

SUPPORTING TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE PROCESSES IN THE GAMBIA

GIJTR PARTNERS: Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVR), International Coalition of Sites of Conscience (ICSC)

LOCAL PARTNERS: African Network Against Extrajudicial Killings and Enforced Disappearances (ANEKED), Fantanka, Gambia Centre for Victims of Human Rights Violations (VC), Toufah Foundation, Women in Liberation and Leadership (WILL)

TIME FRAME: January 2019 – January 2022



Participants discuss GIJTR-funded projects in December 2019.

PROJECT DETAILS

From 1994-2016, the Yahya Jammeh regime in the Gambia was characterized by gross human rights violations, including torture, enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, and sexual violence. The regime also fueled a division among different ethnic groups that continues today. In 2017, the Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission (TRRC) Act was enacted in the Gambia with the support of President Adama Barrow, who has pledged to break with the Jammeh regime and create opportunities for Gambians to come to terms with the past so that peace and social cohesion can take hold.

The Global Initiative for Justice, Truth and Reconciliation's (GIJTR) work has shown that transitional justice processes, while well-intentioned, are often top-down affairs that provide little relief for victims and survivors, whose experiences must be addressed in order to rebuild and sustain trust in a society that has been fractured by decades of authoritarian rule. To avoid this common challenge, the GIJTR is training local civil society organizations in the Gambia to ensure there is a highly-qualified, coordinated cohort of civil society actors there who can guarantee that victims' and local communities' needs are addressed and that their voices are included in the country's transitional justice process. The GIJTR is also raising awareness among the general public about the TRRC and equipping CSOs with the necessary tools to monitor the transitional justice process for inclusion and transparency given that it is a predominately government-led activity.

PROJECT ACTIVITIES

- **Building the Capacity of Gambian CSOs to Support Transitional Justice Processes:** To ensure that all Gambians can have an active role in the TRRC, the GIJTR is equipping civil society actors with the skills to advocate for inclusive transitional justice mechanisms; raise awareness about truth-telling and justice in marginalized, rural areas; draft effective policy briefs; and engage with victims and survivors in a supportive and dignified manner.
- **Supporting the Launch and Development of Awareness-Raising Projects:** In 2019, the GIJTR provided twelve CSOs with financial and programmatic support for the development of 11 community-led advocacy projects that strive to make the country's TRRC and transitional justice process more inclusive and reflective of victims' needs. The projects included a short video that highlighted the experience of survivors from the Jammeh-era and aired on national TV between TRRC hearings, helping a broad audience to gain a deeper, more compassionate understanding of survivors' post-conflict needs, and a dedication to human rights.
- **Developing Local Advocacy Networks and Strategic Planning Capacities:** To facilitate effective networking and collaboration among civil society actors – which is key to efficient and economical advocacy efforts, and to ensuring that truth and justice remains front and center in society long after the close of the formal TRRC in 2021 – the GIJTR assisted in the development of the first memorialization network in the Gambia – the African Network Against Extrajudicial Killings and Enforced Disappearances (ANEKED), which was founded by 22 victims' families. Through its training with the GIJTR, the network supports an array of ongoing activities, including social media campaigns and traveling exhibits to preserve and share the stories of victims and survivors.
- **Expanding Outreach and Psychosocial Support to Women, Rural and Hard-to-Reach Communities:** The GIJTR worked with local CSOs to create accessible educational materials and connect with women's networks and radio shows to help dispel common misconceptions around the TRRC process to marginalized communities, whose input is necessary to sustaining a peaceful future. The GIJTR also provided extensive training since 2019 to the Gambia's main victims' association, the Gambia Centre for Victims of Human Rights Violations, in psychosocial support to assist survivors who often need additional supports to talk about their traumatic experiences. In 2021, the GIJTR will conduct an art-based documentation project with women to ensure their Jammeh-era experiences do not go unrecorded.
- **Leading TRRC Staff Through a Reflection Process:** Ahead of the TRRC's interim report released in 2020, the GIJTR led a reflection session with TRRC staff to identify lessons learned from the Commission's first year and strategize improvements for the final year.



KEY IMPACT TO DATE

- **A Strengthened and Coordinated Cohort of Gambian CSOs and Victims' Associations:** Through over two years of GIJTR training and support, project participants have recalibrated their work to more effectively impact the Gambia's transitional justice goals. These activities include launching national networks and new advocacy and awareness campaigns to address weaknesses in the TRRC process, weaknesses that – left unaddressed – would have excluded a diversity of women and other marginalized communities from the process.
- **Protocols to Ensure the Security of Women Witnesses:** In collaboration with local partner, Women in Leadership and Liberation, the GIJTR shared concerns from rural dialogues with women survivors, including those who were victims of Jammeh's forced HIV "treatment," with the TRRC to guarantee protocols were in place to ensure the safety of women witnesses – a concern that had previously discouraged women from testifying about their experiences.
- **Establishment of a Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Referral Network:** GIJTR partners coordinated a dedicated Psychosocial Support Unit at the Gambia Centre for Victims of Human Rights Violations (VC) to enable them to better meet the emotional needs of victims and communities in the Gambia. The GIJTR also provided technical and institutional support to the VC to recruit 14 people outside the capital city of Banjul to ensure rurally based victims' needs are met.



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