender Based Violence (NGBV) to implement a project called Strengthening the Capacity of the Network against Gender Based Violence (NGBV) to Advocate for the Eradication of FGM in The Gambia funded by AmplifyChange. The signing ceremony took place at ActionAid's headquarters in Kanifing with ActionAid's Executive Director Omar Badji and the Network's Board chairperson Njundu Drammeh signing on behalf of their institutions.



(L-R) Omar Badji, AAITG Executive Director and Njundu Drammeh, NGBV Board Chairperson

Under the agreement, the Network Against Gender based violence will coordinate the implementation of all project activities and work with partners like ACTIVISTA The Gambia, Edward Francis Small Teaching Hospital and other health Facilities in partnership with a gynaecology consultant and three other gynaecologists.

The project will build the capacity of NGBV and its members to advocate against FGM using evidence-based documented facts and figures. In addition to the already existing evidences, the project will provide the much needed clinical evidence on the effects of FGM on the lives of women and girls in the Gambia for advocacy to stop the practice. The project, which will last for 2 years, has a total funding envelope of 347,299 euros from AmplifyChange, a pooled fund supported by the governments of Denmark, the

Netherlands, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, and the Viiv Foundation. Early last month ActionAid signed an agreement with Manion Daniels, who has been contracted to deliver AmplifyChange.

During the signing ceremony, Omar Badji, the Executive Director of ActionAid expressed the hope that by the end of the project, a lot more people will be aware of the harmful effects of FGM and do everything in their power to stop the practice. 'FGM is one of the most common forms of Gender Based Violence (GBV) practiced at a high prevalence rate on women aged 15 – 49. Many women who are victims of FGM/C have either lifelong sexual and reproductive health challenges or conditions while many others live with psychological trauma' said Mr.

Badji. Njundu Drammeh thanked ActionAid for the trust and confidence bestowed on them and gave assurance that the NGBV will deliver as expected and with commitment.

An Anti FGM Law has just been passed In the Gambia and that makes it more relevant to popularise and continue persuading the communities in other to avoid clandestine practices. Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C) is a deeply rooted culture that continues to be a violation of the bodily integrity, reproductive health and sexual rights of girls and women in Africa including The Gambia and other parts of the world. By the end of the project, it is expected that the communities will be more informed and convinced to abandon the practice.

Domestic Violence Kills Five Women Every Hour

Five women are killed every hour by a partner or family member globally, according to new figures released by ActionAid on International Women's Day.

An analysis of a United Nations global crime study has revealed that an estimated **43,600 women are killed every year** by an intimate partner or family member. This is the equivalent to five women every hour or **one woman every 12 minutes**.

ActionAid also estimates that **over half a million women will die** as a result of domestic violence by 2030. Despite this, almost a quarter of countries in the world still have no laws specifically protecting women from domestic violence.

The finds were launched as part of ActionAid's new briefing **Fearless Women and Girls - leading the way, transforming lives** which sets out the critical role women's rights groups play in tackling violence.

The report calls on the Government to commit to boosting the proportion of aid going directly to women's groups working on the frontline. ActionAid is recommending at least **£70 million** over the next three years to be taken from the existing aid budget.

Research from the Association for Women's Rights in Development shows women's



16 Days of Activism procession against Gender-based Violence in Soma

rights' organisations are chronically underfunded, with an estimated average income of just over **£14,000 a year** per year.

In 2013 the UK committed £9 million to women's equality organisations and institutions, this equates to less than 1% of total UK aid for gender equality.

Sarah Carson, Women's Right's Campaigns Manager, at ActionAid UK, says:

"As a woman the most common form of violence you are likely to face is domestic violence. This is a horrific symptom of gender inequality.

"With a third of all women experiencing some form of violence in their lifetime, the issue is a global epidemic and one which threatens the lives of millions of women every day, with women living in poverty and those facing other forms of discrimination often at greater risk.

"Women's rights organisations are often the first and most important source of support to women in crisis, the safe haven that they can turn to for help and the best advocates for change. Research shows that their vital work is the single most effective way to end violence for good. Yet they are chronically underfunded.

