

Shadow Report on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Assessing Progress and Challenges in The Gambia

The Association of Non-Governmental Organisations (TANGO)

JULY 2025

Foreword

On behalf of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Civil Society Organizations in The Gambia, I am honoured to present this Shadow Report on the 2025 Voluntary National Review (VNR) of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in The Gambia. This report is both a product and a reflection of the collective efforts, experience, and critical engagement of NGOs and other CSOs working in diverse sectors of development across the country. It captures our independent assessment of The Gambia's progress in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and offers concrete insights, challenges, and recommendations that aim to complement the official national report.

The global commitment to the 2030 Agenda demands inclusive, participatory, and transparent processes, and this Shadow Report reaffirms the critical role that civil society plays in realizing that vision. Across the country, CSOs have remained at the frontline of development—advocating for human rights, social justice, gender equity, environmental sustainability, partnership and accountable governance.

This report is the culmination of months of national and regional consultations, community dialogues, data collection, policy reviews, and validation processes led by CSOs and supported by development partners. It demonstrates that civil society is not merely an observer of the SDGs process but actors and catalyst for sustainable change.

As we look ahead to The Gambia's participation in the High-Level Political Forum (HLPF), this Shadow Report urges policymakers and development partners to listen to the voices of citizens, especially the marginalized and underserved, whose stories often go unheard in official narratives. It highlights gaps in implementation, identifies key structural and policy challenges, and calls for stronger partnerships between government, civil society, and other stakeholders to accelerate progress.

We recognize and appreciate the steps taken by the Government of The Gambia to align national priorities with the SDGs and to open avenues for civil society participation in the VNR process. However, we also believe that more needs to be done to institutionalize inclusive dialogue, invest in local capacities, and strengthen the data ecosystem for evidence-based decision-making.

On behalf of TANGO and all contributing organizations, I extend our gratitude to NGOs, CSOs, grassroots groups and community members who contributed their insights and expertise to this process. We also commend our development partners for their continued support and collaboration.

As we present this report to national stakeholders and the global community, we do so with a firm belief that a just, equitable, and sustainable Gambia is within reach—if we continue to work together with commitment, integrity, and purpose. We hope the Report will serve as a valuable reference document, fostering open dialogue and guiding our collective efforts for generations to come.



Ndey Sireng Bakurin
Executive Director

Acknowledgement

The Board and Management of The Association of Non-Governmental Organisations (TANGO) extend sincere appreciation and gratitude to all NGOs, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and individual experts who actively participated in the development of the Shadow Report on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for The Gambia.

This report is a product of tireless effort, rigorous analysis, and passionate contributions from our diverse CSO community. Your time, expertise, and unwavering dedication to ensuring that no one is left behind in our national development journey are commendable.

We wish to express our profound appreciation to the Government of The Gambia, through the Office of the President, for its continued support and role as host of the National Voluntary National Review (VNR) Steering Committee. Your leadership and engagement with civil society have been critical in shaping a more inclusive and participatory VNR process.

We also extend our sincere gratitude to the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs (MoFEA) for serving as TANGO's lead government partner in this process.

Our sincere appreciation goes to FORUMCIV, Gambiagruppera- (FIOH-S) and Action for Sustainable Development organisation for the financial and technical support that gave basis for the development of the Shadow Report.

Special recognition and heartfelt appreciation go to our Lead Resource Person Mr. Lamin Rene Loua, whose invaluable technical guidance, in-depth research, and strategic coordination significantly enhanced the quality and integrity of the Shadow Report. Your contributions have left a lasting mark on this important work.

We acknowledge the dedicated staff of TANGO who worked diligently throughout the development process of the Shadow Report. From coordination to technical support, communications to logistics, your commitment and teamwork were instrumental in delivering this vital document.

Acronyms

AKI	Acute Kidney Injury
BEmOC	Basic Emergency Obstetric Care
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CEmONC	Comprehensive Emergency Obstetric and Neonatal Care
CSO	Civil Society Organization
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GSDR	Global Sustainable Development Report
HRH	Human Resource for Health
ILO	International Labour Organization
LGA	Local Government Area
MoGCSW	Gender, Children and Social Welfare
MOH	Ministry of Health
MoHERST	Ministry of Higher Education Research Science and Technology's
MSMEs	Micro, small and medium enterprises
NBER	North Bank East Region
NCD	Noncommunicable disease
NHSP	National Health Strategic Plan
NMR	Neonatal mortality rates
PHC	Primary Health Care
RHDs	Regional Health Directorates
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
TANGO	The Association of Non-Governmental Organizations
UHC	Universal Health Coverage
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
VNR	Voluntary National Review
WAVE	Women's Association of Victim
WHR 1	West Health Region 1
YEP	Youth Empowerment Project

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Introduction

Civil Society is indispensable in driving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Nations, 2015). Their active engagement spans across planning, executing, and monitoring various sustainable development initiatives, ensuring the inclusivity of diverse perspectives throughout the process. By involving a wide range of stakeholders, Civil Society helps to ensure that no one is left behind in the pursuit of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Moreover, their role extends to holding duty-bearers accountable, promoting transparency, and building public trust by ensuring that commitments made by authorities are met. This accountability is critical in achieving the SDGs, as it helps to highlight areas where progress is lagging and where additional efforts are needed.

The first CSOs People's report on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) implementation in The Gambia is part of the Voluntary National Review (VNR) process that countries committed to during the adoption of Agenda 2030.

This report will serve as annexures to the country's official VNR report, and aims to track The Gambia's progress in achieving Agenda 2030 through the lens of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), and will spotlight specific aspects of SDG delivery.

The report draws attention to the halfway point of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, underscoring the substantial divergence from the intended course. This is evident in the figure that summarises the current status of the Sustainable Development Goals. Without urgent course correction and acceleration, humanity will face prolonged periods of crisis and uncertainty—triggered by and reinforcing poverty, inequality, hunger, disease, conflict, and disaster. At a global level, the “Leave no one behind” principle is at significant risk.

The 2023 Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR), themed “Times of Crisis, Times of Change: Science for Accelerating Transformations to Sustainable Development”, found that at this critical juncture—midway to 2030—incremental and fragmented change is insufficient to achieve the SDGs in the remaining seven years¹. The 2023 report says that implementation of the 2030 Agenda requires the active mobilisation of political leadership and ambition for science-based transformations. It is crucial to achieve this globally, with no country, society, or person left behind. The report is an invitation to embrace transformations with the urgency needed to accelerate progress towards the SDGs.

The 2024 Sustainable Development Report highlighted that on average, *only 16 percent of the SDG targets are on track to be met globally by 2030*, and that at the global level, SDG progress has been stagnant since 2020, with SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), SDG 14 (Life Below Water), SDG 15 (Life on Land) and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) particularly off track.² The report also highlighted key data gaps for all SDGs and this includes SDG 3: Health care system resilience and preparedness to face global health risks, SDG 5: gender pay gap and other empowerment measures & violence against women as well as SDG 17: development impact of trade practices.³

This civil society report aims to review The Gambia's progress of the Sustainable Development Goals from the people's perspective, providing an independent assessment of progress. It seeks to amplify the voices of grassroots and marginalised communities, foster multi-stakeholder engagement, and highlight key challenges and opportunities, with the

¹ Independent Group of Scientists appointed by the Secretary-General, Global Sustainable Development Report 2023: Times of crisis, times of change: Science for accelerating transformations to sustainable development, (United Nations, New York, 2023).

² Sustainable Development Report 2024 – The SDGs and the UN Summit of the Future

³ Sustainable Development Report 2024 – The SDGs and the UN Summit of the Future

principle of Leaving No One Behind as a cross-cutting agenda. The report is intended to complement the government's Voluntary National Review report, not compete with it.

Methodology

As the first Civil Society Organization (CSO) shadow report for The Gambia, this report marks a significant step toward enhancing transparency, accountability, and inclusive participation in the country's development agenda. It adopts a structured and systematic methodology for analyzing and classifying progress on selected Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with the aim of offering a credible historical narrative and a clear picture of the current national context.

The methodology used to develop the shadow report involved an extensive desk review of policy documents, government reports, CSO publications, and international data sources. This was complemented by consultations with key stakeholders to validate the findings and ensure that the perspectives of grassroots organizations and marginalized voices were adequately reflected. The report focuses on the SDGs prioritized for The Gambia's 2025 Voluntary National Review (VNR), ensuring that it contributes meaningfully to both national discourse and global accountability efforts.

In addition to the desk review and stakeholder consultations, a Civil Society Organization (CSO) scorecard was developed as a participatory tool to gather relevant data from CSOs actively engaged in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in The Gambia. This scorecard allowed for the systematic collection of insights, experiences, and progress assessments from grassroots actors, advocacy groups, and development partners working across various thematic areas.

Finally, to accurately assess the status of each SDG target, a classification system was adopted to evaluate the Government of The Gambia's level of implementation. This system provided a structured framework for categorizing progress based on available data, policy actions, and institutional efforts. By assigning clear classifications—such as on track, moderately progressing, or off track—the report offers a concise yet informative overview of how well the country is advancing toward its SDG commitments. This approach also helps to identify specific areas requiring greater attention, resources, or policy shifts to accelerate progress.

Target Classification

SETBACK Policies or actions were disrupted, altered or defunded

AT RISK Compromised by detrimental actions or a lack of action;

STAGNANT No statistically significant indication of improvement or regression;

INSUFFICIENT PROGRESS Lacking sufficient progress to achieve implementation;

SATISFACTORY PROGRESS Being implemented and may be achieved by completion of the 2030 Agenda.

