

FUTURE IN OUR HANDS THE GAMBA

NEWSLETTER

NOVEMBER 2019

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FIOHTG ORGANISES UNITY FESTIVAL IN KABAKOTO, UPPER NIUMI



Future In Our Hands The Gambia (FIOHTG) secured a grant from the US Department of State through the International Republican Institute to implement a project aimed at promoting political pluralism, tolerance and unity in the North Bank Region and the Central River Region. One of the activities was a Unity Festival in North Bank Region targeting 10 communities namely Chamonding, Chilla Jurunku, Kabakoto, Kassewa, Kerr Alagie, Kerr Sidiki, Kerr Weigo, Malick Nana, Nyofelleh and Passy Chally. The event held at Kabokoto village attracted hundreds of partici-

pants from the region including regional, district and village authorities.

At the opening ceremony on 7th November 2019, the Governor of the region, Mr. Dampha said the event is "demand driven. All we have is this country and we must do everything to preserve the peace." He admonished the youth and women who were the main participants to jealously guide the peace, abandon politics of hatred and contribute to national development. He thanked FIOHTG and partners for selecting his region to host the important and needed festival. Earlier the Chief of Upper Niumi District, Mr. Mamadou Chatty Cham expressed happiness for hosting this great event in his district. Speaking about the importance of the festival, he said "this is one of the most important programmes for this country because all we need is peace which can only come through unity. There shouldn't be any segregation or disunity within us be you Jola, Fula, Mandinka or Wollof as we are one. We intermarry and attend one another's events. Therefore helping others to rise to power, must neither divide us nor destroy our existing relationship." He thanked FIOHTG for the initiative and asked the "youth to keep the peace and work for nothing but national development". Also present was the Interparty Committee in the North Bank Region; the Independent Electoral Commission representatives in North Bank Region; the SLA Choir, the Red-cross link in the region, a Scout Band from Essau, several youth and women groups. Later football matches would be played as part of activities to promote unity through sports.

Madam Ngui Secka, the chairperson of the IPC in NBR emphasised the need for political tolerance and pluralism. She said it is this need which led to the formation of the IPC to promote understanding among political parties in the country. She added that forums like this should be regularly organised otherwise many will run away during elections as many people are intolerant to pluralism. She reminded the gathering that all political parties have signed the MOU. Mr Busso the secretary to the IPC was also given the platform during the youth bantaba to the participants through the MOU. Under the MOU, signatories have resolved to ensure a level playing field, non-usage of foul words, avoidance of tribal politics, avoid buying votes, and preventing others from pursuing political office.



He asked the youth to vote based on competency. The festival featured bantabas where discussions were held to raise awareness about political tolerance and pluralism; football matches to promote unity and cultural night shows to promote cultural understanding. After 4 days, the festival came to an end with a final football match and cultural night. Madam Sarr deputizing the director thanked all participants and urged all to continue being tolerant.

FIOHTG INVITED TO INTRODUCE MENSTRUAL CUPS IN THE GAMBIA



The School Development Unit was invited by Gamcup, an organisation founded by Malin and Fredrik Sand to participate in a training session for the use of menstrual cups in the Gambia. The training exercise was led by Camilla Wirséen, the founder of the organization thecup.org who has educated over 20,000 girls in Kenya. Thecup.org educates young girls in Kenya's ghettos about the use of the menstrual cup, the body, sexually transmitted infections, teenage pregnancies, unsafe abortions, and sex. Having heard about FIOHTG's work in schools and children and its pilot project on menstrual hygiene management, the organisations deemed it necessary to invite FIOHTG to their training programme. It is hoped that the organisations will work together in addressing issues facing teenage girls in The Gambia.

Teenage girls are one of the most vulnerable groups globally, therefore, it is crucial that they are educated and empowered to be able to manage the challenges of growing up like a girl and everything that comes with it, including sexual and reproductive health, gender stereotypes, and sexual predators. The Cup-program is developed to holistically support girls for them to stay in school, live in dignity, be safe, be healthy, and make well-grounded choices in life. In the Gambia, many girls are missing information about puberty, menstruation, reproduction, and sex. Moreover, it is still a taboo to discuss these issues and the only way to change this is through continuing to speak on the issues. FIOHTG through its pilot project *Keep Our Girls In School* noticed that many mothers are lack the knowledge about women's health issues and have worked towards addressing this by training mothers and girls on menstrual hygiene and women related topics.

FIOHTG and Fandema organisations are now planning a joint programme on the menstrual cups. It is envisaged that Fandema will ensure that the girls participating in the programme will educate their peers, and FIOHTG will work with the Ministry of Health to support girls to better manage their menstruation and related matters affecting girls. Furthermore, Village Development Committees will be informed on the use of menstrual cups, its advantages, and what it means for girls' health. The programme will involve education of whole communities, including boys, fathers, mothers, teachers, elders, and other informal leaders in the villages. FIOHTG is looking towards this programme being implemented as it will contribute to better health among girls, and enable girls to feel safe and secure during their period.

