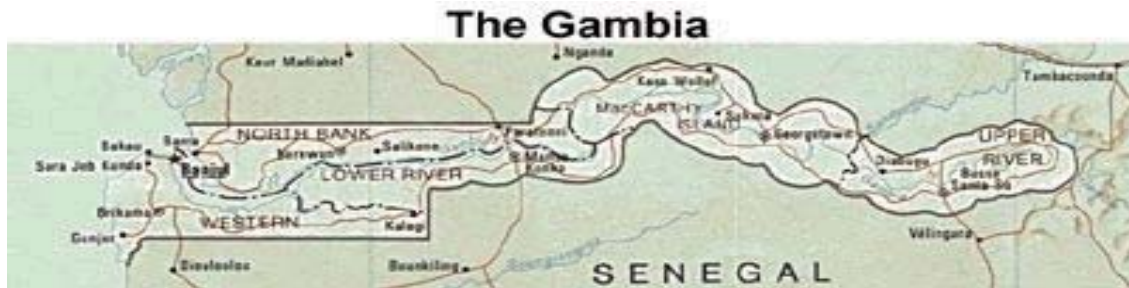




HEALTH MATTERS



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Education Authorities express commitment to the expansion of the WHO Health Academy Project



Banjul, 9th June 2011: The Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education (MOBSE) has expressed its commitment to the expansion of the WHO Health Academy Project to all senior secondary schools in the Gambia. This was disclosed by the Permanent Secretary at MOBSE in a statement delivered at the recently concluded WHO-sponsored mentor training workshop held in preparation for the expansion of the project in the country.



Mentors being guided through the Health Academy modules

The Health Academy Project, a health education and promotion initiative of the World Health Organization, is a distance learning tool designed to disseminate pre-packaged health information resources through Information and Communication Technology (ICT).

Being a health promotion tool, the Health Academy Project represents a *unique interaction* between the learner and the subject by transforming the former from being a mere passive recipient of information to being an *active participant* in knowledge acquisition.



A cross section of participants at opening of the workshop

Packaged in CD ROMs, the Health Academy Project can be used in schools in remote areas without internet connection. This “health information library”, developed by ICT/WHO-Headquarters, provides diverse but pertinent health issues including road safety, physical activity, diet and nutrition, oral and mental health , HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria, to name a few, in a user-friendly and culturally appropriate manner.

With technical and financial support from ICT/ WHO-Headquarters, and in collaboration with the Ministries of Basic and Secondary Education and Health and Social Welfare (MOHSW) and the WHO Country Office (WCO), the project was successfully piloted in **10** Senior Secondary Schools (rural and urban) in the Gambia during the 2009 academic year. About 2000 students took part in the pilot phase.

Indeed, the successful outcome of the pilot constitutes the rationale for the expansion phase which is now being proactively pursued by the three institutions. In support of the expansion process, the Education Permanent Secretary called for strong partnership between the health and education sectors, and therefore thanked the WCO for strengthening that process through this unique project.

He said that health and education heavily impact on each other, noting that better learning in schools can only take place when children are healthy. The Health Academy Project, he noted, offers a window of opportunity to steer that process.

The Health Permanent Secretary, Mr Sekou Omar Toure, also echoed similar sentiments, describing the two sectors as interdependent and inseparable. He said that it is his ministry's priority to ensure that school children are healthy as articulated in the national health policy.

“This is all the more reason, according to Mr Toure, that MOHSW and WCO have been actively pursuing smooth implementation of the WHO Health-Promoting School Initiative in collaboration with MOBSE”.

For his part, the WHO Representative, Dr Thomas Sukwa, whose statement was delivered by NPO/HPR, thanked both ministries for their support and participation in the implementation of the pilot phase of the project. He also pledged WHO's continued support to this expansion phase as well as other school-based health education and promotion interventions in collaboration with both ministries.



Training in progress



The training, facilitated by the WCO, brought together 40 participants from 14 public and private senior secondary schools, ministries of health and education and the media fraternity.

Participants, the majority of whom were teachers, were trained on the basic concept and tools of the Health Academy Project as well as their role as mentors in its implementation. The project is expected to run during the current school term which ends in July 2011.

It will be worth noting that this expansion phase came as a result of increased demand from teachers and students alike during the pilot, having found the project interesting, educative and appropriate for replication. Notwithstanding, the project has also open a window of opportunity for the three institutions to pursue and strengthen the broader school health programme in the Gambia.
