2015 YOUTH CONSULTATIONS
ON THE FOURTH ANNUAL HIGH LEVEL DIALOGUE ON DEMOCRACY, HUMAN RIGHTS AND GOVERNANCE IN AFRICA: TRENDS, CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

National Conversation
(The Gambia)

Theme:
“YOUTH PARTICIPATION AND LEADERSHIP IN POLITICAL PARTIES IN AFRICA: SPECIAL FOCUS ON YOUNG WOMEN.”

Facilitators

#DGtrends @AUC_DPA

American Corner, Comium, October 24th, 2015
1. Executive Summary

African is known for having youthful population, and this youthful energy and potential if put into good use, many believe would drive the continent to rapid economic transformation, socio-cultural advancement and political development. This though can never be achieved if the young people are marginalized in the decision making process from the grassroots, national and continental level.

Knowing fully well that policies are shaped through politics, the African Governance Architecture (AGA) Secretariat of African Union Commission opened up to broader participation and inclusion of young people across the continent on the agenda for the Fourth Annual High Level Dialogue on Democracy, Human Rights and Governance in Africa: Trends, Challenges and Prospects. This they did through requests to youth organizations in Africa to host national conversations in their respective countries dubbed “National Conversations on Youth Participation in Political Parties”.

The Gambia and its youth are in no way left behind on the crusade. Thus, in line with our role as representatives of young people, the National Youth Parliament – The Gambia (NYP), African Union Youth Working Group, National Youth Council (NYC), Think Young Women (TYW), Children and Community Initiative for Development (CAID) and Activista collaborated in organizing and facilitating The Gambia National Conversation. The Conversation brought together different players and stakeholders in youth development, political parties and women’s rights advocacy, youth and civil society organizations in a dialogue that focused on the main theme: “YOUTH PARTICIPATION AND LEADERSHIP IN POLITICAL PARTIES IN AFRICA: SPECIAL FOCUS ON YOUNG WOMEN.”

The Gambia’s conversation was divided into three phases, the Pre-Bantaba, The Bantaba (Conversation Day) and Post Bantaba.

2. Activity Undertaken

1. Research

The main activity of the pre-bantaba phase was the research trip which was mainly to help address the first aim of the National Conversation i.e. “Sharing evidence-based knowledge and analysis on youth and particularly young women’s participation in political parties” The task force committee visited the four main political parties to have access to information on the level of youth (especially young women) participation at these parties. Visits were made to the Ministry of Lands & Regional Government (MOLGL) to check from records the level of youth representation at the local government areas and authorities around the country. It’s from these efforts that the following findings were made.

Starting from the grassroots, the Commonwealth Secretariat and Government of Gambia jointly conducted a survey on councillors in all Local Government Authorities in The Gambia. The survey which revealed the Majority of the councillors are male (81%), compared to the females, who are (19%). Out of 19.17% nominated councillors, the females’ forms 6%. The female ratio of the nominated group in higher that the elected. There is a seat reserved for a youth representative in all the councils. The average age of councillors is 41 years old (which is clearly not within the age bracket of
The Gambia Youth Policy and that of the African Youth Charter. The youngest councillor is 24 years old. The oldest is 59 according to the submitted answers. However, the most senior councillor, the report says, is actually 63 year old (such information was collated thanks largely due to personal communication says the report). Out of the 110 councillors who took part in the survey, there were 19 females compared to 91 males. At National level more focus was on the level of participation at the Political parties as it is through these parties that leaders are groomed and recruited to be put forward and voted into office. The findings at the party level are as follows.

3. Political Party A:

- **Representation at Party Executive**

  **Quota on Youth and Women in the Executive**

  The findings of the survey revealed that Party A has a total number of 11 executive members (all adults - above 35 years). In response to the questionnaire it has indicated to have a quota on youth and women at both national and regional levels but could not give an accurate number by gender and age beyond national level at the time of the study. Out of 11 national executive members 5 are male and 6 female. Unfortunately their actual ages could not be established and thereby considered (all adults - above 35 years). At this survey Party A has zero percent of youth or young women (18 to 35 years of old) representation in its national executive.