Author: Isatou Bah, Intern at FIOHTG

FIOHTG DIRECTOR & CHAIRPERSON OF GAMBIAGRUPPERNA ATTEND NGO FORUM



The Country Director of FIOHTG Mr. Buba Faburay and the Chairperson of FIOH Sweden Kristina Lundahl Sanneh, attended a three day meeting in Tendaba in the Lower River Region (LRR). The NGO Forum brought together over 50 NGOs to discuss the results of the NGO Mapping that was undertaken by the NGO Affairs Agency and also the NGO Accord. The forum revealed that some NGOs that have been registered have not been fulfilling their duties. In fact some do not currently exist as no asset or operation could be link to

them. The Forum also provided stakeholders the opportunity to discuss means of engaging the government to reduce the heavy taxation on employees in the NGO sector. FIOHTG and FIOH Sweden have been praised for their work in the country and their adherence to statutory regulations in paying their annual contributions and submitting reports to the NGO Affairs Agency.



In as much as I am tempted to use the singular to capture the spirit of oneness, “Ujamaa” and “Ubuntu” among Gambian women, I am more compelled to emphasize the fact that we come in all different forms and minds hence the plurality in my title. Having said that, I herein share my reflections on the status of today’s Gambian Women.

In the area of education, Gambia has achieved parity in primary school enrollment of boys and girls. This is largely attributed to the commitment of the various stakeholders from government, to development partners working hard to see to the success of initiatives such as Education for all Initiative and others. This is certainly something to celebrate considering the significant boost this has given to the nation’s literacy rates within the last decade among other positive socio-economic impacts. However, it is, unfortunately, a different story for the retention rates with 74 girls to every 100 boys completing their primary school, and the pressure on girls to continue to carry the burden of household chores is the greatest culprit of this disparity according to the Borgen Project Report. Exam results over the years show that when girls do stay in school, they generally out-perform their male counterparts. While acknowledging these strides, the struggle to keep girls in schools appears to continue well into the tertiary level and further to employment.

Employment opportunities

Even though more and more employers encourage women to apply for their jobs, the dominance of men in the Gambian workforce is overwhelming at a glance. A common explanation at most workplaces would be that few women apply and qualify for the jobs but underlying factors – from deeply ingrained self-doubt to societal barriers to high achievement by women – are significant contributors to this reality. The good thing is that the discussion has started on female representation in all stages of the workforce. We urge all stakeholders to translate the goodwill and commitment to action on this matter.

Health status

Maternal mortality remains at a morbid reality for Gambian women. Statistics in 2017 showed an encouraging fall in the rates of maternal deaths in the country from 931 deaths per 100,000 births to 597 deaths per 100,000 births. However, pending updated statistical data, there is a general feeling of a surge in maternal deaths in these past two years based on the frequency of media information of women dying from complications in pregnancy or during childbirth. This calls for a serious study on what the main causes are and concerted efforts to mobilize the resources needed to make this alarming trend a thing of the past.

Leadership

Women leadership in the Gambia is generally on the rise as various stakeholders challenge the status quo, citing that real change and development is only possible if more women are involved in decision making structures. We are seeing more female leaders in all fields previously dominated by male leadership. However, there is still a lot of catching up to do in terms of the numbers so that we can move beyond tokenism.

Gender-Based Violence

Gender-based violence holds a stubborn grip within our society mostly taking the form of entrenched female genital mutilation in the name of cultural preservation. **Continued to the next page**

Rape and other forms of sexual violence also pose a serious threat to our society. From this vantage point, it seems we have been paying lip service to the issue through our many policy pronouncements and sensitizations. Culprits in this practice walk freely with considerable social standing. There is a big opportunity in advocacy towards law enforcement structures in the country to put to practice what the law prescribes to curb gender-based violence.

Industrial and economic status

In recent times, there has been a rise in entrepreneurship as a promising alternative to unemployment and even white-collar employment. Women have been taking the lead in budding cottage industries ranging from soap-making, herbal tea products, clothing, a variety of processed foods with strong organic – product marketing potential, a range of farm produce. All these new industries show a strong potential to contribute to a positive turnaround to the national economy as seen in Ghana in recent times. However, this can only be achieved if government and development partners make a serious commitment to support by providing the right resources such as processing and packaging machinery on a subsidized basis to help scale up these industries for local and international markets.

Social standing

While women slowly progress towards some level of economic freedom through business or employment, the challenge of work-life balance persists as household work remains as the sole responsibility of women. There is no indication of a signal of men sharing this burden. This is problematic at all levels from school-going age to old age leaving its mark in the form of women lagging or playing catchup in all productive sectors of national development. The good news is that women are finding their voices and strength in the support systems in the rising number of women's groups, cooperatives, and general goodwill of institutions. Albeit the slow pace, there are sure signs pointing towards the rise of Gambia women.

References

<https://borgenproject.org/top-10-facts-about-girls-education-in-the-gambia/>

<https://knoema.com › atlas › Gambia › Maternal-mortality-ratio>

BAYABA GETS NEW STAFF QUARTER



The staff quarters in Bayaba Basic Cycle School in the Central River Region has been handed over by Chernon Jeng (site supervisor FIOHTG), Lennart Anderson (Accountant) and Kristina Lundahl (Chairperson) of Gambiagrupperna (FIOH). The construction of the buildings was funded the Gambiagrupperna/through FIOHTG. This staff quarter and the newly constructed kitchen have uplifted the landscape of the school. Additionally, teachers can now sleep under a good roof and can use the solar system to prepare for lessons. No one doubts the role of a conducive environment in delivering quality education. Well, this new quarters will definitely play a key role in uplifting the morals of the teachers as it serves as a conducive quarter for teachers after school.



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Do you have a story or an event for the next newsletter?

If so, we would like to hear from YOU!

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