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Introduction

- The Gambia is a small country in West Africa:
- 11,000 Sq.km;
- 1.5 million people;
- Life expectancy is 58 years;
- per capita is USD 543;
- 168th in the HDI;
- 51 per cent of population are women.
The Gambia National Museum

- Created in 1985; a good example of post colonial museum in Africa with a narrative towards re-conquering the national cultural identity after decades of subservience
- Yet women’s portrayal is still stereotypical: breeders, beauties and bucket bearing.
The latest report by the United Nations reveals the following about The Gambia’s move towards attaining the UN’s MDGs set for 2015: MDG targets for poverty, gender equality, and HIV/AIDS were unlikely to be met if existing trends did not change. On the other hand, maternal health, hunger, and access to basic amenities such as safe drinking water were relatively more likely to be met by 2015. The Gambia is also ‘on track’ towards achieving MDG 3: to ensure that all boys and girls complete a full course of primary schooling.
Beating the deadline: Women in the quest for attainment of the United Nations’ Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and human rights’.

The Gambia National Museum seeks to embark on research to collect women’s cultural and traditional knowledge on the ways and means of helping The Gambia attain the MDGs, and to use the data to mount a temporary museum exhibition and publish a brochure. Experience has shown that much of Gambian history is gender biased— it is the voice of the men that is heard and seen in our museum displays, despite the huge contribution of women to our history, and their role as purveyors of culture.
Our research wishes to concentrate on those MDGs most directly related to the issue of women’s rights such as MDG I (Eradicate extreme poverty); MDG II (Achieve universal primary education), MDG III (Promote gender equality), and MDG V (Improve maternal health).
MDG 1: Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger:

- Through our fieldwork on various Gambian cultural practices, it will be possible to identify women centred cultural and historical factors which pose Challenges to poverty reduction such as:
  - Traditional ideas about wealth or valued resources
  - Cultural order of priority or obligations
  - Individual versus community ownership
  - Dependency syndrome (extended family system
MDG II: Achieve Universal Primary Education:

Through our fieldwork, we shall be able to identify cultural barriers to girls’ enrolment in school such as:

- Traditional occupations and established cultural paradigms about women’s role in society.
- Early marriage and betrothals
- Fostering practices – young girls as surrogate mothers
- Children’s participation in domestic economies etc
MDG III Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women:

- Traditional concepts on women; the positive/negative duality
- Religious ideas of pollution – residential segregation
- Beliefs in mythical forces – witchcraft that leads to the brutalisation of women
- Traditional beliefs that deny leadership to women in community affairs
- Polygyny and traditional conjugal arrangements that make women subservient to men
- Systems of inheritance and descent – patrilineal
- Domestic roles ascribed to women as by culture prescribed etc.
MDG V: Improve Maternal Health

- Cultural Dietary taboos related to the mythical attributes of women
- Generally held traditional beliefs about pregnancy and child delivery
- General tolerance of physical violence and inhuman treatment against women on account of belief in witchcraft and ritual processes of purification required in widowhood observances and in other rites of passage.
Conclusion

The research, exhibition and brochure shall:

- Help maximize the importance accorded to women’s cultural knowledge and practices in helping an African country meet the MDGs;
- Show how museum exhibitions can be useful tools in promoting the human rights through advocacy and public sensitization;
- Highlight women’s role in promotion of basic human rights issues.
- Improve the current representation of women in The National Museum from the stereotypical roles as child bearers (fertility) and beauties (pageants, dress) to new role as major players in national development.
THANK YOU