

## Road to Kilimanjaro



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## EU Parliamentarians Visit EC Funded Children's Rights Project

A delegation from the EU parliament comprising four parliamentarians and three support staff visited project sites of the EC funded Children's Rights project in September. Accompanied by three personnel from the EU Office in The Gambia, the delegation visited Soma and Tendaba in the Lower River Region, one of the areas where the project is being implemented. 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.

In Soma, the visiting EU delegation was received by the Governor of the Region Salifu Puye at the Regional Education Directorate who expressed happiness at the project and assured the delegation of his region's support. 'We are working on an inbuilt committee within the TAC to look at children and youth affairs so that when the funding phases out, the project will continue', he noted.

In a meeting with members of the Technical Advisory Committee, TAC and Community Child Protection Committees, CCCPs, the project coordinator Bridget Correa gave a rundown of the project while Josselin Amalfi from the EU delegation dilated on the work of the EU through partners such as ActionAid, CPA and FAWEGAM for sustainability. David Martin, the head of the delegation informed the gathering that the EU



Parliament is interested in the project because of the issues of FGM in particular.

According to him, Child Rights are very vital and the actions being taken to mitigate these rights being violated are very important. Other speakers included the project officers of CPA & FAWEGAM who are the implementing partners, the Social Welfare officer, and

Judith one of the support staff in the delegation.

In Tendaba, a similar meeting was held with members of the Mothers' clubs where the mothers mentioned the education of their children (both boys and girls), salt intrusion and lack of refrigerators to preserve their fish as their major challenges.



EU delegates, AAITG staff and partners

## The Vice President Receives ActionAid's New Board Members

ActionAid's long standing and cordial relationship with the government received a boost on Wednesday, October 12<sup>th</sup> 2016 when ActionAid's Board of Directors made a courtesy call on the Vice President, Her Excellency Aja Dr. Isatou Njie-Saidy. Led by the Board Chair, Mr. Ousman Mohammed Cham and including four Board members in the persons of Cherno Jallow, Isatou Ndow, Satou Barrow and Yusupha Dibba, the Board members were accompanied by the Executive Director of ActionAid, Omar Badji, and the Board Liaison Manager, Yankuba Mamburay. TANGO's Executive Director, Mr. Ousman Yarboe also attended the meeting.

In the discussions that followed, ActionAid's Executive Director expressed appreciation to the Vice President for what he called, her 'Open Door' policy particularly to Civil Society Organizations and informed her that the courtesy call was meant to introduce the new board members and to reaffirm ActionAid's continued commitment towards the development process of the country. Badji stated that due to ActionAid's long-standing good relationship with the government it has now become a tradition to introduce new Board members to the Vice President. This, he said is also an opportunity for dialogue with the government as our current Country Strategy Paper (CSPIV) ends in 2017. 'ActionAid International (AAI) has started developing a new strategy. We have also engaged



**AAITG Board Members and the Vice President**

stakeholders including government departments to contribute to the development of the new AAI strategy.

Next year our Country Strategy Paper will also be developed with the active participation of all stakeholders', Badji concluded.

The Board Chair, Ousman Cham, explained that strategic decisions are handled by the Board which comprise of four sub-committees with seven females and four males. He informed the Vice President that AAITG is now a full member of the global ActionAid International (AAI) Federation. "We were a Country Program managed by ActionAid International. Thereafter we became an Associate jointly managed locally and by ActionAid International. Eventually, after fulfilling all requirements we are now an Affiliate, a fully-fledged member, with all the rights as equal players with other ActionAid countries. As a result we have our own Board, making our own

decisions, of course in consultation with AAI to ensure that our programs are aligned". Mr. Cham explained that the Board's responsibility is to AAITG and The Gambia. While they ensure policy compliance they have it in mind that AAITG works for the people living in poverty and the vulnerable.

Board member Isatou Ndow expressed similar remarks made by the Board Chair and the Executive Director emphasising that they work for and with the poor and the vulnerable and for the general development of the country. Musu, the Director of NGO Affairs, the Chief of Defence Staff, General Ousman Badjie, the Inspector General of Police, Mr. Yankuba Sonko all commended ActionAid for its work. Mr. Yarboe of TANGO reiterated the fact that for many decades, ActionAid has done wonderful work around the country, from agriculture to education to women's Rights, health and many more. He urged them to continue playing

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## The Vice President receives ActionAid's new Board members

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the important role they have been playing in national development.