Civil Society Scorecard

The scorecard provides an assessment of the current level of implementation of the selected goals. By taking into consideration the following parameters: (1) Policy and legal Frameworks, (2) Sectoral Plans, Strategies and Programs, (3) Institutional commitment, (4) Implementation progress of policies and strategies (5) Capacity Building, (6) Monitoring, Evaluation and reporting, (7) Transparency and Accountability (8) overall progress. The final score is computed once the group rates each target relevant for the country or constituency on a scale of 1-5 based on the parameters provided in the matrix. An average is calculated to determine the final score.

Rating	Parameters
Very Low Progress (1)	Policy frameworks are being developed or updated in light of the SDGs for most targets; progress on this SDG is still minimal but showing positive early trends
Low Progress (2)	Policy frameworks are starting to be meaningfully implemented; progress is slowly starting to be seen for some of the targets in this SDG
Medium Progress (3)	Policy frameworks are starting to show positive outcomes for most targets; progress for this SDG shows a positive trend
High Progress (4)	Policy frameworks are consolidating, and their implementation shows continuous positive outcomes for most targets; most of the targets for this SDG are on track to be achieved
Very High Progress (5)	Strong and successful policy frameworks guide government programs effectively and in line with SDG principles. Statistical indicators show that all of the targets for this SDG will be achieved

Goal 3: Good Health and well-being

Introduction and context

Goal 3 of the SDG agenda aims to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.

The Gambia has been making improvements in advancing health care in all the regions in the country. A pivotal achievement is the development of a comprehensive National Health Strategic Plan (2021-2025) and National Health Policy (2021-2030) which anchors in the ideals of resilience, Universal Health Coverage (UHC), and strategic initiatives to combat major diseases. In the realm of Gambian healthcare, there has been notable progress, yet considerable challenges persist. While the national standards indicate that only approximately 50% of the villages in Gambia have been integrated into the Primary Health Care (PHC) networks,⁴ it is important to recognize the triumphs that have been achieved amidst these difficulties. Notably, the delivery of Primary Health Care services has been effectively extended to all secondary and tertiary health facilities, showcasing the commitment to comprehensive healthcare provision.

The Gambia has a three-tier system for the delivery of public health services, the Ministry of Health (MOH) is on the top level responsible for setting health policies, regulations, research and mobilizing resources. The regional level, which comprises of seven care responsible for implementing the policies and programs of the MoH and act as Regional Health Directorates. The RHDs oversee the provision of health care delivery and provide stewardship for primary and secondary levels of care in the peripheral

health facilities within their regions. At the primary level, health care is delivered through the village health services by village health workers who provide promotive and preventive health care.⁵ Between 2022 and 2025, the national health budget allocated to the Ministry of Health experienced a notable decline, dropping from 9.53% to 9.27% of the total national budget⁶. This allocation includes both development and recurrent expenditures, which are critical for sustaining the delivery of essential health services, maintaining infrastructure, ensuring adequate staffing, and procuring vital medical supplies and equipment.^{7,8} The reduction in budgetary allocation raises significant concerns about the country's ability to meet its health-related threats. A shrinking health budget will limit the government's capacity to expand service delivery and coverage, invest in preventive care, or respond to regional disparities (second tier of service delivery).

The Gambia, like its counterparts, has confronted a pressing challenge in the form of a scarcity and unequal distribution of its health workforce. The 2022 adopted Human Resource for Health (HRH) strategy (2022-2026) exposes a glaring disparity: the country's skilled health workers per 1,000 people stand at a modest 1.33, falling short of the WHO benchmark of at least 2.5.⁹ The situation is compounded by a skewed allocation of health professionals towards urban and semi-urban regions, leaving remote areas in a dearth of medical

⁴ 2022- Annual Report WHO – The Gambia - <https://www.afro.who.int/sites/default/files/2024-02/The%20Gambia%20Annual%20Report%202022.pdf>

⁵ National health Policy 2021-2030, https://www.moh.gov.gm/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/FINAL-HEALTH-POLICY-2021-2030_18.01.22.pdf

⁶ <https://mofea.gov.gm/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/2025-Approved-Budget-Citizens-Version.pdf>

⁷ <https://mofea.gov.gm/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/2022-approved-budget.pdf>

⁸ https://mofea.gov.gm/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/2025_Aproved_Budget-Final.pdf

⁹ <https://databank.worldbank.org/metadataglossary/health-nutrition-and-population-statistics/series/SH.MED.CMHW.P3>

expertise.¹⁰ In 2019, the core health workforce density was at 25.7% with 11.4% service utilization for both inpatient and outpatient services. The low utilization of service delivery is attributed to the lack of infrastructure in the country, which has an inpatient bed density, maternity bed density, and facility availability rate of just 48.8%.¹¹ Additionally, in 2023, a survey conducted by the Directorate of Human Resources and Health indicated that the health work force comprised of two thousand seven hundred and seventy-five (2,775) health workers in The Gambia compared to six thousand one hundred and fifty-two health workers in 2021¹². Out this number, general nurses constituted the highest density threshold per 1000 population with 0.52, followed by nurse midwives and public health personnel with 0.15 and 0.13 respectively (in 2023). The radiology and physiotherapy personnel constitute the least with 0.01 each per 1000 population¹³.

As of 2024, there were 8 hospitals operating in the country. These hospitals include one specialized hospital, one teaching, five general hospitals and one private hospital. There were four district hospitals and six major health centers and both the district hospitals and health centers are expected to provide a Comprehensive Emergency Obstetric and Neonatal Care (CEmONC). A total of fifty (50) minor health care services are distributed across all the regions in the country.¹⁴ In The Gambia, the distribution of health facilities and personnel remains heavily skewed toward urban areas, resulting in significant inequities in access to healthcare services. The majority of well-equipped health facilities and trained health professionals are concentrated in urban centers, particularly in the Western Region, that is the Greater Banjul Area, which continues to receive a disproportionately large share of the country's health resources.

In the Upper River Region, Lower River Region, and North Bank West Region—three of the eight Local Government Areas (LGAs) in The Gambia—there is a significant gap in access to advanced healthcare services. These regions lack both general and specialized hospitals, relying instead on a single district hospital and one major health center per region to serve the entire population. As a result, patients with serious or complex medical conditions must often be referred to the country's only teaching hospital in Banjul or to one of the five general hospitals located in other LGAs. This referral system places a heavy burden on patients and their families, especially given the long travel distances, transportation costs, and potential delays in receiving critical care. The absence of higher-level health facilities in these regions not only limits timely access to life-saving interventions but also contributes to regional health disparities and strains the national healthcare system. While The Gambia has made substantial strides in healthcare access and delivery, it is critical to address disparities between urban and rural areas. The concentration of healthcare facilities in urban regions underscores the need for equitable distribution to ensure comprehensive health services reach all corners of the nation.¹⁵

Furthermore, Non-Communicable Diseases (NCD) are overtaking infectious diseases over the past two decades. This is largely attributable to certain lifestyle factors such as diet, sedentary behaviour, alcohol consumption, cigarette smoking and many others. Stringent policies and intensive public health awareness campaigns are being implemented to curb the rising trend in cases, but little success have been achieved so far. Hypertension remains the

¹⁰ 2022- Annual Report WHO – The Gambia - <https://www.afro.who.int/sites/default/files/2024-02/The%20Gambia%20Annual%20Report%202022.pdf>

¹¹ National Health Policy 2021-2030, MOH Republic of the Gambia

¹² Service statistic report 2021.

¹³ Service Statistics Report 2023, <https://moh.gov.gm/service-statistics/>

¹⁴ Service Statistics Report 2021 & 2023, <https://moh.gov.gm/service-statistics/>

¹⁵ 2022- Annual Report WHO – The Gambia - <https://www.afro.who.int/sites/default/files/2024-02/The%20Gambia%20Annual%20Report%202022.pdf>

most prevalent noncommunicable disease (NCD) in The Gambia, affecting 32.6% of the population¹⁶. It is followed by diabetes, which has a prevalence rate of 10%, and asthma at 4.2%. As of 2023, 24,088 individuals had been diagnosed with type 1 diabetes, while 7,178 were living with type 2 diabetes. In contrast, recorded cases of certain cancers remain relatively low, with only 40 cases of prostate cancer and 17 cases of lung cancer reported nationwide. These figures highlight the growing burden of NCDs and the need for enhanced prevention and management strategies.¹⁷

In 2022, The Gambia experienced a tragic public health crisis when 66 children died from acute kidney injury (AKI) linked to contaminated cough syrups. The outbreak was first reported in July, when a paediatric nephrologist at Edward Francis Small Teaching Hospital alerted the Ministry of Health to a cluster of AKI cases among children. Investigations revealed that the affected children had consumed syrup-based medications imported from Maiden Pharmaceuticals, an Indian manufacturer. Laboratory analyses confirmed the presence of diethylene glycol and ethylene glycol—industrial chemicals toxic to humans—in the syrups. These substances can cause severe kidney damage, leading to the high fatality rate observed during the outbreak.¹⁸ The crisis highlighted the vulnerabilities in pharmaceutical regulation and the need for stronger quality control measures, especially in low-resource settings. It also underscored the importance of international cooperation in responding to public health emergencies.