"The UK government has already demonstrated its commitment to tackling global violence against women and girls. It must now take the next step and ensure that the necessary money is getting directly into the hands of women on the frontline." Stand with fearless women and girls to end violence: call on the UK to fund the life changing work of women's rights organisations around the world.

www.actionaid.org.uk/fearless

Message from the Executive Director of ActionAid The Gambia on International Women's Day 8th March 2016



Omar Badji

I implore on all staff, male and female, to take women's issues seriously at organisational, community and national levels. We should not leave the work of women's rights in the hands of the Women's Rights Manager Fanta and the female staff alone, it is a responsibility for all and we must all be seen to be playing our roles effectively for any meaningful development to take place that will benefit everyone, man or woman.

cause of women in ensuring that women can claim and enjoy their rights. Going forward, we need to put more energy and efforts in women's empowerment processes to enhance their self-confidence and economic independence. We must all work towards ensuring that men and women have equal access to all opportunities.

Let us not forget about the Rural Woman and the Girl.

Dear female colleagues and everyone in AAITG

Thanks to God for witnessing another International Women's Day. I pray that we live long enough to witness many more IWDs. Dedicating a day for women is just a formality because every day of the year can be celebrated as a Day of Women because of the important role women play in society.

I wish to congratulate all the women of ActionAid The Gambia and wish all of you a very happy and blessed Day. Whilst we celebrate our combined achievements (both women and men) in the advancement of women issues, we also need to take a moment to reflect on some of the key challenges and constraints that hinder our progress towards women inclusion in political and decision making spaces. Why are women still being marginalized? Why are women being abused and violated against? Why is the girl child still not given the support needed for her to pursue her educational and other lifetime ambitions?

I thank all of you for the hard work and dedication to the

Thanks and enjoy the Day!



AAITG ED joins female staff to celebrate IWD

EU Ambassador to The Gambia visits EU funded Projects



The Ambassador speaking at a meeting in the LRP

The European Union (EU) Ambassador to The Gambia, H.E. Attila Lajos on Wednesday 16th March 2016 visited the EU funded project titled 'Promoting Women's Socio-economic Rights in Central River Region' being implemented by ActionAid International The Gambia. The visit was part of a three-day countrywide tour by the Ambassador to EU funded projects in The Gambia. The project started in 2013 and aims to contribute to gender equity in The Gambia, through the promotion of women's access to socio-economic rights and economic empowerment by addressing factors hindering women in The Gambia from accessing and controlling economic resources.

On his arrival in Kumbaney village in the Central River Region, Ambassador Lajos and delegation received a tumultuous welcome with a display of welcome messages from the beneficiaries. Here, he visited the women's vegetable garden being supported under the project.

"Before the project started we used to go to the bush to mine incense but when the project came it eased our burden. The consumption of our garden produce has improved our nutritional status and health condition as well as our income level" said Boto Camara, the President of Women's Vegetable Garden.



A tour to the garden



The Ambassador and team inspecting a well in the garden

Speaking briefly to the women after a conducted tour of the garden, the ambassador told the women, "what I have seen

so far in all the communities and the projects is an extremely impressive experience. I saw community initiatives supported by local government authorities, NGOs, civil society organizations and with financial support from the European Union. The fact that all the beneficiaries of the projects – the ordinary people in different communities have changes in their lives, any project that brings changes and improvement in the lives of the people, is a successful project" said the Ambassador. According to him, International Women's Day should be celebrated every day of the year, not only on the 8th of March every year. He thanked ActionAid and partners, and the local government authorities for supporting the project and noted that the changes we are yearning for cannot happen soon but we have to have the stamina to carry on and make advancement in promoting women's rights and empowering them. He told the women to consider him as their closest ally.



Villagers welcome the Ambassador and his delegation

At a separate meeting with AAITG staff and partners at ActionAid's office in Kudang, the Executive Director of AAITG Omar Badji, highlighted women's economic empowerment as one of ActionAid's strategic objectives to enable women participate

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EU Ambassador to The Gambia visits EU funded Projects

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effectively in the development processes. According to Mr. Badji, culturally, women in the Gambia are meant to listen to men who make decisions on their behalf and the women will just obey those decisions. "The issue of land is also very critical because most of the women around this area (CRR) are smallholder farmers but when it comes to land allocation and control, it is entirely under the control of men. The project has come to support and empower women for them to be able to be part of the decision making processes and to know what their rights are especially in terms of resources for production", he concluded.

