



REPORT
OF
THE SECOND NATIONAL FORUM ON CHILDREN



HELD AT FRIENDSHIP HOTEL

BAKAU
THE GAMBIA

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Country Report on
Gambia's CEDAW Report: Combined
The Elimination of Discrimination against
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ANNEX D. 7

PRESENTATION BY BANJUL MUNICIPALITY AT THE NATIONAL FORUM ON CHILDREN

THEME: THE BEST POSSIBLE START IN LIFE FOR ALL CHILDREN

Mr/Madam chairperson, UNICEF Representative, all protocols observed, and my fellow participants, I greet you all in the name of GOD and the children of Banjul Municipality.

MY PRESENTATION WILL ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS ON THE THEME

**WHY? HOW? WHERE? WHO?
AND WHAT?**

CAN BE PROVIDED TO GIVE THE CHILD THE BEST POSSIBLE START IN LIFE?

The format of my presentation will be as follows,

- 1) I will give you an over view of the theme
- 2) Then discuss the burning issues affecting us in Banjul.
- 3) Finally I will give you the recommendations we came up with at our municipal consultation i.e. the Banjul Municipality Consultation.

1. WHY should we be given the best possible start in life?

Every child should have the best possible start in life because the care given at this tender stage of his/her development has a great impact on the adult life of the person. Studies have shown that from age zero to two going to three the brain of the child is taking shape at a very fast speed. Although, it is known that genes pre-order the sequence of normal development, yet the quality of the development is shaped by environmental factors. Thus, we realise that the development of the child affects both the pregnant and lactating mothers. Among many positive experiences that affect the development of the young brain, nothing is more important than the love and nurturing given by the parents and other caregivers.

This brings us to the fact that early childhood is the formative years in the child's life. For example, a child whose basic needs are not met during infancy and early childhood is often distrustful and will have difficulty believing in him/herself and in others. There is the possibility for this behaviour to continue later on in life.

Another example of early childhood years being the formative years is that of children who do not receive guidance in monitoring or regulating their behaviour during the early years. These children have a greater chance of being anxious, frightened, and affected by behavioural disorders during school age and later into adulthood if it is not corrected.

Therefore the early years of a child's life is the time when appropriate measures can be taken to correct abnormalities.

Mr. Chairperson, distinguished guests, fellow participants we the children are the future citizens of our country, we must be prepared to take on our future roles as we demand to be given the best start in life.

2. This brings me to answer the question HOW can we be given the best possible start in life?

In the Gambia and other countries, early childcare used to be carried out by using the sectoral approach. That means, that every stakeholder in early Child-care had their own independent activity and time to interact with the child. For example, parents take care of the nutrition and emotional development at home, health services take care and cure when child is sick and schools educate the child for cognitive development (intellectual development or development of the various aptitudes and talents). There were a lot of shortcomings with this approach. After years of studies and research it is accepted and proven that the Integrated/Holistic approach is the way forward. If we the children are to have the best possible start in life, the Integrated/Holistic approach to address children's issues must be adopted.

The Integrated approach promotes the concept that:

- a) All childcare stakeholders must always see the child as a Whole Child.
- b) There must be a co-ordination of activities in caring for the children, especially within the five priority areas; **Health, water and sanitation, nutrition, early stimulation/education and protection of all children.**

This concept of the integrated approach is known as Early Child Development (ECD), since it ensures that all the developmental domains of the child are being taken care of simultaneously. The domains are the child's Physical, Cognitive, Social, Emotional and Spiritual development.

The Gambia is not left behind in adopting the Integrated/Holistic approach of childcare known as the Early Child Development. My research has proven that an ECD Mutli-Sectoral Working Group has been formed and its membership comprises of representatives from Dept. of State for Education, Dept. of State Health, National Nutrition Agency, Department of Community Development, Central Statistics Department, Department of Water Resources, Association of Early Childhood Educators, Non Governmental Organisations namely Christian Children Fund, Catholic Relief Services and GAFNA, Gambia College, the Secretariat of the Roman Catholic Mission and UNICEF.

I must congratulate UNICEF, all childcare stakeholders, and The Gambia Government, for I have reliably learned that the ECD Multi-Sectoral Working Group is working on developing a comprehensive ECD Policy and will soon embark on conducting a nation-wide survey of childcare facilities. The development of an Integrated Parenting Training Manual is also on the pipeline to be sponsored by UNICEF.

3. We now ask the question WHERE can we be given the best possible start in life?

- ◆ In the mother's womb, so there need to be a supportive father and above all a healthy and emotionally stable pregnant mother.
- ◆ A home that provides love, shelter, stimulating environment, and basic needs such as food, clean water to name a few.
- ◆ A neighbourhood/community that ensure that the environment is kept clean, free from pollution and all other environmental hazards, and there is peaceful co-existence.