- **Representation by Age and Gender**

  Column chart showing number of executive members at national level by age and gender

  ![Column chart showing number of executive members at national level by age and gender](image)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Youth (18 to 35 years old)</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adult (Above 35 years old)</td>
<td>5</td>
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- **Youth/ Young Women leadership and participation in party activities**

  In the study the party is said to have a quota on youth in its executive and does have an equal opportunity for in party leadership through parliamentary and political bureau and decision making process. In both the party and society the norms, values and culture permit youth to partake in politics. As part of the mechanism/strategies the party national mobilizer
in his sensitization efforts youth are recruited and involved in the junior league as young militants to join the party. The party has a youth wing and runs the youth in agriculture and fishing initiative under its umbrella. Also the party has a quota on women in its executive. Women have an equal opportunity in party leadership and decision making process. Women occupied key leadership roles such as the first vice chairperson and national women mobilizer. The societal norms, values and culture allowed the women to participate actively in the politics. Politically, it’s no more a sin for a woman to address the gathering even in front of her husband in speaking up her mind. The party provides a space and opportunity for women to participate not only in politics but in business and farming through their affiliated associations and societies. There is an active women wing and does provide business, tie and die, farming and adult literacy programmes for women to improve their educational and standards of living.

4. Political Party B:

- **Representation at Party Executive**
  Quota on Youth and Women in the Executive
  Findings of the survey revealed that Party B has a total number of 45 executive members at national and regional levels. Out of which 19 are female and 26 male. It was difficult to capture their ages in the study, there is probability that majority of them are above 35 years of old. The youth and young women (18 to 35) year olds are either not represented or constitute the lowest percentage in the executive at both national and regional levels.

- **Representation in the national and regional executive by Gender**
  Bar chart showing number of executive members at national and regional levels by gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>National and Regional Executive</th>
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<tr>
<td>URR</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female</td>
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</tbody>
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*Keys: GBA & KM = Banjul and Kanifing Municipality, WCR = West Coast Region, LRR = Lower River Region, NBR = North Bank Region, CRR = Central River Region, URR = Upper River Region

- **Representation in the executive by Age**
  a. Adults: above 35 years old (40 representatives).
b. Youth/Young Women: 18 to 35 years old (5 representatives).

- **Youth/ Young Women leadership and participation in party activities**
  
The findings revealed that the party does not have a quota on youth and women in its executive but does have an equal opportunity in party leadership and the decision-making process. The environment guaranteed youth and women in leading, making and influencing decisions in the party based on its democratic principles.

  The party norms, values and culture permit youth and women to actively participate in politics without any hindrance. Its set mechanisms/strategies allows and enhances women involvement in politics through a high level of women sensitization, empowerment, capacity building and counselling of women to take up party responsibility and participate as women representatives rather than being mere supporters. In the study an existence of an active women wing was noted of which canvassing for female votes, regular gender sensitization on women involvement in politics and sensitization on protocols for women political development through collaboration with various agencies are the main focus of the wing.

  As a democratic party operating on democratic principles the party structure also supports equal opportunity for youth in party leadership and the decision-making process but youth leadership in the party is based on merit and qualification and not by age. Societal norms, values and culture do permit youth to actively participate in politics but unfortunately youth continues to show less interest. There is a need for a serious youth sensitization to enhance their participation at all levels.

  Possible mechanisms/strategies to enhance youth involvement in politics could be a regular sensitization, counselling, capacity building and political education.

  There is an active youth wing in party. Youth development in politics, counselling of youth to take up political leadership roles and canvassing of votes for the party are among the activities it does.

5. Political Party C:

- **Representation at Party Executive**

  **Quota on Youth and Women in the Executive**

  Findings of the survey revealed that **Party C** has a total number of 22 executive members at national and regional levels. Out of which 8 are female and 14 male. The ages were captured in the study; there are a total of 18 executive members above the age of 35 years. Only 4 are within the youth age of (18 to 35) years in this party executive.

- **Representation in the national and regional executive by Gender**

  Column chart showing number of executive members at national and regional levels by gender
**Representation in the executive by Age**

a. Adults: above 35 years old (18 representatives).

b. Youth/Young Women: 18 to 35 years old (4 representatives).

**Youth/ Young Women leadership and participation in party activities**

The findings revealed that youth and women are represented in party executive but in the lowest number. It shows they are limited space for equal opportunity in party leadership and the decision-making process as youth/young women are somehow represented both its central/national and regional committee.

The party norms, values and culture believe that the youth are engine of change, that is why it encourages their active participation its decision-making as well as in all the implementation of all party activities.