Amie Secka one of the beneficiaries of the project from Sinchu Alagie in CRR said that the project has taken them to another level in terms of development and awareness creation on their rights. According to Amie, they have learnt skills that have helped increase their income level.



Alhaji Malang Saibo Camara, Deputy Governor of CRR

Speaking on behalf of the Governor of CRR, the Deputy Governor Alhaji Malang Saibo Camara said that no government can bring development or do everything alone by itself. He therefore commended the project which is aimed at promoting women's socio-economic rights. Camara further stated that empowering women will certainly eradicate poverty and this is demonstrated in his region's decision to include women in the district tribunal. He reiterated the need for continuing the already existing partnership between the government, ActionAid and the EU, and thanked the Ambassador for the support accorded to ActionAid in the implementation of the project.

A Victim of Forced Marriage Speaks (Name withheld)

"I am a young lady who had FGM type II as a child. I was married off by my family when I was 13 years old. My first sexual experience with my husband at the age of 13 years was very traumatic resulting in recto-vaginal fistula. My family took me for traditional treatment where I had all forms of treatment including the application of cow dung to my genital area to cure me. However, this only worsened my problem. My husband abandoned me as a result of the condition and my family subsequently abandoned me as well. I lived with this problem for about 9 years. I was desperate and at some point I thought I would never be cured. Then I was referred to the Network against Gender Based Violence through ActionAid by people who spoke highly about the assistance the Network is giving to women like me. I started to have hope and I am happy that I am not disappointed. At the Network office I was counseled by staff of the Network and ActionAid and referred to a Doctor. The doctor told me that my anal canal and vagina where all merged together as one and that was why I was leaking feces from my vagina. I was counseled and operated on to fix this problem which had been with me for 9 years. The doctor did a good job to repair the anal tissues, the anal sphincters so that I can be content. He also repaired the vagina and the perineum. I was later discharged and thank God I am now normal again. The Network and ActionAid have made my life meaningful again. I am now smiling and living a happy life once again. There was a time when I thought that I will never regain my health but thanks to the Network and ActionAid, I am now well and enjoying life again."



**Save the Next
Generation of Girls**



AAITG Against FGM

Songs of Resilience: Training traditional communicators for the Agro-ecology and Resilience project – Jainaba Nyang Njie

I went to the training with a very serious mind. Thinking of agro ecology and resilience and its associated terms and acronyms, I mentally tried to make sure that I got the terms right. 'Mbeye mu sahhtehmouth', I said to myself trying to translate Climate Resilient Sustainable Agriculture (CRSA) in the Wolof language. 'Toss' means compost, reminding myself not to say "angareh", which means chemical fertilizer, a farm input that is so expensive. Gaining confidence, I went on to translate the other terms used in the language of climate change and agriculture. I did pretty well from the comments I received later on. Such terms are not very common in the local languages.

With my presentation on message development in hand, I arrived early at the venue in Jarreng village in Central River Region of The Gambia. As soon as I stepped out of the ActionAid vehicle, I was greeted with songs and dances by the traditional communicators or "Kanyelengs" as they are better known. They went into a frenzy of singing and dancing as they welcomed me to the meeting venue. I also joined in trying to dance to the Mandinka cultural drum beat called "sewruuba" in the circle they had formed. What a welcome! I thought. By the time it finished, I was already sweating. It was nice and I enjoyed every part of it. I guess that should have been a sign of what the sessions would be like.



People watching the Traditional Communicators as they sing

AAITG is working with communities across the Gambia to promote Agro ecology and Resilience in the face of climate change. With many communities increasingly affected by drought, irregular rainfall pattern and rising sea levels, there is more need than ever for approaches to ensure resilience. But to ensure that information and values can reach all members of the community, AAITG works with "Kanyelengs" to develop messages into traditional formats of song and drama.