Performance on Targets

The Association of Non-Governmental Organizations (TANGO) reviewed Gambia's performance on Goal 3, considering the national context and features of good health and well-being, policies and government commitment to the quality of life of the people.

Target 3.1 By 2030, reduce the global maternal mortality ratio to less than 70 per 100,000 live births.

Maternal Mortality ratio has been *stagnant* since 2019/20. The Gambia's Maternal Mortality Rate (MMR) currently stands at 289 for every 100,000 live births according to the 2019/20 Demographic and Health Survey.¹⁹ No official data on maternal mortality has been recorded or published since 2019, creating a significant gap in the country's ability to track progress toward SDG 3.1, which aims to reduce the global maternal mortality ratio to less than 70 per 100,000 live births by 2030. With current trends, the country is highly unlikely to meet its SDG target.

Additionally, the rate of mortality associated with pregnancy and childbearing in The Gambia is 0.43 maternal deaths per 1,000 woman-years of exposure. The estimated age-specific mortality rate is highest among women aged 40–44 (0.97) and lowest among women aged 45–49 (0.00) and those age 15–19 (0.07).²⁰ The low mortality rate among women aged 45–49 could be older women may have fewer children overall, but pregnancies later in life can carry

¹⁶ Service Statistics Report 2021 & 2023, <https://moh.gov.gm/service-statistics/>

¹⁷ https://moh.gov.gm/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Final-Draft-2023-Service-Statistics-Report-1.docx_updated_1_compressed.pdf

¹⁸ Acute Kidney Injury Among Children Likely Associated with Diethylene Glycol Contaminated Medications — The Gambia, June September 2022, <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9997663/>

¹⁹ https://www.moh.gov.gm/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/FINAL-JAR-REPORT-15-11-22_compressed.pdf

²⁰ GDHS 2019–20

higher risks due to age-related health complications such as preeclampsia and other conditions that can complicate childbirth.

Although data has not been available over the past five years (from 2020), several initiatives have been undertaken to enhance and strengthen the health system's capacity to provide quality emergency obstetric care services, ultimately contributing to safer deliveries. In 2022, a UNFPA initiative in The Gambia's Kiang East District yielded positive results with no maternal deaths reported out of 264 health facility deliveries.²¹ Despite some progress made, maternal mortality still remains high due to inadequate access to emergency obstetric care services, particularly in rural areas. While the number of facilities providing Comprehensive Emergency Obstetric Care (CEmOC) is sufficient, the availability of Basic Emergency Obstetric Care (BEmOC) services is significantly low. Additionally, the disparity in the distribution of emergency obstetric services is uneven, with rural areas facing significant disadvantages in accessing life-saving interventions such as caesarean sections.²²

Target 3.2. end preventable deaths of newborns and children under 5 years of Age
Progress towards reducing under-5 mortality and neonatal mortality rates (NMR) in The Gambia have experienced notable setbacks, making it challenging to meet the national and global targets outlined under SDG 3.2. While there have been past improvements in child survival, recent trends indicate a stagnation in monitoring both under five mortality and neonatal mortality rate, particularly in the neonatal period—the first 28 days of life. From 2013 to 2021, under-5 mortality in The Gambia increased from 54 to 56 deaths per 1,000 live births, and infant mortality increased from 34 to 42 deaths per 1,000 live births.²³ In 2018, the MICS recorded under-5 mortality and infant mortality rates at 61 and 44 respectively.²⁴ The infant mortality rate is higher among children born to mothers under age 20 and mothers aged 40–49 (59 and 57 deaths per 1,000 live births, respectively) than among children born to mothers aged 20–29 and 30–39²⁵. The under-5 mortality rate is three times as high among children with birth intervals of less than 2 years (116 deaths per 1,000 live births) as among children with birth intervals of 4 or more years (38 deaths per 1,000 live births).²⁶

The Infant welfare clinics across the country have been playing a crucial role in combating under-five morbidity and mortality. In 2023, one hundred and forty-five thousand, four hundred and twenty (145,420) children under 1 month were attended and provided care. This is a huge increase from the previous year (2022) when 97,482 were attended. Figure 1 illustrates the trend in new infant care from 2019 to 2023, covering both neonates (children under 28 days old) and infants older than 28 days.

²¹ https://gambia.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/unfpa_annual_report_2022_8.pdf

²² <https://gambia.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/2025-04/UNFPA%20THE%20GAMBIA%20ANNUAL%20REPORT%202024.pdf>

²³ The Gambia Demographic Health survey, (GDHS) 2019-20

²⁴ Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, 2018

²⁵ GDHS 2019-20

²⁶ The Gambia Demographic Health Survey, 2019-20

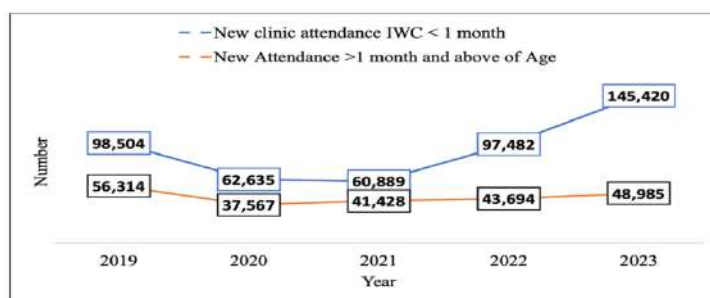


Figure : Trend of new infant welfare clinic attendance by age. Extracted/sourced from the Annual Service statistic report 2023 -

Target 3.3 end the epidemics of AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and neglected tropical diseases and combat hepatitis, water-borne diseases and other communicable diseases

Target 3.3 has seen some progress over the past five years; however, significant gaps remain, indicating the need for continued efforts and targeted interventions to accelerate progress and achieve the desired outcomes. Malaria still remains a public health problem in The Gambia with an estimated 213,311 cases in 2021 (incidence rate of 80.8 cases per 1,000), resulting in 615 deaths²⁷ which was responsible for 7 percent of deaths among children under age 5 in 2022²⁸. From 2021 to 2023, there has been an upward trend in malaria incidence per 1,000 population, with Figure 2 illustrating the fluctuation and inconsistency in the pattern over this period. This suggests ongoing challenges in malaria control and the need for strengthened prevention and response efforts.

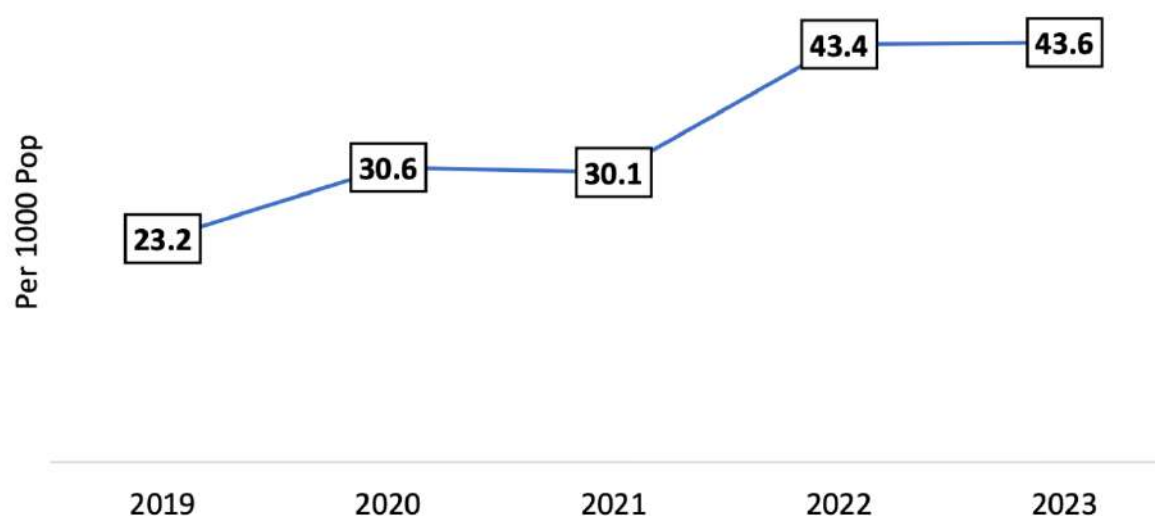


Figure :Trend of reported malaria incidence per 1000 population from 2019 - 2023²⁹

The inpatient malaria deaths in the country per 100,000 population has also been inconsistent since 2021. In 2021, under-five mortality due to malaria was recorded at 4.8 deaths per 100,000 population. This figure declined to 2.5 in 2022, indicating progress in malaria-related child health outcomes. However, the rate rose again to 3.4 in 2023, highlighting a reversal in

²⁷ WHO Country disease outlook, The Gambia 2023

²⁸ World Health Organization (WHO). (2022). *World Malaria Report 2022*. World Health Organization. Available at: www.who.int

²⁹ Service statistic report 2023

gains and underscoring the need for sustained and adaptive malaria prevention and treatment efforts targeting young children.