The Vice President said that she has known ActionAid since in the 1970's and that this was one of the several moments she had met the personnel. She recognized the good work that the organization has done in the country over the years and noted that ActionAid has on many occasions collaborated and shared its vision with the government. She commended the organization for being one of those who share their reports with the government.

Vice President Njie Saidy expressed the importance that government attaches to the work of NGOs, particularly ActionAid and commended the organisation for working with the government and buying into government programs, be it work related to youth, women, agriculture, health, etc. She noted that The Gambia is an agrarian society and doing good work in agriculture is very good, saying that this is particularly important in the sense that ActionAid is known for women's empowerment and most of the small holder farmers are women. The Vice President cited AAITG's work on FGM and used the opportunity to thank the president for making a proclamation to ban FGM. She thanked the organization for choosing wisely and thanked them on behalf of the government.

## From Jahally to Mount Kilimanjaro: Gambian Women Farmers Demand What is Rightfully Theirs.



**Women smallholder holders, male supporters and Activistas climbing Jahally hill in preparation for the Kilimanjaro initiative**

In preparation for the Road to Kilimanjaro initiative in Tanzania, Activista and ActionAid The Gambia supported rural women smallholder farmers to embark on a cross-country caravan from 4<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> October, 2016 to mobilise women farmers and create awareness on the urgency and the need for women land rights. The caravan team visited all the six regions and later converged at what is called 'Mini Kili' in Jahally in the Central River Region to present their demands to policy makers.

Moving forward with actions from the cross-country caravan, rural women farmers across The Gambia joined the rest of African women in their continuous struggle to claim for their land rights. Land is their life and women's rights are human rights. The rural women smallholder farmers joined other African women in an iconic event in October to

climb at the foot of Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania.

The Kilimanjaro Initiative was conceived by Rural Women during a meeting held in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania in 2012. This initiative aimed to create space for rural women to be able to participate in decision making processes about land and natural resources.

With 2016 declared by the 26th African Union Summit as "Africa Year of Human Rights with particular focus on the Rights of Women", coupled with the transition from MDGs into SDGs, the quest for actualization of women's right to land and natural resources towards a food and nutritional secure continent could have never been timelier. The initiative mobilised rural women from across Africa and gave them space to engage with and seek accountability from decision makers at national and continental level, with a view to securing fundamental,

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## From Jahally to Mount Kilimanjaro Gambian Women Farmers Demand What is Rightfully Theirs

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irreversible shift and commitments on women's land property rights.

From The Gambia Aja Fatou Trawally, Kumba Sanyang and Saiba T Suso joined 35 other climbers. Six other people: Emily Nying, Jainaba Badji and Aja Fulo Drammeh from National Alliance for Food Security, Marie Darbo and Yama Touray from our LRPs and Muhammed Lamin Saidykhan the Activista Coordinator joined the Mass Assembly in Arusha and welcomed the climbers at the foot of Mount Kilimanjaro, the highest mountain in Africa and the highest free standing mountain in the world. There, the women presented the African Women Charter of demands to a representative of the AU Commission Chairperson.

The journey of Kilimanjaro took six days of walking through the rain forest of Tanzania, hiking from rock to rock, crossing the desert with high altitude and climbing the mountain with limited oxygen to the Uhuru peak of 5,895 meters above sea level.

"I suffered as I watched women suffer when we climbed the mountain together; I saw tears rolling from the eyes of Mama Africa, tears of bad governance, tears of injustice, tears of hunger and poverty when our protectors turn out to be our oppressors, our elites a subject of dishonesty and greed", said **Saiba T. Suso, an Activista The Gambia** Volunteer who accompanied the women to claim for their land rights.



Saiba T. Suso

**Mama Apio** a smallholder farmer from Uganda and the oldest climber who nearly died due to lack of oxygen as she moved from Kibo hut on the mountain to Uhuru told **Saiba**, "my Son, look at me, an old woman on this journey for 6 days walking and climbing mountains of 34km to demand for what is rightfully mine. I'm stuck here. I can't even move an inch because I have no more energy to do so and if I die here, never forget to tell the story that I die fighting for women's right as I am a woman, a mother and a grandmother".

