**CONCEPT NOTE FOR THE GENDER AND WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT**

 **PROJECT (GAMWEP)**

# BACKGROUND

Gambian women constitute 78 percent of the economically active population involved in agriculture compared to just 57 percent of men (source). The majority of women farmers are unskilled agrarian wage earners and are responsible for about 40 percent (source) of the total agricultural production in the country. This massive contribution does not translate into improved socio-economic status for them. The vast majority of women farmers grow food for subsistence only. They are also actively involved in horticultural production which generates a relatively good amount of income.

Women’s agricultural produce and income are often ploughed back to the household, largely for food and for meeting educational expenses of their children, subsidizing the daily household expenses and meeting other social obligations. Efforts to increase women’s participation in large scale and commercial agriculture is impeded by their lack of capacity and skills, inadequate financial and material resources, as well as lack of ownership and control over productive resources such as farmland and modern agricultural equipment. Additionally, their triple roles and socio-cultural practices that are inimical to their well-being also pose challenges.

The above constraints faced by women are influenced by policies and issues of justice. Making justice accessible to all and ensuring that women and girls enjoy their rights which start with adequate knowledge of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the functions and services continue to occupy centre stage in the government development agenda. A case in point is the recent enactment of the Offences and Domestic Violence Acts 2013. There is need for continuous sensitization and advocacy on these two acts as well as reporting on international instruments such as CEDAW, AU Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa, including Beijing Declaration 2010, the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights and the Rights of Women in Africa.

To address the above mentioned issues, the Office of The Vice President and Ministry of Women’s Affairs solicit support from the UN System to develop a comprehensive project proposal on The Gambia Women’s Empowerment Project (GAMWEP).

**OBJECTIVE**

To develop a comprehensive project proposal on the empowerment of women, focusing on their economic empowerment, capacity building and rights.

**JUSTIFICATION**

Over the years, numerous sensitization, advocacy and capacity building activities were implemented to address issues relating to gender and the empowerment of women and girls. These include sexual offences and domestic violence which continue to be at the epicenter of The Gambia’s development agenda.

However, not much progress has been registered in spite of these interventions. Women and girls continue to suffer from all forms of Gender Based Violence (GBV), be it physical, economic, emotional and sexual. Gender based violence (GBV) has serious implications for the development of girls and the advancement of women as well as their contribution towards national development. Coupled with these is the weak capacity of institutions to provide redress to victims of GBV. Key among these is the security forces whose capacity will need to be further strengthened for the effective and efficient management of GBV cases. Awareness creation on GBV and on the Sexual Offences Act 2013 and the Domestic Violence Act 2013 will continue at all levels. This programme will provide the necessary support to other institutions that provide redress to victims of GBV. To further reduce the vulnerabilities of violence against women and girls and enhance their decision making status, evidence has shown that there is need to invest more into economic empowerment, capacity building and skills development for women and girls.

Women in the Gambia are considered the poorest of the poor, thus poverty is described to have a woman’s face. The 2010 integrated Household survey shows that female headed households are poorer than the male headed households. The survey also shows that poverty is more prevalent in the rural areas than the urban areas with higher prevalence of malnutrition. This thus means that rural women who are mainly dependent on agriculture for their livelihood would be considered to be the poorest of the poor. The bulk of the economic activities for most women in The Gambia particularly the rural women are agriculture. Women generally have very low yields for all their crops with very high post-harvest losses. What are often marketed are the very small surpluses. In some cases, due to the serious financial constraints food produced for the family are also sold at giveaway prices causing families to suffer from food insecurity only after few months (often as low as two months) from harvest. These produce are almost all sold in the primary form with very little or no value addition for very little value and also very high levels of perishability.

The low level of production and productivity of women farmers’ crops in the Gambia is attributed to their poor access to productive resources and labour (drudgery) and time (labour hours) saving technologies in addition to the fact that agricultural production in the Gambia is mostly dependent on rainfall (on average three months per year). The results of the above constraints are very low yields compared to the potential. Women very rarely produce more than one metric ton of rice per hectare, even though the potential yields can be as high as four metric tons per hectare.

Effective eradication of poverty in The Gambia requires increased focus on women. This requires increasing resources directed at increasing women’s capacities to increase production, productivity and income all along the value chain. Investments should be made on the needs and interests of women based on their own perceptions. These should include strengthening women’s technical and managerial knowledge and skills all along agricultural value chains for key commodities including rice, coarse grains, horticultural crops, forestry products such as bees, poultry and small ruminants and aquaculture. Women need to actively engage in agricultural commercialization for all key commodities at all levels of the value chain, with very strong farmer institutions. This will be facilitated by making available strong financing structures, input marketing facilities and appropriate access to labour and time saving technologies. In this programme women’s agriculture will be viewed holistically covering a wide range of commodities to provide options. It will include production processing, marketing, input retailing, technological support for time and labour and financing for agriculture. Agricultural institutions particularly women farmers organizations and cooperatives will be supported and strengthened

Previous attempts made in entrepreneurship development focused more on the private sector and as a source of livelihoods for the unemployed and not as a sustainable strategy for creating a cadre of local entrepreneurs. Furthermore, the majority of the limited number of Women entrepreneurs are in micro-enterprises (65%) and many of them lack business development skills and managerial capacity for improved competitiveness and management. In general, there is a lack of sustainable institutionalized and integrated business advisory/development services especially in women’s organizations, such as cooperatives and women’s entrepreneurs’ associations. These women groups have limited capacity to deliver services, and to build capacities of their members. The development of such skills will therefore lead to women and girls entrepreneurs having confidence, voice, influence and access to services and opportunities.