The workshop began with opening statements from the Project Coordinator, Mrs. Musu Badjie and the Executive Director of ActionAid International The Gambia (AAITG), Mr. Omar Badji. Speaking in the local Mandinka language, Musu told the participants that the purpose of the workshop was to develop messages on climate change and the strategies to improve resilience, such as CRSA and Early Warning Systems (EWS). The messages developed will be

pre-tested in at least two communities in the Jarreng village area.

I spoke on behalf of my Executive Director but no sooner had I begun, the "Kanyelengs" broke into a song:
*ActionAid, ActionAid, you have brought development to the women in this country
You have brought us farm inputs and you have trained us on so many things
I am now consulted on issues related to the development of my village.*

*I have never been able to do such things, but now I can, thanks to ActionAid
We pray for your advancement and for the advancement of your leaders
We cannot repay you for all what you have done. We can only pray for you....*

The rest of the women joined in and soon the beating of the empty 20 litre oil drum started. The others clapped danced, and the resource persons could not help but join in.

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Songs of Resilience: Training traditional communicators for the Agro ecology and Resilience project – Jainaba Nyang

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What an opening day it was! I turned to the woman next to me and said, I have never been in a training like this before'. 'Don't worry', she said. 'You will soon realize that these people are knowledgeable in agriculture because they are also small holder farmers'. I was afraid that I may not be able to teach these women how to develop messages after all – they were already experts!

The statement by the Executive Director was short and focused on CRSA. 'In recent years', he said, 'the incidence of disasters and shocks has increased dramatically. In 2013 alone, more than 22 million people worldwide were displaced by natural disasters - three times more than the number of people displaced by war even in such a conflict-ridden year. Disasters and climate change impacts are reversing development gains like never before. 'The Executive Director urged participants to participate fully in the training because as traditional communicators, they occupy an important place in society. 'People in the communities listen to you when you speak, when you disseminate messages through your songs, drama and so on', he concluded.

The women broke into a song on compost making explaining how compost is cheaper than chemical fertilizers and that compost materials are readily available. They emphasized that using compost enriches

the soil long after one has applied it on one's farm. I began to relax, knowing fully well that these traditional communicators are also small holder farmers who understand fully well what agriculture is all about.

In my presentation, I taught them about the need to make their messages simple and clear because they act as guiding principles for all kinds of communications including songs and drama. Musu gave an overview of the Project which is in its second phase. The two consultants, Mr. Alpha Jallow from the Department of Water Resources and Dr. Sidat Yaffa from the University of The Gambia, made presentations on climate change, EWS, and CRSA, respectively.

In the group work that followed, each group was asked to compose three songs relating to the issues discussed. The "Kanyelengs" huddled together and discussed.

Occasionally, they will start to sing and others follow with drumming and dancing. Their presentation was interesting and people made comments which they readily accepted and incorporated into the songs. It was very interesting!

The songs composed were later pre-tested in three different communities and comments received were very positive.

There were nine songs altogether in the major languages of Wolof, Mandinka, and Fula, focusing on climate change, and the strategies we use to help communities become resilient, such as compost making, Early Warning Systems, CRSA, the importance of multi cropping, just to name a few. The traditional communicators will now be going into the communities sensitizing people through these songs and performing drama plays.



Traditional Communicators singing and dancing

Bryan and Jackie Drewett: Next Step Sponsors of ActionAid for more than 8 years



Jackie Cuts the ribbon to commission the new classroom block while Bryan looks on

Bryan and Jackie Drewett from United Kingdom have been Next Step Sponsors of ActionAid for more than 8 years. Bryan is a retired engineer and has been sponsoring ActionAid for more than 30 years, first as a child sponsor. He and his wife are now ActionAid The Gambia's Next Step sponsors prior to sponsoring a child in India. The couple has just ended a week-long visit to our areas of work. This is the second time the couple is visiting, having made a similar one last year. The Sponsorship Communications Coordinator Madi Ceesay spoke to Bryan and Jackie at the end of their visit.

