



# THE GAMBIA

*Check Against Delivery*

**STATEMENT**

**BY**

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STATUS OF WOMEN**

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**Mr. Chairman,  
Madam Under-Secretary-General,  
Distinguished Delegates,**

My delegation would like to thank you and the Bureau for all the preparatory work you have undertaken to make this 55<sup>th</sup> Session of the Commission on the Status of Women a success. We celebrate UN-Women and we look forward to seeing it develop an interactive working relationship with the Commission, with a view to enhancing gender equality and empowerment of women throughout the world.

Likewise, we hope that the agreed conclusions of this 55<sup>th</sup> session of the CSW would further guide the work of UN-Women and other UN entities as it relates to this year's priority theme.

**Madam Chairperson,**

*"Access and participation of women and girls in education, training, science and technology, including for the promotion of women's equal access to full employment and decent work"* is topical and should be at the core of policy discussions that aim at empowering women. The education of women and girls empowers them to take charge of their well-being and that of their families and communities. However, access and participation of women in science and technology or education and training in the developing world is affected by a number of factors which must be addressed through innovative policy interactions, legislation, establishment of partnerships and networks, as well as the provision of adequate financial resources. The theme presents particular challenges to the education systems in most developing countries, where the teaching of science and mathematics lags behind other disciplines. The teaching of basic science starts at the primary school level and the need for training more teachers in science and mathematics, therefore, cannot be overemphasized. As we strive to improve access, we must not leave the question of quality to chance and hence the need to address the issue of gender parity as well.

**Madam Chairperson,**

The Government of The Gambia has made education a top priority issue convinced that it is a root of future successes. We have embarked on a number of measures and initiatives to ensure, in particular, the education of girls and literacy of women. Our Education Policy 2004 – 2015 **"Rethinking Education for Poverty and Reduction"** lays a strong emphasis on gender mainstreaming and increased equitable access to basic, senior secondary and tertiary education, including the areas of science and technology. With such strategic focus, the Government has made education tuition free in public schools up to Grade 9. There are scholarship trust funds that support girls' education throughout the country, including from private sector NGOs and CBO Organizations. In addition, the President's Empowerment of Girls Education Project (PEGEP) and The Jammeh Foundation for Peace have become major tools to

encourage girls of all backgrounds to enroll and stay in school without fear of cost and this includes special scholarship packages for girls who excel in mathematics and the sciences.

**Madam Chairperson,**

Allow me to highlight other initiatives from our national experience that we believe are examples of best practices that we can share with you. Policy interventions must specifically address the situation of women and girls or gender specific issues in providing them with education and training. Science and technology must incorporate a gender dimension if they are to lead to women's equal access to full employment and decent work. It is therefore imperative to create a conducive school environment, which promotes the health and welfare of the girl-child throughout the learning cycle. These include the provision of adequate water and sanitation facilities and catering to the nutritional needs of children. The Gambia tries to achieve this through the Child Friendly School Initiative (CFSI) which is supported by UNICEF and it seeks to promote gender equality in enrolment and achievement as well as eliminating gender stereotypes. The promotion of the participation of women and girls in the management of schools is another way to enhance their access and participation in education and training.

**Madam Chairperson,**

As I stated earlier, at the heart of our education policy is the emphasis on gender mainstreaming at all stages of the education process, as well as the expansion of access to science and technology. In the last few years, the Government embarked upon a realization of these policy objectives through the establishment of the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology and Research, a science park, an academy of science and technology as well as allowing private sector interventions in the field of ICT training. In the course of this year, we will see the commencement of operations by the American International University for West Africa embarking on the teaching of medicine, dentistry and pharmacology in The Gambia. We strongly believe that these are all avenues to promote the access and participation of women and girls in education and training, especially in science and technology.

The aforementioned initiatives also represent opportunities to promote women's equal access to full employment and decent work. Whereas Gambian women have registered significant strides ascending to senior management levels in the public sector, men still dominate in the upper level cadres of the private enterprises as managers, professionals and technicians while women predominate in the lower levels because they lack training and marketable skills. These challenges have galvanized the government's efforts to improve vocational and technical education as a means of generating dynamic entrepreneurs and technicians. Skills training programmes are now being developed with the view to supply the demands of the labour market. This is why the GamJobs Project, a collaboration between The Gambian Government and the International Labour Organization has been designed with these goals in mind.

**Madam Chairperson,**

Most importantly, education and training should not be a privilege of only the educated women and girls in urban cities and towns. As in most other African and developing countries, the majority of the women folk are to be found in the rural areas and are engaged in agriculture which is the mainstay of our economies. Education and training programmes must also be targeted at this important segment of the workforce particularly in agricultural extension, horticulture, and animal husbandry to enhance women farmers' skills and know-how and in the process, help bring about their economic empowerment.

**Madam Chairperson,**

Let me conclude by reiterating the following observation by George Bernard Shaw, (quote), "Reasonable people adapt themselves to the world. Unreasonable people attempt to adapt the world to themselves. All progress therefore depends on unreasonable people" (unquote). For decades, women worldwide have mobilized, (under the auspices of the UN) and as a result, gender politics and policy have changed for good. Yet a lot more remains undone and are exacerbated by new and more daunting challenges and so the struggle for equality and women's empowerment must continue, unabated.

As the great Mahatma Gandhi puts it – *Women must continue to be the change they wish to see in the world.*

**Thank you.**