Part of its mechanisms/strategies, the party has set up a bureau headed by the youth representative in the central committee to encourage youth/young women political participation and leadership. Its youth wing is very active and engages in programs to sensitize and mobilize youth and women. Youth/young women in the wing do participate in youth farms, raising funds for their local committees as well as engage in educational activities to raise awareness on political, health and education. The party has an equal opportunity for all including young women but noted some challenges hindering their total and equal participation. Norms, values and culture in our environment wise the party believe that young women does not have a space to actively participate or freely seek for leadership positions due to their heavily family roles or other socio-cultural circumstances. For this the party recommends suitable mechanisms/strategies to enlighten and support women especially the young with financial and otherwise to participate fully in politics.

There is a functioning women wing in this party that does engage in sensitization and all other party programs. They do periodic country wide
tour to mobilize women, raise funds for their activities and rallies. The wing does a great job in promoting the ideals and programs of the party through theatre and cultural performances.

6. Political Party D:
   - **Representation at Party Executive**
     **Quota on Youth and Women in the Executive**
     Findings of the survey revealed that Party D has a total number of 40 executive members at national and regional levels. Out of which 17 are female and 23 male. The ages were captured in the study; there are a total of 30 executive members above the age of 35 years and 10 are within the youth age of (18 to 35) year.

   - **Representation in the national and regional executive by Gender**
     Column chart showing number of executive members at national and regional levels by gender

     ![Column chart showing number of executive members at national and regional levels by gender](image)

     *Keys: GBA & KM = Banjul and Kanifing Municipality, WCR = West Coast Region, LRR = Lower River Region, NBR = North Bank Region, CRR = Central River Region, URR = Upper River Region*

   - **Representation in the executive by Age**
     a. Adults: above 35 years old (30 representatives).
     b. Youth/Young Women: 18 to 35 years old (10 representatives).

   - **Youth/ Young Women leadership and participation in party activities**
     The findings revealed that the party does have in minority a quota on youth and young women in its executive and equal opportunity in party leadership and the decision-making process. The environment guaranteed youth and young women in its constitution. Its believes the societal norms, values and culture does not discriminate but however young women are somehow under represented due to some of our socio-cultural norms and values.
In the party’s mechanisms/strategies youth are presently engaged in country wide sensitization programs on its strategy and do organize seminars for women at grassroots and political debates in constituencies. Our findings conclude that this party has an active youth wing that is into the organization of sensitization programs, debate symposiums, cultural programs, caravan tours and youth sport program. Based on our study, it has no structure on women wing yet.

7. WhatsApp Group Conversation
A WhatsApp Group named ‘GM National Conversation” was created to help to start the conversation. This was a great and best virtual platform that enabled us to interact with so many talented and energetic young people and has helped set a direction and contributed in shaping the National Conversation. It was through this less formal free flow conversation that the main thematic areas for the Conversation were identified. The group was full to its maximum capacity of 100 members. As a result of members’ active participation and contribution to our successful National Conversation and the group’s potential for continues engagement/follow up on the dialogue and sharing of information amongst young people in the Gambia, we deemed necessary to maintain it.

8. Online Survey
To help get a wider coverage and more views from the people, an online survey was created for young people to respond to which served as an avenue for people to participate. Due to time constrained we could not include the result of findings in this report.

9. National Conversation (Bantaba)
The National Bantaba (Conversation) which was the main event of the whole process brought together a cross section of society, those from the girls’ and women’s rights advocacy, civil society organizations, political parties, politically active and interested young people interested in the manner in which the affairs of their country is being run. After the opening ceremony, and the usual protocol observed, the participants were divided in to four working groups each given a topic to dilate on. Each group’s discussion was guided by pertinent questions that also allowed them to discuss critical issues concerning youth and women participation in Gambian politics. After the discussions, the groups converged and had representatives to presents the various group discussions and resolutions, and this was followed by comments and contribution which added value to the conversation. The working groups were:

a) Working Group on Women Wings
b) Working Group on Youth Wings
c) Working Group on Women Participation in Grassroots and National Politics
d) Working Group on Youth participation in Grassroots and National Politics
10. Outcome Statement Highlighting Conclusions and Key Recommendations

- **WORKING GROUP 1; WOMEN'S WING:**
The participants acknowledged that they do have women wings, but there functionality has room for improvement. Emphasis was on how they can come together to help one another and also address their financial constraints. For the wing to be successful, they need to be united and keep working hard, supporting each other. Their challenge lies in the fact that women are not supported enough to take up leadership roles and contest for election. In the event that they come up to contest they are discouraged and told that their place as woman should be confined within the household. They are made vulnerable so much so that taking up key position in their various parties becomes difficult.
So the Resolutions from the Women Wing working groups were as follows:

1. All parties should establish and strengthen women wings.
2. Women wings should be exclusively run by women leaders.
3. The women wings should not be used as a mean of excluding women leaders from the Main party executive.
4. Women wings should not only be used as platforms for voter mobilization but should also have capacity building and awareness creation and leadership training for women leaders to prepare them to take up political office.