**Fatou Tarawally** a small holder farmer from The Gambia who climbed up to 8km to Mandara Hut told me, "son I am a politician, a women's leader, a smallholder farmer and I am proud to be a rural woman. We are united here not because of politics, culture or religion but because of a common goal to demand and defend our rights to land."



Aja Fatou Trawally (Left) Kumba Sanyang (behind)

The women demanded for Sensitization of leaders, youth, and women on the law and policies on land, women empowerment, translation of land laws and policies into local languages, digital inventory of public, community, and private lands so that all land is identified, recorded, and made public for safeguarding, 50% involvement of women in decision-making bodies and implementation on land issues and matters so that they can speak and defend their land rights. Other demands relate to regulation of businesses and investors that pollute the environment, inclusion of people living with disabilities and other vulnerable groups in all land matters and their

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## From Jahally to Mount Kilimanjaro Gambian Women Farmers Demand What is Rightfully Theirs

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representation in decision-making bodies, the enactment of laws by Government to provide security and protection of women's rights defenders.



**Kumba Sanyang wearing her mountain climbing gears**

Solution raised by Women to help fulfill the demands are: Civic education on the land laws so that women understand the law and their rights, Review, Harmonize, and Update land laws to reflect women's rights on land, Engage governments in the Kilimanjaro Initiative for them to support women's land rights, Involve youth in land issues – through curriculum & youth should have representation in decision making bodies, Joint and equal ownership of land through joint title deeds, Include women in customary land ownership, Land laws and policies should be translated and made available to communities (dissemination) in local languages, Mobilize and build women's movements in support of women's land rights (the Kilimanjaro Initiative) – popularize the demands and solutions, Educate and mobilize custodians of culture to become champions of women's land rights, Create an African network of women's rights defenders, Recognize and facilitate the work of women's rights defenders and Include 30% land ownership of land as suggested by AU.

**Saiba T Suso and  
Muhammed Lamin Sadykhan  
Activista The Gambia**

## ActionAid Sensitise Men in CRR on Women's Rights

ActionAid International The Gambia has conducted a series of sensitisation programmes for men in the Central River Region. The focus of the programmes was on women's rights and related matters. The programme was organised to consolidate the gains already registered by the EC funded project titled 'Promoting women's socio economic rights in the Central River Region'. It brought together 107 Alkalolus (26 from Dankunku District, 34 from Niamina West and 47 from Niamina East District) and 3 chiefs for the six days meeting. Despite the important roles men play in the socio-economic development of the rural communities, most of the interventions in the initial phase of the project targeted women leaving out men. The sensitisation of women alone on their socio-economic rights without bringing men to the same level may create an imbalance in the communities that could lead to some male resistance where men may withhold their valuable support to the course of the women empowerment.



**Some of the participants**

In order to address this imbalance, two days of sensitisation meetings were organised in each of the three Niamina districts targeting the District Authorities - i.e. the Seyfo (Chiefs) and all Alkalolu (village heads) of the District. The objective was to expose the District Authorities in the Districts, who are all men, to the same women's rights issues and messages that their wives, sisters, nieces were exposed to in order to create the necessary balance. The theme of the sensitisation was women's rights in general and a broad range of women's rights issues such as ownership of productive resources, decision

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## ActionAid Sensitise CRR Men on Women's Rights

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making, inheritance, marriage rights, domestic violence, and sexual offences amongst many others were covered during the two days sensitisations. The audience were informed of the key women's rights laws in The Gambia - the 1997 Constitution; Women's Act, 2010; Sexual Offences Act, 2014; Domestic Violence Act, 2014 - which are the sources of these rights with the view to dispel the misconception that women's rights are the imposition of foreign ideas.

Sensitising the men on women's rights will go a long way in clarifying a lot of misconceptions about women empowerment among men, minimise resistance and even serve as a catalyst for harnessing men's support for women empowerment.