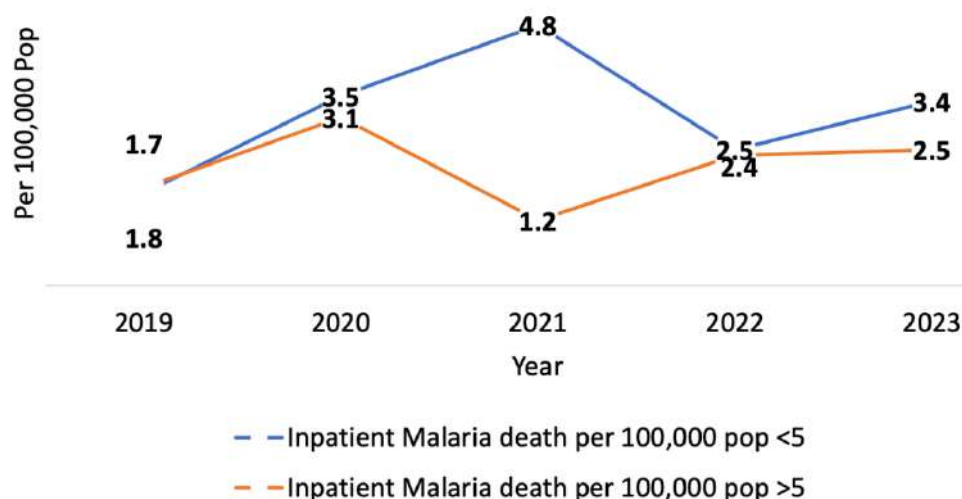


Figure : Inpatient malaria death per 100,000 population --sourced from the 2023 MOH Service Statistics report

A cornerstone achievement was the formulation of comprehensive Malaria Surveillance guidelines and Standard Operating Procedures (SoPs) and the formulation of the first Integrated Vector Management plan. These guidelines, fostered with WCO's support, play a pivotal role in gauging progress toward the country's mission of eliminating malaria in The Gambia. They

enable accurate tracking of both the decline in malaria-related morbidity and mortality.³⁰

Tuberculosis (TB) is one of the notifiable diseases that requires special attention for timely detection, testing, treatment and follow-up. In 2021, a total of 2,279 TB case notification was registered nationally. The majority of new cases were registered in West Health Region (WHR) 1 and West Health Region (WHR) 2 with 51.5% and 25.8% respectively, while North Bank East Region (NBER) and North Bank West Region (NBWR) registered the lowest new cases with 2.7% and 2.6% respectively.³¹ Additionally, in 2023, an average of 212 cases were reported per month from January to December of the number of adult and childhood TB cases³².

In the year 2020, The Gambia maintained a low overall prevalence of HIV, with a prevalence rate of 1.5% among individuals aged 15-49, as reported by twelve sentinel surveillance sites. This achievement signifies the country's concerted efforts in managing HIV. Nonetheless, a noteworthy challenge persists: the disproportionate prevalence of HIV among key populations. Female sex workers (FSW) exhibit an 11% prevalence, reflecting the need for targeted interventions.³³

As previously noted, The Gambia's health sector has made notable progress in expanding service delivery across the country. However, despite these efforts, the pace of progress toward achieving the 2030 health-related targets remains insufficient. One of the key barriers

³⁰ <https://www.afro.who.int/sites/default/files/2024-02/The%20Gambia%20Annual%20Report%202022.pdf>

³¹ Service Statistics Report 2021

³² Service Statistics report 2023

³³ <https://www.afro.who.int/sites/default/files/2024-02/The%20Gambia%20Annual%20Report%202022.pdf>

hindering further advancement is the challenge of inadequate budgetary allocations. Limited and declining financial resources continue to constrain the Ministry of Health's ability to scale up essential services, invest in infrastructure and human resources, and respond effectively to the growing health needs of the population.

Policy and institutional readiness

The Gambia has demonstrated its commitment to strengthening the health sector and achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals through the adoption of two key policy frameworks: the National Health Strategic Plan (NHSP) 2021–2025 and the Vision 2030 National Health Policy (2021–2030).³⁴ The NHSP serves as a medium-term operational framework that guides implementation across key pillars such as health systems strengthening, human resources for health, service delivery, health infrastructure, and data-driven monitoring and evaluation. It prioritizes equitable access, especially in underserved areas, and supports the achievement of Universal Health Coverage (UHC).³⁵

Complementing this, the Vision 2030 National Health Policy³⁶ provides a long-term strategic direction focused on building a resilient, inclusive, and sustainable health system. It emphasizes equity, community participation, and health system resilience, while addressing key health priorities including maternal and child health, communicable and non-communicable diseases, and emergency preparedness. Together, these policies form a comprehensive foundation for health sector reform in The Gambia and are central to accelerating progress toward SDG 3 and related targets.

The Ministry of Health (MOH) further strengthened the departments policies by introducing the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) in 2021. This was an important milestone towards achieving Universal Health coverage (UHC) in the country and reduce out-of-pocket medical expenses of the general citizenry.³⁷ The successful pilot launch of the NHIS at the Bundung Maternal and childcare hospital in 2023 has resulted in the expansion of the NHIS to additional 12 public health facilities, including major hospitals such as the Kanifing General hospital, Bwiam General Hospital and the Edward Francis Small Teaching Hospital in Banjul. The implementation of the NHIS as of March 2025 saw additional 54 public health facilities included nationwide.³⁸

Additionally, in 2022, as part of the Ministry of Health's annual expenditure plan, several key health infrastructure projects were completed across the country to strengthen service delivery and institutional readiness. These included the construction of a Cancer and Trauma Center in Farato, a Cardio Surgery Facility at Edward Francis Small Teaching Hospital in Banjul³⁹, a National Public Health Laboratory in Kotu⁴⁰, and a Blood Transfusion Center in Kanifing. These facilities represent significant investments in specialized healthcare and continue to enhance the country's capacity to provide quality, accessible, and life-saving health services.

³⁴ https://www.moh.gov.gm/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/FINAL-HEALTH-POLICY-2021-2030_18.01.22.pdf

³⁵ National Health Strategic Plan 2021-2025.

³⁶ https://www.moh.gov.gm/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/FINAL-HEALTH-POLICY-2021-2030_18.01.22.pdf

³⁷ <https://foroyaa.net/nhia-set-to-expand-national-health-insurance-scheme.com>

³⁸ <https://thepoint.gm/africa/gambia/national-news/special-report-nhis-intensifies-efforts-to-ensure-affordable-and-accessible-healthcare-service-in-gambia?.com>

³⁹ <https://thepoint.gm/africa/gambia/headlines/efsth-inaugurates-multi-million-dalasi-cardiology-unit.com>

⁴⁰ <https://hub.unido.org/labnet/national-public-health-laboratories.com>

Gaps and Accelerators

Civil society's assessment of the country's performance on Goal 3 revealed the following gaps, challenges and accelerators

Assessment of Gaps

- Insufficient allocation of funds from central government to MOH. This affects normal operations at programs, RHDs, and Health facilities.
- Uncoordinated M&E systems to enhance accountability and transparency
- Inadequate health facilities and infrastructure for storage of medical supplies, accommodation sanitary facilities.
- Lack of funding to conduct operational research to guide program decisions.
- Conflict of interest in quality-care verification and provision.
- Lack of systematic appraisal systems and grievance redress mechanisms.

Accelerators

- To bolster health care service delivery in The Gambia, the Ministry of Health should implement a centralized electronic medical records system. This system would securely store patient data, enabling healthcare providers to access essential information quickly and deliver more efficient, continuous care without having to repeatedly start from scratch.
- Utilize Primary Health approach as a strategy to give health education to the people especially those in hard-to-reach areas to enable informed decision making and build trust in the health system.

Interlinkages

In the context of The Gambia, Good Health and Well-being (SDG 3) is deeply interconnected with other key Sustainable Development Goals. Notably, it links with SDG 1 (No Poverty), as access to quality healthcare reduces the risk of medical expenses driving families into poverty and enables individuals to contribute productively to society. It also relates closely to SDG 5 (Gender Equality), since improving health outcomes—especially maternal and reproductive health—depends on empowering women with the right services and information, which benefits entire communities. Additionally, achieving SDG 3 relies heavily on SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals), as effective collaboration between government, international partners, civil society, and local communities is essential to mobilize resources and coordinate actions to tackle the country's health challenges.

Conclusion

The Gambia has made limited efforts toward achieving overall well-being at all ages, and significant gaps remain within the health sector that hinder progress toward this goal. Despite the existence of national policies and strategies (discussed earlier), implementation has been inconsistent and often underfunded. Key health indicators such as under-five and maternal mortality remain high, with little recent data to track improvements due to weak health information systems.

Instances of negligence, including reports of poor patient care, lack of timely emergency services, and preventable deaths in health facilities, have raised public concern and eroded

trust in the system. Moreover, essential medicines and equipment are often unavailable in public health centers, particularly in rural areas, forcing patients to travel long distances or resort to private services at their own cost. We can't discuss negligence without talking about the elephant in the room – the lack of accountability with the AKI related deaths. It's coming to three years and no one has been held accountable for the deaths of 66 children. This is a serious instance that needs to be addressed by the government and those found wanting be brought to justice.

A lack of transparency and weak accountability mechanisms has further exacerbated these challenges. Oversight of health expenditures and service delivery remains limited, with few consequences for underperformance or misuse of resources. In some cases, community feedback systems are either non-existent or ineffective, leaving patients without a voice in the quality of care they receive.

Addressing these lapses requires not only increased investment in the sector but also a stronger culture of accountability, better governance, and community engagement to ensure that all citizens—regardless of age or location—have access to quality, respectful, and timely healthcare services.