- **WORKING GROUP 2: Youth WINGS:**
Youth participation is not only vital due to the civic rights they possess but it is very much needed due to the fact that young people would be the torch bearers in the future and so need to be involved today to enhance an easy process of transition from one generation to another. The most effective democratic means for this though are the political parties. Political parties are platforms through which leaders can be prepared and in the case of youths, the Youth wings play that role.
The working groups on Youth wing highlighted the fact that all political parties in The Gambia have youth wings structures but might not necessarily be playing the role as required. This might be either due to the fact that these youth platforms are headed by elderly people or as one participant puts it the fear factor associated with participating in political parties, especially opposition parties. Youths they said are participating in political parties but not in the most desirable of manner, they are mostly used in member mobilization but not present in decision making platforms and are often not nominated to run for political office.

The resolutions of the Working Group on Youth Wings are as follows:

1. All parties should have youth wings headed by young people within.
2. The Leadership of these youth wings should be elected in periodic Youth Wings Congresses.
3. Youth wings should have annual Leadership Training Camps where the youth will be training on not only leadership skills but also on the constitution and other relevant legal treaties.
4. All youth wings should have Annual General Meetings (AGMs) for the leadership to report to the General membership.
5. The youth wing should be represented at the National Executive level and in all decision making structures of the parties from the grassroots to the National level.
6. The Model Youth Wing Executive should consist of the following: President, Vice President, Secretary General, Treasurer, and Regional chairperson for the seven administrative regions across the country.
7. Young wing structures should be decentralized down to the district level.

- Working Group 3; Women participation at grassroots & national politics:
Starting with what is available for women participation, the Local Government Act, 2002, Constitution of The Gambia, 1997, Women’s Act 2010 and Youth Bill 1999 all provide for women participation; however they are not sufficient or effective. They do not specify the participation of women, thus there is room for improvement. More provisions should be in place in the Local Government Act for women. At the VDC level, it has been noted that women participation is not effective. Laws are too restrictive, thus hindering women and youth participation. The Resolutions of the Working group on Women participation in Politics are as follows:

1. Steps should be taken to support women interested in contesting for political office.
2. The authorities too need to relax the hold and open up the political space to enhance the political environment for women participation.
3. Efforts should be made by the National Council for Civic Education to create awareness especially at the grassroots level as social barriers are the main challenges for women participation.
4. Capacity building and young women mentorship program should be run at national level to help groom young women leaders and thus boost their chances of taking political office.
5. A system of proportional representation should be introduced to enhance more women participation.
6. A quota system for women election into parliament and local government should be introduced.

- Working Group 4; Youth Participation At The Grass Roots & National Politics:
The participants have stated that there are provisions for youth participation in council, parliamentary, presidential (above 35yrs old) elections but there are bottlenecks that they are faced with. The nation’s policies should be evaluated to create an atmosphere which is friendly for all political parties. If youths are not actively involved in political parties, it can be a threat to the existence of parties in general. (Youth should be policy makers).
To remedy the bottlenecks, the Working Group came up with the following resolutions:
1. There is a need to enhance the freedom of the media issues also hinder youth political participation and the authorities should open up the political space to enable youth to freely participate in politics with parties of their choice.
2. To improve on youth participation at the level of the VDCs and LGAs; there is a need to enact laws that will enforce the sovereign republican citizenry to elect representatives or to be elected in all spheres of political life.
3. Civic education should be strengthened to help youths across the country to know their role and the avenue that exist for their effective participation in politics.
4. There is a need for a quota system for youth in party nominations for political office at all levels.

11. Possible Follow-Up Plans
There are mainly three plans for the follow-up:

- **Report and Feedback**
The report at this stage would be shared with all stakeholders and efforts would be put into getting these stakeholders committed to the resolutions put forward in the conversation.

- **Research on Youth and women Participation in Politics**
The research conducted shows exposed a lot of issues which call for further research on the issue at hand.

- **Decentralized Conversations**
Among the strongest calls added during the conversation was the need for decentralization of the National Conversation at Regional level to make sure all regions have their conversation before having a major one at National level.

12. Participants List as Annexure
13. **Reach on Social Media**

WhatsApp Group: 100

Twitter/Facebook: 33 users,

133,323.00 unique deliveries (number of independent users reached)
260,170.00 impressions (total number of time content was delivered).