The meetings were informally conducted in open air face-to-face format. The facilitator Dawda Jallow, a lawyer chose any women's rights topic which he introduced to the audience by presenting the legal principles underpinning such rights, explaining the rationale for according such rights to women and then call on the audience to contribute to the discussion. Deliberations were held in the local dialects such as *mandinka*, *wolof* or *fula*. thus, creating the opportunity for the audience to participate effectively by expressing their views freely without hindrance.

The meetings were very interactive and sessions were punctuated by critical discussions of the real socio-economic situations and the ways of life of the participants within the rural communities as they relate to women's socio-economic rights. Issues covered included the types of citizenship under the Gambian Constitution, violence against women, sexual offences, right to health and healthcare, right to freedom from discrimination, harmful traditional practices and other women's rights issues relating to education, child marriage, among others.

Pertinent questions were asked by the audience in all sessions seeking clarifications on vital

day-to-day issues that the audience claimed to be facing in their communities. In some instances, very touching life stories were shared by some participants some of which turned out to be great learning points for all. In the end, some self-proclaimed diehard opponents of women's right, for instance, women's right to land, openly confessed to their previous conducts as a violation of women's inherent rights and pledged to henceforth change attitude towards women's rights issues.

Many participants shared their experiences while others recounted incidents that they witnessed in their communities where some male siblings denied their own female siblings access to farm land resulting into heated family disputes. In one instance, the Alkalo of a particular village in Niamina Dankunku District stood up to vehemently defend this traditional practice of handing farm lands of deceased parents to the male siblings. He vowed never to abandon the practice because it was handed down to them by their forefathers and there was no way that they could deviate from such age old practice.

However, information later emerged that the said Alkalo was in fact encountering a very serious dispute in his village on a very similar issue, which at the time of the sensitisation, was reported and is being handled at the level of the District Seyfo. It is worth noting that by the end of the two days sensitisation in Dankunku, the said Alkalo voluntarily stood again to inform the gathering that he has learnt a lot and admitted that the tradition of denying women their rightful share of the estate of their parents, such as land, was contradictory to the principles of sharia, it is also unjust and he has changed his position henceforth.

The discussion on violence against women elicited a lot of lively debates between supporters of wife battery and their opponents among the participants as well as between participants and the resource person. In the end a lot of self-proclaimed supporters of wife battery or self-confessing perpetrators agreed that there is no justification for violence of any kind against women and the practice must cease immediately or perpetrators be brought to book.

## AAITG Next Step Sponsors, Bryan and Jackie continue to support communities in The Gambia



Jackie and Brian presenting gifts

**Bryan and Jackie (B&J)** who having been supporting the Gambia for almost 40 years this year have just concluded a two week-visit to the country. Their support started with a child in ActionAid's Child Sponsorship programme but have since moved to the Next Step supporters among more than 5000 others. ActionAid Communications Coordinator Madi Ceesay spoke with the couple in an exclusive interview at their hotel a day before their departure.

**AA:** You have visited the Gambia and ActionAid projects twice this year, what are the motivating factors?

**B&J:** In February this year we ordered five new toilets to be built for Bakalari Nursery school in the North Bank region and we therefore wanted to see if those toilets were built. We have also paid for the paintings of the school fence. Another motivating factor is that we did support the pea-nut farmers [Group Juboo] with donkeys and we wanted to see those animals too. Another motivating factor is that we are privately helping to improve the lives of three disabled children at Njie Kunda in the Niamina area and we believe that is in the LRP 8.

**AA:** Your visit took you to Bakalari Nursery school which is in one of our LRPs, tell me what you have seen differently.

**B&J:** The school looks very colorful. The walls were all painted with phonic which makes it a learning environment for the children. The

school looks very beautiful and we are really impressed with the project. We were surprised that there were some money left from our previous donations which was used to equip the play grounds with two slides and two swings for the children. The headmaster is very proactive to use the balance of the money and see that the project is done.

The entrance of the school has a mission and vision statements, in our opinion that is a very good thing to do as it makes the school look professional.



One of the disabled students being supported by Brian and Jackie

Bryan and Jackie suggested that when next we have a supporter visit we should explore the possibility of making the visitors see two different schools; one like Bakalari which is supported and another school which is not supported. By this way they said ActionAid may have support for the other. B&J said Sukai a class teacher at Bakalari gave a lively teaching exercise and the head teacher too who is very proactive, really inspired them to come back and give more support to the school. Jackie who is a retired teacher brought with her some teaching materials made by herself and she used those materials to do some teaching demonstrations. She gave out lots of more teaching materials to the staff such as teaching aids, musical instruments, and other learning materials.

