



Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

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Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

Information received from the Gambia on follow-up to the concluding observations on its sixth periodic report*

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* The present document is being issued without formal editing.



Follow-up information relating to paragraph 20 (a) of the concluding observations (CEDAW/C/GMB/CO/6)

1. The government of the Gambia has undertaken the following measures in addressing the practice of FGM.

Community engagements/sensitization

2. The National Action Plan for Accelerating the Abandonment of FGM/C 2013–2017 and its successor strategy and action plan are part of the key frameworks developed to sustain the gains made during the implementation of anti-FGM/C laws in the Gambia. The Anti-FGM law has been popularized in communities by engaging religious and traditional leaders, parents and community members for effective enforcement at grass root levels.

3. The Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Welfare in its coordination role of advocacy against FGM programmes, through the Directorate of Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment have raised awareness on the harmful effects of FGM. The ministry plays a key role in advocating for the enforcement of the FGM laws and capacity building of service providers including the social workers and law enforcement officers. The ministry also coordinates and monitors the activities of stakeholders working on FGM and gathers reports from the actors through the National Steering Committee on FGM and the Consortium of Civil Society Organisations working on FGM.

4. As part of the sensitization programs, police officers, social workers, health care workers, teachers and students were also sensitized on the law to prevent the practice of FGM. Training was also conducted for magistrates, and judges on FGM. Educational institutions such as the School of Nursing and Midwifery under the University of The Gambia has integrated FGM in its curriculum to teach the harmful effects. NGOs have also undertaken community awareness campaigns around the country targeting politicians, community leaders, young couples and religious scholars which have yielded some good results. For instance, the Madrassa engagement projects on gender-based violence targets religious/scholars as they may play critical roles in perpetrating and maintaining harmful social norms such as FGM by influencing perceptions of people at the grassroots level due to their influence. Thus, government and civil society organisations continue to engaged religious leaders/scholars as changemakers and influential voices in the end FGM movement to adopt and preach positive social norms to their various students and followers.

5. In addition, campaigns targeting grass root actors such as traditional communicators who are key agents responsibly for conveying traditional messages through the use of drama and songs to empower grassroots communities against FGM. This group has been instrumental in sensitively engaging communities to end FGM with the support of women’s lead organisations like Think Young Women and The Girls’ Agenda and funding from development partners, such as UNICEF and AmplifyChange respectively. Through this community engagement initiative, traditional communicators have crafted engaging performances that highlight the dangers of FGM and the legal consequences of continuing the practice. The drama spots and songs are performed in various settings including community “bantaba” (safe spaces) women’s ousus (money lending) meetings and during community and grassroots sensitisation training.

6. The Lahido Project: Paving a brighter future for girls is a grassroots initiative, led by Beakanyang – a community-driven organization focused on inclusivity and support, is gaining momentum in the fight to end these harmful practices. Supported by UNFPA with USAID/UNICEF and implemented through ChildFund, Beakanyang

conducted spot meetings across kabilos (wards) and door-to-door outreaches to engage household heads and parents in vital conversations about the harmful effects of FGM and child marriage¹. Men for Equality organisation's intervention called "mobilising grassroot communities to embrace Positive Masculinity and End FGM" has leveraged the influence of men to promote positive masculinity, foster gender equality, and advocate for the elimination of harmful traditional practices like FGM. Through UNFPA support, this initiative is helping conservative societies understand that true masculinity supports and uplifts women and girls, rather than oppressing them.²

7. The animated film, "A LONG DAY" by The Girls' Agenda was produced as part of efforts to raise awareness on the effects of FGM and the importance of implementing the FGM law to protect women and girls. The film depicts the realities of female genital mutilation (FGM) in Gambian communities. The story shows a safe haven, ("Kaira Suu") that protects girls from FGM through a community initiative by young women. The film explores key issues such as religious misconceptions and cultural factors that perpetuated FGM for centuries. It also teaches the consequences of the harmful practice and reveals the need for collaboration to protect girls through grassroots activism and the recognition of the law that banned FGM in The Gambia. Moreover, the film recognizes the potentials and voice of children to end FGM when provided with the right information and space to speak.

8. These community wide advocacy and interventions increased awareness on the harmful effects of FGM and has led over 500 local communities to make declarations against FGM which is a big achievement.

Criminalization of Female Genital Mutilation

9. The Government of the Gambia has taken measures to address harmful traditional practices, including Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C). In October 2015, the Government of the Republic of The Gambia passed the Women's (Amendment) Act 2015, which prohibits female circumcision. Sections 32A and 32B criminalize and set out punishments for performing, procuring, and aiding and abetting the practice of FGM/C.