BOX 1: Civil Society Scorecard

The Civil scorecard developed rated the Gambia's performance of Goal 3 as **level 2: low progress**

Areas	Rating
Governance and Policy Frameworks	3
Plans and Strategies	3
Institutional commitment	3
Implementation Progress	3
Capacity Building	3
Monitoring, Evaluation and reporting	2
Transparency and Accountability	2
Overall Progress	3
Total	2.75

The Gambia has policies, strategies and plans in place for implementing SDG 3. Some of these policies include National Health Policy (2021-2030) provides a long-term strategic direction focused on building a resilient, inclusive, and sustainable health system. However, there remains a significant gap in transparency, accountability, and the systematic monitoring, evaluation, and reporting of medical and health-related progress in the country. Mechanisms for tracking outcomes, assessing the effectiveness of health interventions, and providing timely and accurate public reporting are either weak or inconsistently applied.

Updated data on MMR and NMR are lacking which hinders insight in the country's progress in the six (6) years. There is a pressing need to strengthen transparency and accountability mechanisms within the medical and health sector, as doing so is essential for fostering public trust, ensuring responsible use of resources, and improving the quality and equity of healthcare delivery.

Goal 5: Achieve Gender Equality and Empower Women and Girls

Introduction and Context

The Gambia has made efforts to accelerate gender equality and women's empowerment through legislation, policies and programmes. Despite this progress, more efforts are needed to achieve gender equality by 2030.

The Gambia has developed legislation and policies to ensure women's full and effective participation in the economy and equal leadership opportunities across political, economic, and public life. Women's socio-economic development is supported by specific plans, strategies, and programmes across all the three spheres of government. Despite an existing legal framework, relevant policies, reformed institutional structures, and women empowerment initiatives aimed at addressing gender gaps, significant disparities continue to exist in The Gambia. Women mostly continue to be significantly affected by poverty and unemployment. The National Development Plan (2018-2021) noted that "While significant steps have been taken for the empowerment of women through several legislative acts, as well as vigorous efforts to ensure gender parity in primary education, the welfare of the Gambian women continues to lag significantly behind that of men."⁴¹

Patriarchal norms are prevalent in The Gambia and explain the existence of gender inequality in different areas of the society. Men are recognised as heads, in charge of decision-making at different levels, from the family to politics.⁴² Women occupy a lower position in the social cadre.

According to the 2022 Gender Global Gap Report, The Gambia ranks 115 of 146 in political empowerment.⁴³ The Gambia ranks 49th out of 54 countries in Africa in female parliamentary representation, indicating very low representation compared to the rest of the continent.⁴⁴ With less than 10% of female parliament representative, The Gambia also has among the lowest percentage of female representation in the National Assembly, significantly behind other African countries such as Rwanda (51.9%) South Africa (48.6%), Ethiopia (47.6%), Seychelles (45.5%), Uganda (36.7%) and Mali (34.4%).⁴⁵

The trend of low representation of women in politics has continued in the most recent elections. In the 2021 Gambia Presidential Election, of the 26 presidential aspirants, only one was a woman, and all 6 nominated presidential candidates were men.⁴⁶ The number of female candidates for the legislative elections in April 2022 was still very low, with only 19 female candidates out of 251 candidates. Out of the 19 female candidates only 3 were elected to the National Assembly.

⁴¹ National Gender Analysis for The Gambia, 2022. UNFPA

⁴² Tamara Bah, From the Smiling Coast of Africa to the World: What the Gambia Can Teach Us about Women and Household Empowerment, World Bank (2019), online: <From the smiling coast of Africa to the world: What The Gambia can teach us about women and household empowerment (worldbank.org)>

⁴³ World Economic Forum "Global Gender Gap Report 2022Insight Report" (March 2021) online: WEF_GGGR_2022.pdf (weforum.org)

⁴⁴ Women Political Participation: African Barometer (2021) Accessed via <https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/womens-political-participation-africa-barometer2021.pdf>

⁴⁵ National Gender Analysis 2022, UNFPA, <https://gambia.unfpa.org/en/publications/national-gender-analysis-gambia-june-2022>

⁴⁶ European Union, (2015). Election Observation Mission. Gambia Presidential Election Final Report

WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN LEGISLATIVE ELECTION (ELECTION 2022)

GENDER	NUMBER OF WOMEN PARTICIPANTS	%
ELECTED	3	15.8%
NOT ELECTED	16	84.2%
TOTAL	19	100%

Figure : Participation of Women in legislative elections (2022) - Source : UNFPA National Gender Analysis report 2022

As of 2025, women occupy only 8.6% ⁴⁷ of the seats in The Gambia's National Assembly, highlighting the persistent underrepresentation of women in political leadership and decision-making spaces. Despite national and international commitments to gender equality - such as SDG 5, which calls for full and effective participation of women at all levels of political and public life - progress has been slow and uneven.

Between 2022 and 2025, The Gambia experienced a significant national debate over the future of its 2015 ban on Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). In March 2024, a bill introduced at the National Assembly sought to repeal the ban, arguing that FGM was a cultural and religious practice integral to Gambian identity.⁴⁸ The proposal passed its second reading with minimal opposition, sparking widespread concern among human rights organizations and women's rights activists. The bill's advancement prompted intense public discourse, with activists, survivors, and civil society groups mobilizing to oppose the repeal. The collective efforts of various women groups contributed to the National Assembly's decision on July 15, 2024, to reject the bill, thereby upholding the ban and reaffirming the country's commitment to protecting the rights and well-being of women and girls.⁴⁹

From a civil society perspective, gender equality in The Gambia remains an area of concern, with progress falling short of national commitments and international obligations under frameworks such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). While the government has enacted important legal and policy instruments - including the Women's Act (2010) and the National Gender Policy (2021–2030) - implementation and enforcement remain inconsistent and underfunded.⁵⁰ Civil society organizations recognize recent positive developments, such as the National Assembly's rejection of the bill to repeal the FGM ban in 2024, which reaffirmed the country's legal commitment to protecting girls and women.⁵¹ However, genuine gender equality requires more than legal frameworks; it demands sustained political will, adequate funding, inclusive community engagement, and robust accountability mechanisms. CSOs continue to play a vital role in bridging these gaps through advocacy,

⁴⁷ <https://data.unwomen.org/country/gambia>

⁴⁸ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/7/15/gambias-parliament-upholds-ban-on-female-genital-mutilation?.com>

⁴⁹ <https://achpr.au.int/sw/node/4058?com>

⁵⁰ Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Welfare. (2021). National Gender Policy 2021–2030.

⁵¹ UN Women. (2024). *Statement on The Gambia's Decision to Uphold Ban on FGM*.

public education, and by holding duty bearers accountable to their human rights commitments.

Performance on targets

Target 5.1: end all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere:

Progress toward achieving Target 5.1—which aims to end all forms of discrimination against women and girls—has been satisfactory in terms of establishing legal frameworks in The Gambia. The country has demonstrated its commitment to gender equality by adopting key legislation such as the Women’s Act 2015 (Amended), which incorporates provisions aligned with international standards for the protection and promotion of women’s rights. Additionally, The Gambia is a signatory to several international and regional instruments, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Maputo Protocol, reaffirming its obligation to eliminate discrimination in all forms⁵².

While the presence of these legal instruments is a significant step forward, enforcement remains inconsistent, and gaps persist between law and practice. Cultural norms, limited awareness of rights, and weak institutional capacity continue to hinder the full realization of legal protections for women and girls. Continued efforts are needed to bridge these gaps through legal literacy campaigns, capacity building for enforcement bodies, and stronger accountability mechanisms to ensure that the laws are not only in place but are effectively implemented across all regions of the country.

Target 5.2⁵³ is currently *at risk*. In 2020, the DHS recorded that 29.09% of ever-partnered women experienced physical violence, 5.52% experienced sexual violence, and 39.23% experienced some form of intimate partner violence (IPV) in their lifetime⁵⁴. Further analysis by The Lancet Global Health highlights a concerning upward trend, with IPV prevalence increasing at an average annual rate of 5.3% between 2000 and 2021. However, in the 2020–21 SDG survey, 12% of the population experienced physical and 62.2% experienced sexual violence by a partner or ex-partner. In 2023 alone, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) reported 575 cases of gender-based violence nationwide, including rape, sexual assault, sex trafficking, and intimate partner violence, yet none of the survivors were able to access justice, underscoring systemic challenges in addressing this issue. Additionally, discriminatory customary laws, cultural, gender, and social norms, as well as intersecting socio-economic factors, continue to play a factor in women’s continuous struggles in the Gambia. These data collectively indicate that without urgent and comprehensive interventions, The Gambia risks failing to meet its commitments to reducing violence against women and girls.

Target 5.3⁵⁵: The Gambia’s progress toward achieving SDG Target 5.3, which aims to eliminate harmful practices such as child, early and forced marriage, and female genital mutilation (FGM), is classified as *insufficient progress*. Despite legal prohibitions and policy efforts, these practices remain deeply entrenched in Gambian society. The 2019–20 Demographic and Health Survey reported that around 28% of girls are married before 18,

⁵² National Gender Analysis, 2022. UNFPA

⁵³ Target 5.2: Eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation

⁵⁴ Demographic Health Survey, 2019–2020

⁵⁵ Target 5.3 Eliminate all harmful practices such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation.

with early marriage more prevalent in rural areas, while approximately 73% of women aged 15 to 49 have undergone FGM.⁵⁶

In 2021, a community-based surveillance system supported by UNFPA and GAMCOTRAP identified a planned FGM event in Bakadaji Mandinka Central River Region, where eight (8) girls, aged 4 months and 1 year, were at risk of getting cut. The intervention managed to halt the FGM process, however, three of the girls were already cut by the time authorities intervened.⁵⁷ Furthermore, in 2024, a controversial parliamentary attempt to repeal the 2015 FGM ban sparked widespread national and international backlash, ultimately leading to the ban's reaffirmation.⁵⁸ However, enforcement of laws against both child marriage and FGM remains inconsistent, and cultural norms continue to perpetuate these practices. Without intensified community engagement, education, and stronger enforcement mechanisms, The Gambia risks falling short of its 2030 target to eradicate these harmful practices.