Gender differences exist in access to employment, credit, financial services, land and other productive resources. In terms of employment, women tend to be employed more in agriculture, informal sector enterprises and small agricultural household enterprises compared to men. In these enterprises, wages/salaries and incomes are much lower compared to what obtains in other seasonal employment categories. Women’s access to credit is constrained by unfavorable terms and conditions of credit schemes, need for collateral, high interest rates and small loan sizes.

Therefore, this project will focus on building the capacity of a cadre of women Entrepreneurs to establish and sustain viable and competitive enterprises to serve as the backbone of the country’s agricultural and industrial growth and transformation. Interventions will focus on building skills and knowledge in business and entrepreneurial skills and tap opportunities in key non-agricultural sectors and improve women’s access to employment, credit, financial services and other productive resources.

There are several policies designed and adopted to improve reproductive health status of women. Maternal and child health services are provided through a three tier health care delivery system. Four Comprehensive Emergency Obstetric Care and 14 Basic Emergency Obstetric Care health facilities exist in the Gambia and skilled attendance at delivery is 54% while the unmet need for Emergency Obstetric Care ranges from 35% to 31%.

The total fertility rate is estimated at 5.4 children per woman. This rate remains higher in rural areas (5.9) than urban (4.5). The high fertility is partly due to low contraceptive prevalence (estimated at 17.6 per cent) and socio-cultural barriers as well as high unmet need for family planning (estimated at 30 per cent). The population is characterized by a youthful age structure with 20.6 per cent of the population aged between 15-24 years.

The limited access to skilled birth attendants coupled with the low level of emergency obstetric care, the low unmet need for family planning services and early marriage of girls (49% of girls marry before the age of 18), has contributed towards the high maternal mortality rate of 556 deaths per 100,000 live births.

Capacities will be strengthened in the health delivery system to increase skilled delivery. To further facilitate these communities will be sensitized on the importance of early reporting to health facilities for skilled delivery. This will be further enhanced by using women’s economic empowerment as an entry point for information and services on sexual and reproductive health including family planning.

Appropriate programmes will also be designed to address the sexual and reproductive health needs of adolescents and youth. The effective implementation of any programme requires the existence of efficient coordination mechanisms. The capacities of government institutions that will be responsible for the coordination of this project will be assessed. The institutions will be strengthened in order to enhance their coordination roles.

**PROJECT DURATION**

The project will be implemented over a five year period, starting from January 2015 to December 2019.

**PERFORMANCE INDICATORS**

* Production and productivity for all targeted crops for women
* Income of women from commercialization of their produce and processed products
* Operating women farmer organizations and cooperatives
* Number of Women Entrepreneurs and Enterprises established
* Number of women refer to H/Facilities for RH information and services
* Level of maternal mortality rate
* Number of laws and policies protecting the rights of women
* Percentage of women of child bearing age that have access to modern family planning method
* Number of institutions with capacity to coordinate the women’s economic empowerment project

**PROJECT COMPONENTS**

The project will focus on the following components:

**Component 1**: Support to Women in Agriculture- value chain approach through:

* Increased crops, livestock, fisheries/aquaculture and forestry production and management
* Improved post-harvest handling and value addition for all commodities identified above
* Strengthening entrepreneurial and financial management skills of women farmers and their associations/cooperatives

**Component 2:** Entrepreneurship and access to resources for non-agricultural activities through:

* Development of a cadre of Women Entrepreneurs and integrated Business Development Services
* Women’s Access to Financial Services and other productive resources.

**Component 3:** Strengthening Women’s Rights through:

* Institutional Strengthening and capacity building
* Women’s Right Promotion and Protection and access to Sexual and Reproductive Health information and services (SRH)

**INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK**

The Office of The Vice President and Ministry of Women’s Affairs will be responsible for the overall coordination of the implementation of the project through a Project Coordinating Committee (PCC) which would comprise of the Ministries of Agriculture, Trade, Justice, Finance and Economic Affairs, Health, Lands and Regional Governments, ActionAid The Gambia, NAWFA and the UN System. This committee will be chaired by H.E The Vice President and Minister of Women’s Affairs and the Executive Director of Women’s Bureau will serve as the secretary.

A steering committee will also be established to be responsible for periodic monitoring of project activities as well as providing technical guidance to the implementation of the project among others. This committee will comprise of OVP, Women’s Bureau, Ministries of Agriculture, Justice, Finance and Economic Affairs, Trade, Fisheries & Water Resources, the UN System, Population, NANA, Farmers’ Platform, NACUFAG and Women’s Bureau will serve as secretary to this committee.

At the regional level, a Task Force will be established to be chaired by the Governors and Mayors. This Task Force will comprise of TAC Members from the Women’s Bureau, the National Women’s Council, Gambia Women’s Federation, Agriculture, Population, Nutrition, RHT, Department of Community Development, Fisheries and Water Resources, Area Council, Council of Seyfolus, Civil Society and a Woman Opinion Leader and will be responsible for the facilitation and monitoring of the project at the regional level.

At the community level, the project implementation monitoring and evaluation will be facilitated by the MDFTs and the VDCs as well as District Development Committees (DDCs).

**Project Management Unit (PMU)**

The PMU will be located at the Women’s Bureau and will be managed by a Project Management Team which will comprise of a Manager, a Deputy Manager, Accountant, as well as a Procurement Officer, M & E Specialist.

**Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E)**

A comprehensive M & E framework will be developed with Performance Indicators and Targets for the project.