10. With the introduction of the Private Member Bill of 2024 to repeal the Women's Amendment Act of 2015, the Government through consultations with the National Assembly succeeded to uphold the law, prohibiting FGM in the Gambia. With advocacy from both the government and the civil society organizations, the motion to repeal the bill on FGM was rejected by the parliament.

11. Currently, a technical committee has been set up by the Directorate of Gender and Women Empowerment, under the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Welfare, to consult with stakeholders for the drafting of a comprehensive FGM/C Bill to eradicate the practice in The Gambia. The Ministry has continued a rigorous engagement on the FGM Law with community structures using the National Assembly Members in their constituencies.

12. To ensure the best interest of the child is protected, the Ministry of Health has also embarked on numerous sensitizations on the harmful effects and raising awareness on the medical complications that can result from FGM/C by targeting women groups, school children and religious leaders. The Directorate of Children Affairs and the Directorate of Social Welfare also trained service providers on the reporting mechanism and FGM case management.

¹ UNFPA The Gambia Newsletter (2024 Quarter 3).

² Ibid.

13. Creation of a Gender Management Information System (GMIS) – On combating Gender-based Violence (GBV) particularly FGM, significant strides have been registered with the provision of shelters to temporary host survivors, one of which (the Orange Center in Bakoteh) which equally host the GBV and Child protection helpline (199) linked to the GMIS. The GMIS was developed through a collaborative effort involving UNFPA, UNDP, ITC, UNICEF, and key national partners, including the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Welfare, and the Network against Gender-Based Violence. Launched in January 2023, the GMIS is designed to create a comprehensive database for recording, managing, analyzing, and disseminating GBV data within The Gambia.

14. The GMIS platform categorizes gender-based violence into various types, such as child marriage, denial of resources, female genital mutilation, intimate partner violence, physical assault, psychological abuse, rape, and sexual assault.

15. To strengthen coordination of GBV case management, the Child Protection helpline and the GBV helpline lines have been merged into one national helpline 199. This is to ensure ease in coordination and integration of reporting services of all forms of violence including FGM. Also, staff have been trained in operating the helpline and rendering psychosocial support to victims. This helpline has been popularized in schools, communities, radio, and TV, to ensure communities are aware of the available reporting channels.

16. Orange Centre – On June 22, 2021, the Gambia Women Empowerment Centre, or “Orange Centre,” was inaugurated by First Lady Madam Fatoumatta Bah-Barrow and other dignitaries. Supported by UNFPA and funded by the UN Multi-Partner Trust Fund, this is The Gambia’s first fully integrated center for protecting women and girls. UNFPA has worked with the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Welfare, the Ministry of Health and civil society organizations to improve GBV response systems, including establishing a National GBV Helpline (199) and supporting One-Stop Centres in key health facilities.

17. The Orange Centre offers essential health, psycho-social, and legal services, including clinical management of rape and temporary overnight stays for GBV survivors including victims of FGM. It uses an integrated approach to ensure care is provided with dignity and safety. Connected to the GBV Helpline-199, the center is a key component of the GBV referral pathway, supporting UNFPA’s efforts to deliver survivor-centered Approach. The center is operated by the Network against Gender-Based Violence (NGBV), with oversight from the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Welfare and the Ministry of Health, through ongoing strategic partnerships. Government also envisages to look for avenues to increase the funding package for GBV to cater for new cases and also increase the popularization of the GBV helpline.

18. A Specialized Government Sexual And Gender Based Unit has been established at the Ministry of Justice to monitor, investigate, prosecute, and provide support for counseling to victims of FGM, sexual and gender-based violence.

19. Creation of Gender-Based Violence Fund-The Government of The Gambia has made a significant stride in combating gender-based violence by establishing the country’s first Gender Based Violence Fund. The Government of The Gambia has committed funds towards this initiative as enshrined in the women amendment Act 2015 and Sexual Offences Act of 2013. This fund aims to provide victims with financial support, counseling, and legal assistance. Managed by the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Welfare, it highlights the government’s commitment to addressing gender-based violence and promoting gender equality. This initiative is a major step in providing crucial support to victims and signals a strong stance against such crimes in The Gambia.

20. Establishment of the National GBV Advisory Committee: The National GBV Advisory Committee is established to oversee the disbursement of the GBV Fund and other issues related to GBV response and coordination in the country with the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Welfare serving as the Chair, the membership of the committee comprises of different stakeholders including, the Police, Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Justice and representative from the Civil Society.

21. Establishment of GBV Courts – To delays in the litigation process of GBV cases the Ministry of Gender Children and Social Welfare is working with relevant stakeholders on establishing a special court for SGBV which will be piloted in two regions in the country and work is in progress to set up a forensic lab for processing evidence of SGBV. The state party has allocated a property in October 2024 to establish the GBV court which reiterate the government's commitment to providing better access to justice for victims of female genital mutilation.