Target 5.5⁵⁹ has shown insignificant progress over the past 5 years. The Gambia has seen some slight improvements in women representation at the local government level, particularly among councillors. In 2018, women held 6.25% of councillor seats (8 out of 128) across the 8 LGAs, and one woman became the country's first elected Mayor. By 2024, female representation among elected councillors rose to 15% (18 out of 120) and country still has one female Mayor. As of 2025, The Gambia's National Assembly comprises 58 members, of whom only 5 are women, representing approximately 8.6% of the total membership.⁶⁰ This figure reflects a persistent gender disparity in political representation, as the number of female parliamentarians has remained unchanged since the 2022 legislative elections.⁶¹ Additionally, only 13.6% of ministerial positions are held by women (3 out of 23 cabinet members), highlighting their continued underrepresentation at the executive level. Despite women constituting over half of the Gambia's population, their representation in decision-making roles remains low, and this underscores the challenges faced in achieving gender parity in the country.

Policy and Institutional Readiness

The Gambia has been committed to strengthening gender equality and empower women in the country through the introduction of various policies and legal frameworks that are meant to protect women and girls. Gender is well recognised as a key matter in the constitution and the preamble acknowledges that: “women shall be accorded full and equal dignity of the person with men, including equal opportunities in political, economic and social activities”.⁶² At the national level, The Gambia has taken important steps to protect the rights of women and girls by introducing at least six gender-specific laws. These aren't just policies on paper—they represent real efforts to make the country safer and more equitable for all. Laws like the Women's Act (2010) and the Domestic Violence Act (2013) were designed to give women legal protection against discrimination and abuse. The Sexual Offences Act (2013) and Children's Act (2005) aim to shield women and girls from exploitation, while the

⁵⁶ The Gambia Bureau of Statistics, DHS 2020

⁵⁷ <https://gambia.unfpa.org/en/news/landmark-convictions-signal-progress-fight-against-fgm-gambia?.com>

⁵⁸ UN Women. (2024). *Statement on The Gambia's Decision to Uphold Ban on FGM*.

⁵⁹ Target 5.5: Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life

⁶⁰ <https://data.ipu.org/parliament/GM/GM-LC01/data-on-women/>

⁶¹ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/gambia/freedom-world/2024?.com>

⁶² The Constitution of The Gambia, Section 28.

Trafficking in Persons Act (2007) and the 2015 amendment banning FGM show a clear stand against harmful practices.⁶³

In 2022, the National Policy for the elimination of FGM (2022-2026) came into effect as part of the country's commitment to advancing gender equality and women empower. The policy outlines strategic priorities to mainstream gender across all sectors of development and enhance institutional mechanisms that will promote the rights of women. The policy focuses on several key areas, including;

- Enhancing women's political participation and leadership
- Strengthen legal frameworks and access to justice
- Addressing gender-based violence and harmful practices
- Promoting economic empowerment and access to resources
- Improving access to education and healthcare for women and girls⁶⁴

Furthermore, in 2024, the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Welfare (MoGCSW) introduced a ten-years National Gender Policy 2025-2034 designed to establish a clear framework for the identification, implementation and coordination of interventions designed to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment in the Gambia. Similar to the National Policy on FGM, the National Gender Policy also focuses on legal frameworks, economic development of women, political participation and equity in all sectors and programmes⁶⁵. With 15 thematic areas⁶⁶, the policy is meant to ensure that the government take measures necessary to promote gender inclusion in all areas of development.

Civil Society organizations have been influential and instrumental in advancing gender equality initiatives in The Gambia. Organizations such as TANGO, Women's Association of Victim (WAVE), GAMCOTRAP, Women in Liberation & Leadership, CSO-Gender Platform have been actively engaged in advocacy, education and community mobilization. They have also participated in policy dialogues, contributing to the development and implementation of gender-focused policies. Furthermore, CSOs have collaborated with government agencies and international partners to raise awareness, provide services to survivors of gender-based violence, and promote women's leadership and economic empowerment. These concerted efforts between the government and civil society have laid a strong foundation for advancing gender equality in The Gambia, aligning with the objectives of SDG 5 and fostering an inclusive environment for women and girls.

Gaps and Accelerators

Despite some progress made towards gender equality, some complex challenges still remain and continue to hinder gender empowerment and inclusion. Some of these include:

1. There is continued lack of gender (sex) disaggregated data
2. Lack of coordination between the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Welfare and the Civil Society organizations involved in gender-related advocacy.
3. Enforcement lapses in the implementation of policies designed to advance gender equality in The Gambia. The gaps identified in enforcement include the Gambia Police where 1) manuals for new recruits need to be revised to align with the amendments, 2) Building the capacity of in-service police officials to ensure

⁶³ UNFPA National Gender Analysis 2022.

⁶⁴ National Policy for the elimination of FGM 2022-2026

⁶⁵ National Gender Policy 2025-2034, <https://mogcsw.gov.gm/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/National-Gender-Policy-2025-2034.pdf>

⁶⁶ Refer to page 27 of the National Gender Policy 2025-2034, <https://mogcsw.gov.gm/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/National-Gender-Policy-2025-2034.pdf>

awareness of the amendments. (3) Public awareness campaigns in communities to raise awareness about the new changes.

Interlinkages

Gender equality is central to the realisation of the SDGs and is interlinked to all the goals. Achieving zero poverty for all women and girls by 2030 necessitates taking action on long-standing gender disparities in access to land, healthcare, and political and economic representation. Similarly, promoting inclusive and equitable economic participation (SDG 8) empowers women through decent work and financial independence. Advancing gender equality also demands strong partnerships and coordinated efforts (SDG 17) across sectors and stakeholders to mobilize resources and align policies. Gender equality is a cross-cutting objective, a gender-responsive budgeting should be costed separately but in conjunction with all other goals.

Conclusion

With the prevalence of gender inequality, gender discrimination, and social norms and practices, girls become exposed to the possibility of child marriage, teenage pregnancy, child domestic work, poor education and health, sexual abuse, exploitation, and violence. Many of these manifestations will not change unless women and girls are valued and prioritised. However, through a lot of awareness and campaigns against such practices, women and girls will be empowered to speak up. Greater efforts and stronger partnerships are essential to accelerate progress in closing gender inequality gaps in the country, with effective enforcement playing a critical role in achieving these goals.

BOX 2: Civil Society Scorecard

Drawing on vast experience in project implementation and research on gender equality and women's empowerment, several CSOs assessed the progress of Goal 5 by considering institutional readiness, policy frameworks, resource allocation and progress on the ground. The participants were given the opportunity to discuss and incorporate experiences and perspectives of individuals at the coalface of gender equality in The Gambia. Based on the targets discussed, the CSOs rated The Gambia's progress on SDG 5 as **Level 3: Medium Progress**.

Areas	Rating
Governance and Policy Frameworks	4
Plans and Strategies	3
Institutional commitment	3
Implementation Progress	3
Capacity Building	3
Monitoring, Evaluation and reporting	3
Transparency and Accountability	3
Overall Progress	3
Total	3.1

The Gambia has comprehensive policy frameworks that address gender inequality and empower women. Despite these in place, there still exist significant gaps in policy

implementation. Government agencies have not been cohesive in responding to policies related to gender equality and GBV.

Additionally, the SDGs are not known in rural areas, rather in only high-level policy reforms advocacy platforms. There is also a lack of transparency with respect to data. For example, the annual crime statistics from the Minister of Interior do not provide specific details about different kinds of sexual offences reported in the various localities, making it difficult to clarify rape cases.

Collaboration among the private sector, government, civil society, and academia is essential for effectively addressing GBV in The Gambia and fulfilling our collective responsibility. Civil society organises and coordinates citizen participation initiatives, inviting key stakeholders to engage, yet more must be done to educate and empower citizens.

Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth

Introduction and Context

SDG 8, which focuses on promoting sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all, is particularly critical for The Gambia—a country where the majority of the population is under 35 and youth unemployment remains a persistent challenge. While efforts have been made to stimulate economic growth and employment opportunities through national strategies and donor-supported programs, the benefits have not been equitably distributed, and informality continues to dominate the labour market.

The progress on Goal 8 has been slow and uneven, as economic growth has slowed down and limited new employment opportunities. From 2014 to 2021, The Gambia experienced commendable economic growth with a steady recovery and resilience. Between 2021 and 2022, The Gambia's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) showed a steady upward trend, signalling a resilient recovery from the economic disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2021, the economy rebounded strongly with a GDP growth rate of 5.3% from 0.6% in 2020, driven by the easing of pandemic-related restrictions and a resurgence in key economic activities.⁶⁷ By 2022, The Gambia maintained this positive momentum with a growth rate of 4.9%. This stability was underpinned by increased private investment, a rise in domestic consumption, and the gradual revival of the tourism sector—one of the country's major sources of foreign exchange and employment.⁶⁸ These indicators highlight the country's efforts to build back better and strengthen the foundations for long-term, inclusive economic development.