AA: You were here last year and did a lot on some of our ongoing projects. ActionAid was very pleased with your contributions. This year too you are back and have just concluded a week long trek up country where you saw some of those projects you

contribute to. What are your impressions

BJD: Our impressions are that everything that we have agreed with ActionAid, that we could do over the year was done and is being done to a very high standard. The two major projects the classroom blocks and the roof on the teacher's accommodation at Sotokoi School are very impressive. We hope these projects will be of great benefit to the people.

We are both delighted with the classrooms and the teachers' accommodations and we do believe that the people who work there and live there are happy with it. We are also very happy about the warm welcome and reception we had from everyone we met. People whom we met last year are even more welcoming than before, as they now feel that these are people that they know, so we have a positive experience.

AA: Your intervention at the Bakalari Nursery school has really uplifted the face of the school, is that what you were anticipating?

BJD: I think it looks much better than I expected. The whole building looks quite charming, and it is a very welcoming place for children to learn. The rooms are very spacious, the store, the furniture and the store room between the two class rooms. We are very, very, proud to have our names on the walls of the classroom block which we certainly did not expect, but really we are pleased about it.

AA: You also visited some needy women who got support from you, for example Sawi Bah and Kumba Bah. You have seen how these women live and under what conditions. Did you think this is something that can happen under the earth comparing it from where you come from?

BJD: Two different worlds, we were very privileged to have these women welcome us into their rooms and again we were impressed with such wonderful fabrics which they make so colorful and beautiful. We found their homes charming and we are very delighted with their warm welcome.

AA: Your contributions have positively impacted on the livelihood of these two women, how do you feel about that?

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Bryan and Jackie Drewett: Next Step Sponsors of ActionAid for more than 8 years

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BJD: Well it seems that the skills that they were taught in soap making and animal husbandry have made a difference in their lives, they told us themselves. Kumba Bah who got a sine hoe from Group Juboo said she has benefited a lot and that she was able to double the amount of food she produced for her family's support and which makes it possible for her to sell part of the produce to pay for other things.

AA: Has what you saw really tempted you to do more this time around?

BJD: Yes it has, when we go to their house and compound everyone is so dignified. No matter how poor they are, they are very dignified. The neighbors come around and say 'hello how are you'. One of the things you ask where do we go, we are only two individuals we are not big corporate bodies, and we are not like ActionAid, we are only two individuals and have only a little bit of savings and want to give some of those savings to the needy ones. Most of the time we discuss among ourselves and see what we can do and more importantly what is sustainable. We do not want to see something we set up just to see it collapse. And we get back to nothing again and everybody is sad. So I would to things in the projects that interest us and will be sustainable.

AA: You have gone around five days, what have you seen

that touched you emotionally more than anything?

BJD: I think it's the peanut farmers, I think the men were very poorly dressed and the conditions that they are living look pretty down. But they spoke with knowledge, they spoke with dignity, and they spoke with ambition. I thought this project with ActionAid will work well and hopefully someday it will be much bigger. There are two things, one is the service industry will want more money and where a produce industry will go bigger and bigger. I hope that.

AA: What would you love to see next time you come?

BJD: Well at Bakalari they promised me that it will be different again and we were able to give them some paints and should do some paintings on the walls. The whole environment is stimulating and the children would like to learn with more equipment we gave today and we hope to give them more next time we come. We want to provide more hands on creative materials. We also hope to give more help to the disabled children we saw.

Yes you Madi have introduced us to three ten year old disabled children in one compound in Njie Kunda, which is a very sad thing to see. I have worked for a number of years learning disability and physically disabled children. I know how difficult it is giving all the facilities we give to these

disabled children in England and now we saw these children in Njie Kunda through your help are now sitting in their wheel chairs more comfortable with their plight. We only thought that life is only going to be very difficult for them, we hope we give some little help to help make life little bit comfortable for them.

AA: Thank you for all your time and wish you safe flight.

BJD: I hope long after am gone ten, twenty years later when those paints will fade away from the building I will not be forgotten.

AA: No, no, you will be remembered forever. On behalf of the management and staff of ActionAid I thank you and wish you safe flight back to UK.



