

The Gambia

FACTFILE

Title New World for Youth

IPPF Member Association The Gambia Family Planning Association (GFPA)

Set up in 1968, GFPA is the country's leading provider of sexual and reproductive health services in the Gambia.

Aim To improve the sexual and reproductive health and rights of young people aged 10 to 24 through service provision and awareness raising.

Duration Five years: 2003–2007

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

▶ The community reported a reduction in unwanted pregnancies, and a reduction in HIV and sexually transmitted infection rates among young people.

▶ Religious and community leaders in the Greater Banjul area accept and support sexual and reproductive health services for young people.

▶ 8,827 young people accessed sexual and reproductive health services.

▶ 140 young peer educators now work throughout the country distributing condoms and spreading sexual and reproductive health and rights messages to young people.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Innovative strategy to change young people's lives

The youth centre set up by the project is the only one of its kind in the Greater Banjul area that works with young people in an environment that they and their communities and families feel is safe and supportive. It provided recreational activities, a homework club and vocational training as well as clinical services and education. In addition, the clinic provided some general health treatments, for example for malaria and minor illness and injuries. This protected the privacy of young people visiting the clinic for sexual and reproductive health services – in other words, a visit to the clinic did not necessarily mean that a young person was accessing sexual health services.

“GFPA is one of the most successful NGOs in the Gambia.”

Permanent Secretary of the Department of State for Youth and Sports

The project trained 140 young peer educators to work around the country to increase young people's knowledge and awareness of sexual and reproductive health and rights issues.

The project centre also gave young people a place to go out of school where they could learn new skills, access medical care and receive help with their homework.

Young people's lives improved through the project

Not only did the community report that rates of unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted

KEY PROJECT STATISTICS

Number of condoms distributed: 475,581.

Number of new family planning users: 8,827.

Number of non-family planning sexual and reproductive health services provided to young people: 32,331.

125 radio and eight television programmes were aired focusing on young people's sexual and reproductive health and rights.

The project gave 1,069 lectures, ran 1,666 film shows and conducted 1,119 talks for in- and out-of-school youth, and conducted 1,583 sexual and reproductive health lectures and discussions in the youth centre.

The project distributed 10,800 information, education and communication materials.

infections and HIV infection had reduced, the project centre also gave young people a place to go out of school where they could learn new skills, access medical care and receive help with their homework.

Advocacy network run by and for young people

A major success of the project was the creation of the youth advocacy movement – a network of youth organizations that involved about 140 young people. This network is governed and run by young people and works to advocate for young people's rights and services, and to get more young people involved in the work of the Member Association.

Challenging a culture of silence and taboo

Sex before marriage is generally considered taboo in the Gambia but a national survey of 14 to 24-year-olds carried out when the

project started reported that over 40 per cent were sexually active. This resulted in a lack of knowledge and awareness of sexual and reproductive health issues among young people and increased the risk of unwanted pregnancies, unsafe abortion, sexually transmitted infections and HIV infection.

The project empowered young people to talk about these issues and discuss their sexual and reproductive health needs and concerns freely, as well as share this knowledge with their parents and other community members.

“There are fewer teenage pregnancies and early marriages than in other places where the project doesn’t operate.”

Parent

Benefits of collaboration with the government

The project benefited from the full support of the Gambian government which was an important contributing factor to project success. The

LESSONS LEARNED

The youth centre should be replicated in other areas to scale up this successful model and address the widespread sexual health issues faced by young people.

Now that the project has established community support, further work could introduce emergency contraception, reduce the incidence of female genital mutilation, and help girls and young women access condoms and negotiate their use.

Young people are powerful agents of change. Their involvement in project decision making, implementation and sensitization has been a key factor behind the project’s success.

Department of State for Youth and Sports and the Department of Health were both represented on the advisory committee of the project and closely followed project implementation as it was directly linked to the objectives of both departments.

Both departments would like to see the project expanded to other areas of the country and are in no doubt about its contribution to sexual and reproductive health services for young people. GFPA is seen by the government as a specialist in young people’s sexual and reproductive health.

IPPF and UNFPA working together in-country

UNFPA and GFPA liaise, plan and collaborate to ensure that sexual and reproductive health and rights services are relevant, not duplicated and complement government service provision. In addition, UNFPA has provided GFPA with financial support and sees the Member Association as an important advocate for sexual and reproductive health and rights.

“When I started coming here I didn’t know about any of the sexually transmitted infections or HIV/AIDS. Our parents weren’t able to talk to us about these things. Now we have full information and discuss all the issues together.”

Youth centre user

Project continuation and sustainability

The youth centre continues to operate through diversification of donor support, restructuring of staff positions and the introduction of some income generation activities in the local community.



COUNTRY STATS

Population is 1.6 million, with 42 per cent under the age of 15.
(2008, Population Reference Bureau)

31 per cent of population is aged between 10 and 24.
(2006, Population Reference Bureau)

Human Development Index ranking: 155 out of 177 countries.
(2005, UNDP Human Development Report 2007/2008)

Average life expectancy at birth is 58.8 years.
(2005, UNDP Human Development Report 2007/2008)

The infant mortality rate is 93 per thousand live births.
(2008, Population Reference Bureau)

The total fertility rate is 5.2 (2000–2005) with only 18 per cent of married women aged 15–49 practising family planning.
(1997–2005, UNDP Human Development Report 2007/2008)

Population living with HIV/AIDS (aged 15–49) is 2.4 per cent.
(2005, UNDP Human Development Report 2007/2008)

Only 55 per cent of births are attended by trained personnel.
(1997–2005, UNDP Human Development Report 2007/2008)