However, the national poverty rate in The Gambia was 53.4% in 2020 and remained high in subsequent years, with a large portion of the population living in poverty. Poverty is disproportionately concentrated in rural areas, where it affects a significantly higher percentage of the population compared to urban areas. Inflation averaged 11.6% in 2022 (year-on-year), with food and non-food inflation at 14.5% and 8.6%, respectively (TOURAY, 2023). While GDP rebounded in 2021–2022, this growth hasn't yet translated into broad-based poverty reductions. High prices, limited job creation, and rural dependency—where agriculture dominates—continue to limit inclusive economic progress.

Furthermore, The Gambia's key economic sectors include agriculture, tourism, trade, fisheries, industries/manufacturing, remittances and informal economy. Micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) also play a pivotal role in economic diversification and creation of employment. In 2021, the Youth Empowerment Project (YEP) created 2,099 jobs and provided technical or vocational training to 1,339 young people (53% women, 47% men). Of these, 630 youths received entrepreneurship and business support services, resulting in 338 MSMEs gaining international market linkages and 176 improving their production capacities.⁶⁹ In 2023, MSMEs contributed 20% of the National GDP⁷⁰, and a significant

⁶⁷ International Monetary Fund (IMF). (2024). *The Gambia: Staff Report for the 2023 Article IV Consultation*. Retrieved from IMF eLibrary

⁶⁸ World Bank. (2024). The Gambia Country Overview. Retrieved from World Bank

⁶⁹ <https://yep.gm/storage/app/uploads/public/630/8bd/7ef/6308bd7ef06e7998988995.pdf>

portion of the labour force, over 60%, being self-employed citizens.⁷¹ According to the Gambia Labour Force Survey 2023, a total of 353,731 people were employed in the informal sector, accounting for 62.8% of the workforce within that sector. This figure represents 79.4% of the country's total employed population, highlighting the dominant role of informal employment in The Gambia's labour market.⁷²

In The Gambia, about 40% of working-age people are actively engaged in the labour market—a figure that has stayed fairly steady over the past few years, at least since 2021. While this shows that many are participating in work or seeking jobs, it also highlights the ongoing struggle to create enough quality opportunities, especially for young people and women. This is exactly where SDG 8 comes in, focusing on decent work and inclusive economic growth for everyone. To tackle these challenges, the government has rolled out important policies like the National Employment Policy and Action Plan (2022-2030) and the TVET Policy, which aim to boost skills training, support job creation, and help more people move from informal to formal jobs. These efforts are crucial to ensuring that economic progress truly benefits everyone and helps build a brighter future for all Gambians.⁷³

International support has played a pivotal role in the country's progress towards achieving decent work and economic growth. The ILO partnership has led to the roll-out of the Decent Work Country Programme which aligns with the SDG 8 targets of promoting safe and secure working environments, improving employment policies etc. The synergy between international support and national development priorities has enhanced The Gambia's ability to meet SDG 8 targets. These partnerships have not only expanded employment opportunities and entrepreneurship but have also contributed to institutional strengthening and policy coherence. Continued collaboration will be essential to ensure sustained economic growth and decent work for all.

Performance on targets

Target 8.1: Sustain per capita economic growth in accordance with national circumstances and, in particular, at least 7% GDP growth per annum in the least developed countries

Target 8.1 has made satisfactory progress in its capita economic growth. The Gambia's GDP is projected to reach approximately 5.6% between 2024 and 2026, with a growth rate of 3.2%.⁷⁴ The real GDP increased by 5.3% in 2023 (2.7% in per capita terms), from 4.9% (2.4% in per capita terms) in 2022. On the supply side, growth was mainly supported by improved agricultural and industrial production. The increase in agricultural growth was primarily attributed to a good rainy season and improved agricultural practices with the use of improved seeds and increased fertilizer subsidies, alongside an increase in investment in projects by international partners.⁷⁵

Target 8.2 currently suffers from a lack of adequate and disaggregated data, making it difficult to effectively assess progress in key areas such as economic diversification, innovation, and productivity growth. Without reliable data sources, it is challenging to measure how much structural transformation is taking place within The Gambia's economy or to what extent sectors are becoming more dynamic and efficient. This data gap hinders

⁷⁰ <https://commonwealthchamber.com/empowering-tomorrow-msmes-and-sustainable-development-in-the-gambia/.com>

⁷¹ <https://sdgs.un.org/sites/default/files/2022-03/Promoting%20MSME%20Formazlization%20in%20The%20Gamabia.pdf?.com>

⁷² The Gambia Labour force survey 2022-2023

⁷³ Gambia Bureau of Statistics, 2023; Ministry of Trade, Industry, Regional Integration and Employment, 2022

⁷⁴ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/gambia/publication/the-gambia-economic-update-2024-jumpstarting-inclusive-and-sustained-growth>

⁷⁵ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/gambia/publication/the-gambia-economic-update-2024-jumpstarting-inclusive-and-sustained-growth>

evidence-based planning and policy formulation, and limits the ability to track whether investments and reforms are yielding tangible results in enhancing productivity—especially in sectors with high employment potential such as agriculture, tourism, and services. Additionally, the country boasts of high digital connectivity, however, high costs, limited competition and weak regulation have restricted the use of ICT for upgrading productivity. There is also lack of data on Research and Development spendings, and the country is not ranked in global innovation indices, which shows a gap in measurable innovation progress.⁷⁶ Strengthening national data systems and integrating sector-specific productivity indicators is crucial for improving the monitoring and achievement of SDG Target 8.2.

Target 8.3: The country has been making satisfactory progress toward SDG Target 8.3 since 2020, which calls for the promotion of development-oriented policies that support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, and the growth of micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs). Initiatives such as the Youth Empowerment Project (YEP-2019), implemented with support from the International Trade Centre (ITC) and GIZ, have contributed significantly to youth employment and entrepreneurship. According to ITC (2023), over 10,000 jobs were created and more than 7,500 young Gambians trained in vocational skills, agribusiness, ICT, and tourism.⁷⁷ The project also supported 338 MSMEs in gaining international market linkages and enhanced the productivity of 176 others. These efforts were further complemented by business advisory services and access to startup finance, particularly benefiting women and youth.⁷⁸

At the policy level, the National Employment Policy and Action Plan (2022–2030)⁷⁹ and the MSME Development Policy (2019–2024) demonstrate the government’s commitment to fostering inclusive growth and job creation. The Ministry of Trade, Industry, Regional Integration and Employment (MoTIE) has worked alongside civil society organizations (CSOs) like Gambia Youth Chamber of Commerce (GYCC) and Think Young Women (TYW) to provide tailored support to entrepreneurs through mentorship, capacity building, and market access initiatives. However, gaps still exist in data collection, coordination, and rural outreach—hindering full realization of SDG 8.3. Bridging these gaps will require stronger public-private partnerships and sustained investment in innovation, skills development, and infrastructure to support entrepreneurship across all regions of the country.

Target 8.5: The country has made sufficient progress in expanding decent work opportunities. Through various partnerships such as ILO, the Decent Work Country Programme has supported labour reforms, safer workplaces, and improved workplace standards across the country. The 2023 Labour Force Survey by the Gambia Bureau of Statistics (GBoS) reveals that 79.4% of the employed population works in the informal sector, highlighting a major challenge in ensuring decent, secure, and well-regulated employment. Youth unemployment remains high, and gender disparities persist, especially in access to formal work and wage equity.⁸⁰

Despite modest improvements in job creation, the quality and security of employment—particularly for women, youth, and persons with disabilities—remain limited. According to civil society groups like The Association of Non-Governmental Organisations (TANGO) and the National Youth Conference and Festival (NAYCONF), many vulnerable groups remain

⁷⁶ <https://www.elibrary.imf.org/view/journals/002/2021/266/article-A001-en.xml?com>

⁷⁷ <https://yep.gm/storage/app/uploads/public/630/8bd/7ef/6308bd7ef06e7998988995.pdf>

⁷⁸ <https://yep.gm/storage/app/uploads/public/630/8bd/7ef/6308bd7ef06e7998988995.pdf>

⁷⁹ <https://motie.gov.gm/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Employment-Policy-and-Action-Plan-2019-2024-1.pdf>

⁸⁰ The Gambia Labour Force Survey 2022-2023

excluded from decent work opportunities due to lack of access to training, digital skills, and formal protections.

Target 8.6 which aims to substantially reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training has made insufficient progress since 2021. According to the 2022–23 Labour Force Survey, approximately 41.5% of Gambian youth aged 15–35 is unemployed. Nearly 25% of those aged 18–35 is actively seeking employment, compared to 21% of middle-aged citizens and 16% of older adults.^{81,82} Through the Gambia Songhai Initiative (GSI)—a strategic partnership between the Ministry of Youth and Sports, the Ministry of Agriculture, and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)—significant progress has been made in equipping young Gambians with practical, market-ready skills in agribusiness and agroforestry. Since its launch in 2015, the initiative has successfully trained over 278 youth, with close to 50% being young women, ensuring gender inclusion in a sector traditionally dominated by men.