Jackie Drewett handing over school learning materials to the Bakalari Nursery School Chair

ActionAid and the National Assembly sign Cooperation Framework Agreement

The National Assembly and ActionAid International the Gambia have agreed to renew and cement the long standing partnership that exists between the two institutions. This is contained in a Memorandum of Understanding signed on Tuesday the 23rd February 2016 at the Assembly Chamber in Banjul. Under the MOU, the two institutions will work together to support the Assembly's Select Committees on Education, Agriculture, Health, Women's Rights and Local Governance, among others. The Clerk of the House, Hon Dodou C.M Kebbeh and The Executive Director of ActionAid, Alhaji Omar Badji signed on behalf of their respective institutions.

In a speech afterwards the Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly Honourable Fatou Mbye who also chaired the signing ceremony stated that the spirit of the MOU encapsulates broader national development aspirations for the people of the Gambia, which are also relevant to the mandate of the Budget Observatory Platform. She emphasised that the shared values of mutual respect, courage of conviction, accountability, transparency, honesty and solidarity shall form the cornerstone of this



AAITG Executive Director (seated right) and the Clerk of the House signing on behalf of their institutions

partnership as reflected in the signed MOU.

ActionAid has had a long standing relationship with the National Assembly. This was highlighted by the Clerk of the Assembly Honourable C.M Kebbeh who cited numerous support offered by ActionAid in the areas of capacity building and support to various Select-Committees and the budget process.

The Executive Director of ActionAid Omar Badji described the partnership with the National Assembly

as ActionAid's obligation towards the development of the country. He expressed the hope that there will be more fruitful collaborations with the National Assembly on issues of national development in the future. The ceremony was witnessed by members of the Budget Observatory Platform which includes ActionAid, the Deputy Clerk of the House, Mr. Daniel Cardos and ActionAid's Programme Specialist for Governance & Partnership, Mr. Saikou Kawsu Gassama.



The Gambia National Assembly

“Trees are very important in our lives” - Aja Kaddy Janneh

As part of the Agro-ecology and Resilience Project, about 4000 fruit trees were planted in LRP 9 in 2015. The project focuses on building resilience and reducing the risks of disasters in some of the vulnerable communities and how those vulnerabilities can be mitigated. This includes land reclamation through agro-forestry.

Aja Kaddy Janneh is one of the Eco-zone members who participated in the tree planting exercise.

“I am Aja Kaddy Janneh of Niumi Toubakolong village. I am 40 years old, married with 4 children – 2 boys and 2 girls.

The tree planting exercise that we embarked on under the Agro-Ecology Project and Resilience Project is for our own development and for the development of our children. Trees are very important in our lives – both women and men including children.

Initially, when it was time for our mangoes to ripe, a lot of them got rotten and we had to discard them. But ActionAid and ADWAC (Agency for the Development of Women and Children) organized a training programme for us on how to process mangoes into jam or juice that can be preserved for a year or more without being contaminated. We also make ‘Baobab juice’ and sell it to get money to take care of our needs. Even our garden produce such as pepper, whether the price is up or down we process it into pepper sauce and sell it to get some income from it. Now we don’t complain if the price is up or down.



ADWAC and ActionAid taught us all these skills and we gained a lot of knowledge. This is why the women are asking for permanent ownership of land in order to cultivate on those lands for the benefit of our children tomorrow. These trees will also help us with the effect of climate change. Even if the rains are erratic we will fetch water and water our plants. Therefore they are very important to us.

We have planted different fruit trees such as mangoes, cashew, guava, baobab, and oranges. At first, we were not taking proper care of our trees but now because of the Agro-ecology Project we are making the best use of the trees in our communities. We process the cashew into soap, we also sell the nuts and use the money to buy rice for our feeding.

So far, there are about 3,800 trees planted and we thank ActionAid. They are here to make life easy for us and our families. ActionAid does not see the support they are giving us as charity but instead they tell us that it is our right to get it. Anytime they call us they give us knowledge that will benefit us and our families. They provide seeds for us, we have learnt how to make soap, tie and dye and other livelihood skills”.