Follow-up information relating to paragraph 26 (a) of the concluding observations

22. The Gambia government, and its stakeholders including development partners, NGOs, CSOs have made considerable strides to implement Section 15(1) of the Women's Act 2010. In this, efforts the state party apply the following methods in accelerating women participation in public life and politics.

Temporary special measures

23. In alignment with CEDAW Recommendation No. 25, the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Welfare, the Ministry of Justice and government agencies advocate for temporary special measures, such as gender quotas, to ensure women's increased representation in elected and appointed positions. These measures serve as a catalyst for achieving gender balance in political spaces that have traditionally been male-dominated.

Political parties

24. Political parties are encouraged to nominate an equal number of female and male candidates for elections. This approach aims to create a more balanced slate of candidates and improve the visibility of women in politics. A roadmap was developed to guide and implement the agenda. This initiative was supported by the government and UNFPA Gambia.

25. In the area of political empowerment of women and girls, the Ministry of Gender Children and Social Welfare will facilitate the promulgation of Women Reservation Bill 2025. The enactment of the Bill will ensure the creation of quota system to reserve 14 seats in the National Assembly for Women.

26. In its bid to empower and encourage women participation in decision making and politics, the Ministry implement social mobilization programs, institutional strengthening, good governance programs to promote women's participation in decision making and local governance. Initiatives such as Women Political Dialogues targeting women in decision making bodies at local structures including elected positions and aspiring women candidates to provide platforms for women engagement in constructive discussions on the importance of participating in local governance and community development. Interventions on women's leadership and political empowerment has raised consciousness and increase interest of women in active participation in politics, equipped women with lobbying and advocacy skills to demand for inclusion and defend fundamental rights to participation.

Follow-up information relating to paragraph 34 (b) of the concluding observations

27. In The Gambia, abortion is illegal and punishable except in case of life threatening conditions of the pregnancy. As a result, the health facilities provide post abortion care (treatment) to prevent complications and save the lives of the woman. The State Party have taken note of general recommendation No. 24 (1999) for future reporting.

Follow-up information relating to paragraph 44 (a) of the concluding observations

28. The Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social has developed a National Strategy and Action for Ending Child Marriage and currently awaiting Validation.

29. The Gambia remains committed to eradicating FGM and child marriage through grassroots awareness campaigns and engagement with community leaders, religious figures, and the general population to promote cultural shifts against these harmful practices. Legislative measures are complemented by community-based efforts to ensure their long-term eradication, with support from international partners like UN Women and other development agencies.

30. In July 2016, The Gambia amended its Children's Act 2005 to prohibit child marriage and set 18 years as the minimum legal age for marriage for both boys and girls. This was preceded by intensive awareness-raising efforts by Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and relevant Government agencies on the harmful effects of child marriage. The Government and CSOs are now popularizing the law against child marriage, building the capacity of law enforcement agencies and community-based child protection structures, and encouraging the reporting of incidences of child marriage to the relevant authorities. Recently, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), in collaboration with various stakeholders, conducted a training session for National Assembly Members on child rights. This important milestone was designed to increase awareness of children's rights and guide the integration of these rights into legislative and policy making processes.

31. In addition, the Children's Amendment Act 2016, equally prohibits any marriage under the age of 18 Years. Under the leadership of the Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Welfare, the Government has launched an Ending Child Marriage Campaign, the National Gender Policy 2023–2032, and Green Recovery Focused and National Development Plan (NDP) 2023–2028, which engage different sectors of Government, Civil Society, Development Partners, media, children, religious and traditional leaders in a joint effort to eliminate child marriage in The Gambia.

32. The Gambia Police Force's Gender and Child Welfare Unit investigates and prosecutes all sexual and gender-based violence and child protection issues, including Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and child marriage. The Unit supports adolescent girls and women against harmful traditional practices, using prevention, protection, and promotion approaches.

33. The Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Welfare (MoGCSW) through the Directorate of Social Welfare (DSW) also developed the Child Protection Guide in 2020 guaranteeing the rights of all children in the country to a life free from violence, abuse, exploitation and neglect. In The Gambia, many actors are engaged in Child protection from both the formal and informal child protection systems and across all sectors.

34. The Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Welfare with support from UNICEF has developed a Communication Strategy (2021–2026) for children on the move in The Gambia. The Communication Strategy has been designed to address

issues of protection needs for children on the move in The Gambia. The Strategy will particularly target children, women, young people, parents and guardians, men, first-line officers, and law enforcement officers, with information to raise awareness and understanding of the risks along migratory routes and how these risks can be minimized.
