

The Youth Advocacy Network undertakes the international day of the girl child at the Semamaya community. Feremusu Fofanah serves as the chairperson while Ferrmusu Mansaray called the program to order and introduced the chairperson.

In her opening statement, she expressed her excitement and happiness to be in Semamaya community and interact with the people more especially the young girls going to school. She asked everyone present in the gathering to observe one minute silence prayer in their own way of worship before, she introduced the chairperson. After the prayers, she went ahead to introduce the chairperson who happens to be Feremusu A Fofanah a dedicated girl's and women's right advocate. The chairperson took the high table and made her opening statement. In her opening statement, she expressed her gratitude to the Youth Advocacy Network for making this day a reality despite the challenges YAN went through to make this happen it is worth it to be in Semamaya and talk to the people. She further stated that the essence of the visit is to discuss the challenges and problems girls faced on a daily basis in their villages, communities, and societies in general, she continues by stating that the United Nations Organisation set this special day to discuss issues related with girls and plan actions on how to remove these barriers unanimously. She finally stated that this year's theme is "girls vision for the future". She called on the section chief of the Semamaya community to do the welcome address. In his welcoming statement, the chief expressed his happiness seeing YAN to Semamaya community again after some years without coming to the community to organise activities of such nature, he further stated that he can understand the frustration of YAN members which is nothing but the issues of some girls who got pregnant and those who left school. He expressed his disappointment in those girls and urged YAN not to relent in the remaining girls and pledge to support in whatever way YAN demands of him as a section chief. Finally, he presented 4 kola nuts in a cup to YAN signifying a traditional welcome gift and a commitment to collaborate in a new trajectory.

The Kola was received by the chairperson on behalf of the organisation and handed them over to the president.

The chairperson called on the former president (Sajor Jalloh) to make a statement regarding the visit and why Semamaya community instead of Kabala or elsewhere? The former president thanked the chairperson and the people of Semamaya for the massive turnout especially the girls. He continues by stating that this activity is undertaken exclusively by YAN members signifying their love and commitment to Semamaya community especially the girls, he further stated that STA did not support YAN for this activity because of the number of pregnant girls Semamaya have recorded which is 4 over the past years which to STA means Semamaya community is not taking us seriously despite the massive support over the years and still giving more support. But the young members organised themselves and put resources together to make sure this activity happened at Semamaya and for the love and safety of the girls at the community. Finally, he stated that YAN and Semamaya community have a strong bond which means YAN will not watch seeing Semamaya relapsing or going back again without doing nothing and that is why YAN pulled all its strength to make this day a success at Semamaya community, he expressed his joy to see huge number of children to school especially the girls which means we are making progress.

The chairperson called the President (Lamin Mansaray) to make a statement on the relevance of girl child education and empowerment for every family, community and nation. The president expressed his delight for being at Semamaya community again and on this day in particular, he stated that Semamaya is a community YAN will never forget despite the challenges we faced working together which to him these challenges are unavoidable and we all learn from it. Lamin

further stated that if you educate a girl you have educated the family, the community, the district and the nation at large because girls bring development home while boys take development to their wife's home in most cases. He made reference to the South east compared to the North, he stated that the southern province is more developed because they educated their girls and most of our political leaders opt to go for these educated ladies while abandoning their sisters in the north who drop out of school or never went to school despite their beauty. Finally, he urged the parents to monitor their girls and report any sexual harassment to the police or YAN if they cannot reach the police in time, he stated that one of their daughter Patty Kamara has bought a form to study public health at the Koinadugu college through the support of STA which is a great news for Semamaya and a good beginning for the girls at the community.

The chairperson called the Mammy Queen (Women's leader) to make a statement. In her statement, the Mammy Queen expressed her gratitude to YAN for coming back to Semamaya to continue where they stopped because new issues are coming up and they have little ideas on how to solve them but thank God YAN is back in Semamaya which means more souls will be won again. She further stated that Semamaya community is open and free to YAN at anytime and she pledge her support to anything YAN wants her to do in order to achieve the desired outcome for the girls.

The section chief in his statement reiterated that for Semamaya community to achieve this massive school attendance today is because of YAN's intervention which means Semamaya community cannot boast of this without mentioning YAN in the picture. He appealed to YAN to continue coming to Semamaya community to educate the little girls and parents on the importance of girl child education.

The acting headmaster expressed gratitude to YAN for their continued support and advocacy which has given much awareness to the community and a very good school attendance to a point now they need a new building to accommodate the number of pupils in the community.

The female teacher expressed her joy for being part of this conversation and thanked YAN for the continued support towards the community especially awareness campaigns which has a slow but sure results. She further urged the girls to concentrate on their education because education is the key to unlock many opportunities.

The chairman for the Wesleyan mission expressed his admiration for YAN and advised the community to be more calculated because even himself will report about this meeting the mission and explain the roles YAN have played over the years that has yield this massive school turnout, he further stated that he is going to engage the paramount chief for a collective action to tackle the issues of teenage pregnancy and early marriage in Semamaya community. Finally, he stated that if this act continues, the mission will not build any other school in the community and will withdraw from Semamaya and thanks to YAN for bringing this to his attention.

The NACSA representative in the chieftdom in his statement inspired the community people and school going pupils with his story by stating the challenges he overcomed to succeed in life, he stated that he was a teacher and he taught the paramount chief of the chieftdom. He further stated that he support girl child education because his elder sister is a living example who has been so supportive of him and the entire family because she is educated and presently living in the USA. He also expressed disappointment in the community stakeholders for not taking action to end teenage pregnancy and early marriage in Semamaya community and promised to tell the paramount chief about it.

The chairperson thanked various speakers and asked the former president to give recommendations and closing remarks.

The former president asked Semamaya people to pray for late Mr BK for his heroic stands to promote girl child education and take action to stop early marriage and teenage pregnancy, he further urged the parents to form a vigilantee group like what Mr BK did. This vigilantee group will monitor and report any issues of teenage pregnancy and early marriage to YAN or the police. The community people welcomed this idea and pledge to do so soonest. He thanked various speakers and prayed for progress in what YAN is doing at Semamaya community.

Successes:

1. YAN undertake this activity independently.
2. Unity and commitment among YAN members.
3. Community action plan to tackle teenage pregnancy and early marriage in Semamaya community.
4. New forces identified and reckon with to tackle Semamaya issues.
5. School attendance improved massively.
6. Fresh energy to YAN and Semamaya community especially the girls.
7. Effective communication and engagement with the people foster results.

Challenges:

1. Timing
2. Bad road network
3. Heavy rains today
4. Insufficient funding
5. Few members made it to Semamaya while others promised but were unable to go.
6. Language barrier caused delay.

Recommendations:

1. Proper time management from both YAN and Semamaya community.
2. More funding to enable YAN to provide food for more people especially the pupils because this is an opportunity to share food with them.
3. A forecast of weather before undertaking such an activity next time.
4. More activities at Semamaya community to incorporate more girls to school and get them more attracted to learning.
5. Bring more innovative ideas to the program next time.

John Marah

Secretary