**AA:** What are your impressions about the groundnutfarmers [Group Juboo] this time around?

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## AAITG Next Step Sponsors...

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**B&J:** We made a very brief visit to the farmers and met Omar Satu Sallah who is the president of the Ground-nut farmers Association. Because we supported the group with some donkeys we were interested in meeting one of the farmers with a donkey. Omar contacted Kumba Bah who is a beneficiary. Kumba told us that now she has sufficient farm implements and that she need not borrow from others. We donated 600 pounds to the farmers through ActionAid office. The donation is meant to enable the farmers buy more animals. Most of the 600 pounds donated was also donated to us in the UK when some friends saw photos of donkeys we bought for the farmers and the model sine hoe donated to us by the Executive Director of ActionAid The Gambia. When we come back next year, we would also want to help another farmers group, and therefore wanted to go to Basse and see WAD [Wuli Association for Development] which is another farmers group if that is okay with ActionAid, depending on the improvement of their governance. We are satisfied with Group Juboo.

**AA:** What is your take on the three disabled children at Njie Kunda, this is a project that you are funding directly

**B&J:** The person who introduced us to the disabled children is you (Madi). We are pleased to support these children and we would like to raise their profile so that they become important people in their community. We are able to provide them with a shelter for social welfare and a shower to improve their cleanliness as they would not be able to wash themselves, but with a shower they could be easily helped. This year we brought them many toys, mainly African toys and other things that will help develop their sensory.

**AA:** Can you share your thoughts on the new project idea with our readership?

**B&J:** We wanted to create a project in the communities which is a shelter just like the one with the disabled children at Njie Kunda. The difference with this one is that the community would have to do part of the job before the cost of the other bit is given to them. We like the shelter because each time they come to the Gambia it's hot all the time; so going under a shelter makes one feel very cool.

**AA:** When do we see you again?

**B&J:** Hopefully next year November.

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## The Gambia Hosts Regional Training on Child Sponsorship



AAITG support staff and participants of the training

The Gambia hosted a Regional Child Sponsorship training for staff of West and Horn of Africa at the Paradise Suites Hotel from the 14-19 November 2016. The training focused on a new way of reporting to Child Sponsors dubbed Community Voices and NK. The shift in reporting to sponsors is from Community Newsletter and Progress Reports to Community Voices. It is not a draconian shift any way. **Community Voices** is a new way of

## The Gambia Hosts Regional Training on Child Sponsorship

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collecting stories from the communities and uploading them on to the story hub for our funding affiliate colleagues to use for reporting to our valued sponsors.

**Nksonsonkonson (NK)** - is the web-based data Management System used by ActionAid International to manage regular giving products of the organization. Through NK we maintain relationship between ActionAid, Sponsors and Sponsored so that each part benefits from the work we are doing. Participants came from Nigeria, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Ethiopia, Somaliland, Italy, UK, Senegal, and the Gambia. The trainers were ActionAid staff from Ethiopia, Italy and the UK.

The objective of the workshop was to train staff on the new way of reporting to child sponsors and the changes that happened on the child sponsorship database (NK) to accommodate the new way of reporting (CV). Community Voices project was piloted in several countries including Nigeria, Uganda, Zimbabwe and others. The success of the pilot necessitated the rolling out to all, except few countries that do child sponsorship.

In his opening speech, the Executive Director of ActionAid The Gambia, Omar Badji urged the participants to take the workshop very seriously as Sponsorship staff have very key roles to play in

the continuity of ActionAid's work, provision regular funding being one of such roles. Badjie informed the participants that it is getting harder to get sponsors for our work, but even much harder to recruit and retain them. "Do a lot of networking among yourselves as you are all coming from different countries with lots of experiences. Share your experiences and when you go to your respective homes pass the knowledge to others who were not able to attend this training for one reason or the other" said Badji.

