

SUPPORTING LOCAL CAPACITIES FOR TRUTH, JUSTICE AND SOCIAL COHESION 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), Women in Liberation and Leadership (WILL)

TIME FRAME: January 2019 – December 2022



Gambian participants of a Learning Exchange to Monitor Implementation of TRRC Recommendations in Johannesburg, South Africa.

The December 2016 election of opposition candidate Adama Barrow in The Gambia marked an end to more than two decades of authoritarian rule under former President Yahya Jammeh and ushered in the initiation of transitional justice processes. This included the establishment of the Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission (TRRC) that was mandated to create an impartial historical record of violations and abuses of human rights from July 1994 – January 2017 under Jammeh's regime. The TRRC held public hearings from the January 2019 until May 2021. During this period, 392 witnesses testified, including people who were mentioned in relation to committing crimes, witnesses, and victims. The final TRRC report was submitted to the president of the 25th of November 2021 and was made public on the 24th of December 2021. The TRRC's findings included unlawful killings, enforced disappearances, torture and sexual and gender-based violence. Following the release of the report, the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) published a White Paper on behalf of the Government in which the majority of the TRRC's recommendations were accepted. The MOJ continues to oversee the implementation of the implementation of transitional justice processes in The Gambia and the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) is tasked with monitoring the implementation of the TRRC recommendations.

The Global Initiative for Justice, Truth and Reconciliation (GIJTR, or the Consortium) together with local partners have worked together in a phased approach to contribute to post-conflict truth, justice and reconciliation efforts by ensuring that multiple stakeholders are supported to actively and knowledgeably engage in the transitional justice process, and by bringing diverse groups together to build consensus on common issues and begin a process of trust-building and healing for the many victims of the Jammeh regime. Since 2019, GIJTR partners have trained a core group of 13 Gambian CSOs in skills around strategically engaging with transitional justice processes, designing and implementing participatory awareness-raising initiatives and advocacy campaigns, and integrating community psychosocial support strategies. Over the course of its first three phases, GIJTR's programming in Gambia has evolved from training civil society, to supporting them in their self-designed efforts to bolster the voices of victims and survivors in the country's TJ process and to meet victims' wide-ranging needs. Challenges of securing justice, receiving reparations, seeking truth and building a peaceful and cohesive society remain at the forefront for victims and CSOs. GIJTR promotes a coordinated and inclusive approach to implementation of the TRRC's recommendations and a sustained commitment to transitional justice goals. GIJTR's local partners remain unceasingly engaged in pushing forward a victim-centered transitional justice process in order to ensure that the gains made by a burgeoning transitional justice process do not falter with the conclusion of the TRRC's work.

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. Capacity needs currently under focus for CSOs include social cohesion measures and the implementation of reparations.
- **Expanding outreach and psychosocial Support to Women, Rural and Hard-to-Reach Communities:** The GIJTR 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. Women in Liberation and Leadership (WILL) has successfully implemented women-only listening circles and safe spaces that have allowed women to speak out stigmatized subjects and gain peer support. In 2022, GIJTR extended support to Fantanka for the provision of mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) sessions for victims of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), youth who work informally on the beaches of Banjul ("beach boys") and children of victims of Jammeh's regime.
- **Learning Exchange to Monitor Implementation of TRRC Recommendations:** In November 2022, GIJTR held a learning exchange for representatives from Gambian CSOs and an additional three representatives from the NHRC in Johannesburg, South Africa. The exchange allowed participants to learn more about the role of CSOs and official monitoring bodies as critical voices in monitoring the outcomes and implementation of government-led transitional justice processes. Participants also had direct engagement with prominent South African CSOs and victims associations that continue to pursue justice and reconciliation efforts 26 years after the close of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, with discussion on best practices and lessons learned from the South African case.
- **Development of the First Victim-Led Memorial:** The African Network Against Extrajudicial Killings and Enforced Disappearances (ANEKED), which was founded by 22 victims' families, opened the doors to Memory House in 2021. As the Gambia's first victim-led memorial, Memory House features visual story-telling of victims and the families of victims and provides a platform to amplify their stories and educate fellow Gambians on the violations and ongoing impacts of the previous regime.
- **Making the TRRC Report More Accessible:** Since the TRRC's final report is sixteen volumes long and only available online and in English, GIJTR sought to make the report more accessible. GIJTR partners developed a summary version of the report's compendium to make it more accessible to everyday Gambians through concise explanations of findings and illustrations. These booklets were disseminated to communities by local partners. The Victims' Center translated and recorded the summary text in four local languages (Mandinka, Wolof, Fula and Jola) and aired it on 25 community radio stations and held one-hour live phone-in radio that allowed listeners to call to ask questions and seek clarifications on a the TRRC report. For younger readers, Fatanka created illustrated child-friendly report on the TRRC's purpose, key findings and recommendations in a way that is accessible to youth aged 9-15 years old.



KEY IMPACT TO DATE

- **A Strengthened and Coordinated Cohort of Gambian CSOs and Victims' Associations:** Through over 5 years of GIJTR training and support, local partners 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. With the ongoing transitional justice process, partners have begun to coordinate activities and outreach to communities to ensure that victims remain informed on developments and participate in decision-making processes.

- **Addressing Gaps of the TRRC Report:**

With GIJTR support Local WILL and Fantanka each launched shadow reports to accompany the TRRC final report. Fantanka's shadow report titled Human Rights Violations During the Jammeh Regime: Experiences of Gambian Youth, covered experiences that to date have not been reflected in the transitional justice process, such as the violations committed against youth who work informally on Banjul's beaches. WILL's shadow report highlighted the perspectives of women, girls and marginalized communities on sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) under Jammeh, based on WILL's extensive community work over the past three years. Both reports shone a much needed light on marginalized groups and presented the experiences of groups that face stigma and lack of empathy for the violations experiences.

- **Growth in Access to Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Services:**

A strong cohort of MHPSS-focused organizations have been established that are able to provide individual and group counselling for victims and victims families. Victims may avoid speaking of their experiences, due to the fear stigma and other kinds of backlashes that may emerge from family members and society. The individual and group-focused counseling provided by the Victims' Center and Fantanka and listening circles by WILL, collectively provide victims with a space to unpack their experiences while also breaking down stigmas and understanding that the violations they experienced were not their fault.



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