- ◆ A nation that can adequately provide for its citizens basic services, improved health services, and the commitment to provide awareness through quality education and sensitisation, on children's issues.
 - ◆ An international community that is ready to support the implementation of positive programmes put in place by governments. By assisting with funding and technical assistance among other aids and grants given.
- 4) After having asked the questions, WHY? HOW? and WHERE? let us now look at WHO would give us the best possible start in life.

Our parents, our families (siblings and extended family), our communities, our nation and the International Community at large. Suffice to say, that everyone has a stake and should be involved.

5) Finally, on the theme, WHAT can be provided to give me, to give you, YOU the child from Banjul Municipality, Kanifing Municipal Council, Western Division, North Bank Division, Lower River Division, Central River Division, Upper River Division, we the children of The Gambia, the best possible start in life?

Health - easy access to health facilities, improved pre and post-natal services, adequate drug supply, and immunisation.

Nutrition - available and affordable quality food, pregnant mothers should be eating well balanced food in the right quantities, lactating mothers should provide babies with exclusive breast feeding for six months, and mothers weaning children by giving nutritious complementary foods.

Education - educating every child especially the girl child, improving parenting skills by educating parents using the integrated approach, creating a child friendly, stimulating learning environment for both boys and girls, providing quality child care facilities, and training for child care givers and facilitators including life skills.

Potable water - providing clean water that is drinkable and can be used for domestic purposes

Proper Sanitation facilities - Proper toilets and waste disposal system

Clean and Healthy Environment - free from harmful and hazardous materials and pollution

Protection - advocacy and sensitisation of the Policy makers, develop policies that will be in the best interest of the child and make laws that will protect the rights of the child. Thus the children will be protected from abuse, neglect, exploitation and discrimination.

Improve access to Basic Services - like electricity etc.

Based on our understanding of the theme, we the children of Banjul came up with these burning issues that prevent us from having the best possible start in life. We also came up with solutions that can give us the children of Banjul and the Gambia as a whole the best possible start in life.

BURNING ISSUES AFFECTING US IN BANJUL

EDUCATION

- Poor level of English in school (as an official language it is a barrier to performance)
- Corporal punishment is keeping children away from school
- High cost of education
- Insufficient stationery and school materials
- Attitude of teachers towards children
- Lack of parental awareness of the importance of education for their children as most of the parents are illiterates
- Lack of transportation for children travelling from Banjul to schools in the Kombo area.
- Inadequate sponsorship and scholarship to poor, needy and deserving children

HEALTH CARE

- Lack of priority given to children in the hospital
- Lack of medical facilities because of cost
- High cost of medicine
- Lack of information, education and communication due to insufficient sensitisation

ENVIRONMENT

- Poor sanitation
- Pollution,
- Lack of recreational facilities and space to play
- Over crowding and noise
- Poor roads
- Poor drainage system
- Coastal erosion threatening the island of Banjul
- Poor electricity and inadequate access to water supply

TOURISM (Negative Influences)

- Undesirable mode of dressing
- Bumsters
- Sex workers both boys and girls
- Gambling
- Movies

AGRICULTURE

- Lack of agricultural land

SOCIO-CULTURAL

- Lack of dialogue between parents and children
- Working mothers not having enough time to bond with their children
- Teenage Pregnancy
- Early marriage
- Female Genital Mutilation
- Poverty leading to household food insecurity.
- Inadequate allocation of resources by municipality and government for service delivery.

I now come up with RECOMMENDATIONS to address our problems

- ❖ Free education for all children
 - ❖ Free medical treatment for all children
 - ❖ Trained medical personnel be provided to all schools
 - ❖ No corporal punishment in schools
 - ❖ More qualified and better trained teachers
 - ❖ Give incentive and motivation to Gambian teachers
 - ❖ Proper drainage and waste management system in Banjul
 - ❖ Impose heavy fines or sentences on custodian and parents who force their children into marriage at an early age and traditional practice such as FGM.
 - ❖ Information, education and communication programmes be provided through radio, Television and newspapers for sensitisation to bring about positive attitudinal change
 - ❖ Children to be consulted and involved in decision making that affect them.
 - ❖ Put in place appropriate policies for children's issues and involve the children in the formulation.
 - ❖ Government to provide employment opportunities for youths in Banjul, i.e. Ice plant, Cold stores and fishing materials
 - ❖ Attitudinal changes towards mode of dressing in the families, and in the homes.
 - ❖ Revisit the curriculum of POP FLE in schools to include life skills and social issues
 - ❖ Promote equal right, meaning gender equity among children in the schools and at home
 - ❖ Holistic/integrated approach be adopted to address all issues concerning children
 - ❖ Finally, we recommend the setting of the Gambia Parliament/National Assembly for children known as the BANTABA.
- Our BANTABA will be for the thinking, and rethinking of the best possible start in life.