The International Fundraising Advisor-Child Sponsorship Lamin Touray, who doubled as the convener of the workshop noted that over the years ActionAid's reporting to sponsors has changed and the overarching objectives in those changes, including the current change is to give our sponsors and supporters good quality reports. He stated that after this training participants should be able to conduct step down trainings in their respective countries and also produce good quality reports.

Roger Mann Fundraising Analyst from ActionAid Italy shared highlights of Child Sponsorship Cost and Efficiency Review report, a survey that was conducted earlier in the year partly to inform the new ActionAid strategy development. The review pointed out several areas of inefficiencies that must be addressed to improve on efficiency.

The topics covered in the training sessions included Photography and its use in

telling stories, tools and technique of collecting stories, how to share the stories collected with colleagues in Europe, packaging and communicating of the stories to the sponsors, using a web-based database to plan, manage, monitor and evaluate the new way of reporting.

Thanks to technology, some of the sessions were delivered virtually through vidyo link from presenters in UK and Italy. We also had face to face presenters in the persons of Deborah Baker from UK, Giorgia and Caterina from Italy and Toyin from Nigeria. The workshop combined theory sessions with practical simulation exercise during which groups interviewed sample community project beneficiaries took several photos and then uploaded the stories and photos on to the story hub.

The second part of the training focused on NK enhancements that are in line with the changes to Community Voices. Mekdes, the NK champion for the region led the discussions on these changes.

The workshop ended with a recommendation that all participants prepare for roll out in their respective countries.



(L-R) Lamin Touray and Debbie

## A second One-Stop-Centre opens in Bansang Hospital

A second One-Stop-Centre has been inaugurated in Bansang Hospital in the Central River Region. The center, like the first one that has been established at the Edward Francis Small Teaching Hospital in Banjul, brings together services needed by survivors of Gender Based Violence from different sectors under one roof. It will, among other things, provide medical care, psychosocial support, shelter, legal aid, protection and criminal investigation. It was set up by the Network Against Gender Based Violence with funding from the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs through RATAS, a civil society organisation in Finland. ActionAid International The Gambia supported the establishment of the centre by providing furniture for the smooth running of the centre.

At the inauguration ceremony, Deputy Governor Camara warned that the work has just begun and therefore, urged all to tighten their belts to make sure the expectations of the centre are met. Malang Saibo emphasised that men should not be left out of issues on gender based violence because those affected are men's mothers, wives, sisters, daughters and granddaughters and thus men should care.

The CEO of Bansang Hospital Mr. Baba Jeng renewed his commitment and that of the Senior Management Team to ensure effective functioning of the centre by supplementing the efforts of the Network Against Gender Based Violence in response to GBV cases. "Reporting and exposing



One Stop Centre in Bansang

culprits of GBV is critical and needs to be encouraged from community members as without reporting of cases the centre will be useless", he noted.

ActionAid's Programme Specialist for Women's Rights Fanta Jatta Sowe, representing ActionAid's Executive Director stressed the need for health workers to be sensitive to GBV and applauded the management of Bansang Hospital for its commitment to the establishment of the One-stop centre. Fanta urged the Alkalo and community members of Bansang and its surrounding villages to be committed to the cause of making their villages violence free by reporting, naming and shaming perpetrators.

Haddy Mboge Barrow, the Coordinator of the Network Against Gender Based Violence suggested the setting up of an operational and strong 'Care Team' comprising health workers, police officers, social workers and possibly lawyers and other important partners to be responsible for the

management of GBV cases, follow-ups and collection of GBV data. Mrs. Mboge Barrow also requested for the cooperation of the hospital management on the on-going clinical research on FGM which is currently being carried out at the hospital as one of the research sites for the AmplifyChange funded project on FGM. "It is hope that the research will give Gambian advocates home grown evidence to support the campaign against FGM in our communities", she stated.

Earlier, the Alkalo of Bansang Mr. Kebba Kora, welcomed the gathering, noting that traditionally victims of GBV used to go to three different centres namely; the health facility, the police and social welfare and sometimes even to the Alkalo or Chief. This he said usually leads to delay in cases, re-traumatization of victims and compromising of cases. "With the opening of the one-stop centre, I hope all these problems in managing GBV cases will be history", Alkalo Kora concluded.



# Up with Justice, Down with Land Grabbing

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