Local government councils across the country have been pivotal in strengthening TVET delivery. According to the National TVET Roadmap 2020–2024, roughly 75% of accredited TVET institutions are clustered in Banjul and Kanifing LGAs, reflecting targeted municipal support.⁸³ In Banjul, the City Council has partnered with the Gambia Technical Training Institute (GTTI) to refurbish workshop facilities—upgrading mechanics, ICT, and carpentry labs—to better align skills training with local labour market needs.⁸⁴ Similarly, the Kanifing Municipal Council, in collaboration with the International Trade Centre and EU under the Young Entrepreneurs Challenge Fund, has rolled out capacity-building workshops in trades such as plumbing, electrical installation, and metal fabrication. Mobile training units now bring hands-on instruction directly into underserved neighbourhoods, extending TVET’s reach beyond the urban core.⁸⁵ In the West Coast Region, the Regional Council has supported Ministry of Higher Education Research Science and Technology’s (MoHERST) plan to expand rural TVET access by backing the renovation and establishment of GTTI’s Ndemban Skills Training Centre. This centre now offers certificate-level courses in agro-engineering, renewable energy installation, and hospitality services—empowering youth in more remote districts with the practical skills to secure decent work locally.⁸⁶

Policy and Institutional Readiness

Over the past decade, The Gambia has rolled out a series of policies aimed at driving decent work and sustainable economic growth. The National Development Plan (2018–2021) laid the groundwork by prioritizing structural transformation, private sector development, and job creation. Building on that foundation, the National Employment Policy and Action Plan (2022–2030) zeroes in on reducing unemployment—especially among young people and women—by promoting skills training, labour market reforms, and more robust social protections. These policy frameworks signal a clear government commitment: economic growth must translate into real, dignified work for Gambians nationwide.⁸⁷

Complementing these high-level strategies are sector-specific initiatives designed to strengthen the country’s skills pipeline and entrepreneurial ecosystem. The TVET Policy has

⁸¹ <https://thepoint.gm/africa/gambia/headlines/gambia-grapples-with-youth-unemployment?.com>

⁸² <https://www.afrobarometer.org/publication/ad521-gambians-say-government-must-do-more-to-help-the-youth/?com>

⁸³ https://unevoc.unesco.org/up/Gambia_TVET_strategy.pdf?.com

⁸⁴ <https://nyc.gm/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Youth-and-Trade-Road-Map-TVET-Sector-2020-2024.pdf>

⁸⁵ <https://www.intracen.org/news-and-events/news/eu-itc-gcci-and-the-kanifing-municipal-council-launch-new-challenge-fund-for?.com>

⁸⁶ https://unevoc.unesco.org/up/Gambia_TVET_strategy.pdf.com

expanded access to market-relevant technical and vocational training, often in partnership with GIZ and the EU's Youth Empowerment Project. Likewise, the MSME Development Policy (2019–2024) tackles the regulatory and financial hurdles that small businesses face—streamlining business registration, improving access to credit, and nurturing export opportunities. By weaving together training, regulation, and enterprise support, these policies aim to turn Gambian ingenuity into lasting livelihoods.

Institutional readiness has also been a critical focus. Ministries such as Trade, Industry, Regional Integration and Employment, along with agencies like the Gambia Bureau of Statistics, have strengthened their data-collection and analysis capacities to track progress against SDG 8 targets. Local government councils—from Banjul to the West Coast and Kanifing—have stepped up, partnering with training institutes and NGOs to bring TVET and entrepreneurial workshops directly to communities. In Banjul, the former Crab Island Junior Secondary School was transformed into a 175-student TVET centre offering trades from electrical installation to tailoring, supported by MOHERST and partners.⁸⁸ In Kanifing, the private Insight Training Centre- established in 1999- has trained over 3,000 youths in areas such as IT and construction across its three campuses.⁸⁹ This decentralization, coupled with coordinated efforts through the Decent Work Country Programme with the ILO, ensures that policies aren't just words on paper but actionable plans that reach every corner of the country.

Gaps and Accelerators

Despite some progress made toward SDG 8, there still exist some gaps and challenges in achieving different indicator targets. Some of these include;

- Insufficient data and structural diversification
- Gender disparities in labour participation and leadership
- The persistent Youth unemployment rates

Accelerators for SDG 8 include adopting gender-responsive budgeting across ministries and local governments. This will help close the gender gap in labour force participation and leadership.

Conclusion

As the country strives to promote sustained, inclusive economic growth and decent work for all, it is clear that the country has been making slow progress over the last five years, however, challenges still exist. Steady GDP growth since the pandemic, targeted youth employment and entrepreneurship programs, and strengthened TVET and MSME policies demonstrate the country's commitment to creating opportunities. At the same time, informality, youth unemployment, gender gaps, and limited structural diversification highlight the work still to be done.

Furthermore, The Gambia must accelerate formalization of the informal sector, deepen public-private partnerships for skills development, and ensure that women and young people are central to economic decision-making. By leveraging local government initiatives, bolstering data systems, and fostering an enabling environment for innovation, The Gambia

⁸⁸ <https://standard.gm/former-crab-island-transitioned-into-tvet-centre/?com>

⁸⁹ <https://www.insight.gm/about-us?.com>

can translate its policy ambitions into real, dignified livelihoods—bringing the promise of SDG 8 within reach for every Gambian.

BOX 3: Civil Society Scorecard

The CSO working group assessed the progress of The Gambia’s performance on Goal 8 and rated it as **level 2: Low Progress**

Areas	Rating
Governance and Policy Frameworks	3
Plans and Strategies	3
Institutional commitment	2
Implementation Progress	3
Capacity Building	3
Monitoring, Evaluation and reporting	2
Transparency and Accountability	2
Overall Progress	3
Total	2.6

The country’s economy growth has been positive; however, poverty rates still remain high. Civil society organizations rated the commitment of government institutions as very low, highlighting concerns over the government’s limited ability to demonstrate tangible progress or accountability in its interventions. Additionally, there is an absence of robust monitoring and evaluation (M&E) frameworks to track progress toward ensuring decent work for citizens. This gap, coupled with limited transparency in reporting on the country’s economic growth, undermines efforts to promote inclusive development and evidence-based policymaking.

The Gambia has made notable progress in strengthening policy and legal frameworks to support Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). However, further efforts are needed—particularly in leveraging digital tools and technologies—to enhance citizens’ economic opportunities and drive inclusive growth.

GOAL 14: Life Below Water

Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.

Introduction and Context

Coastal and marine ecosystems are vital for The Gambia's food security and livelihoods, especially for its 300,000-plus artisanal fishers. However, mangrove deforestation (around 1.5% per year), coastal erosion, overfishing, and climate change threaten these critical systems.⁹⁰ The Gambia contributes just 0.01 percent to global greenhouse gas emissions, but climate change threatens the future supply of people's main source of protein: fish. In this low-lying coastal nation, rich in biodiversity with over 600 fish species, poor fisherfolk depend on marine, coastal and riverine fisheries for their food security and livelihoods.⁹¹

Every year, Gambians consume about 32 000 tonnes of fish⁹², which is sourced from the artisanal fisheries sector. Each day, fisherfolk go out in their small boats on short fishing trips, bringing back their catch to be consumed by the local population. The River Gambia sustains livelihoods and nature; it flows across the country towards the Atlantic Ocean, meandering through mangrove forests in a massive estuary brimming with life above and below water.⁹³ Traditional fisheries are threatened by coastal erosion, mangrove loss (at an estimated 1.5% annually), and overexploitation driven by both domestic activity and foreign industrial fleets—some operated by Chinese firms—which have contributed to environmental degradation and reduced fish availability for local communities.⁹⁴

The dense mangrove ecosystems are vital breeding grounds and nurseries for major shellfish and fish species, such as shrimp and barracuda. They also protect coastlines and riverbanks from erosion by capturing and trapping sediment. Yet over the last 15 years, the Gambia's mangrove cover has shrunk at an average rate of 1.5 percent per year because of climate and human induced degradation, such as the unsustainable harvesting of wood for poles and wood fuel.

The Ministry of Fisheries, and Water Resources, along with the Gambia Maritime Administration and the Department of Parks and Wildlife Management, has implemented several initiatives to promote sustainable fisheries, marine conservation, and improved governance of aquatic ecosystems. These include community co-management programs, seasonal fishing bans, and efforts to combat illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing in Gambian waters. The private sector has also contributed to sustainability efforts, especially in the oyster value chain, where projects like TRY Oyster Women's Association

⁹⁰ <https://thepoint.gm/africa/gambia/headlines/govt-launches-prorefish-gambia?.com>

⁹¹ <https://www.fao.org/gcf/news-and-events/news-detail/restoring-mangroves-for-climate-resilient-fisheries-in-the-gambia/?com>

⁹² <https://www.fao.org/gcf/news-and-events/news-detail/restoring-mangroves-for-climate-resilient-fisheries-in-the-gambia/?com>

⁹³ <https://www.fao.org/gcf/news-and-events/news-detail/restoring-mangroves-for-climate-resilient-fisheries-in-the-gambia/?com>

⁹⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Illegal%2C_unreported_and_unregulated_fishing?.com

and UNDP-supported mangrove replanting programs have shown strong community engagement.^{95,96}

However, the full potential of The Gambia's blue economy remains underexploited, and coastal and marine ecosystems continue to face significant pressure from overfishing, pollution, and weak enforcement of environmental regulations. Strengthening data systems, improving coordination among institutions, and ensuring local community participation are essential for delivering on SDG 14 and protecting life below water.

Performance on Targets

The Gambia has made gradual progress on several targets under SDG 14, particularly in marine conservation and fisheries management. Efforts such as the establishment of Community Fisheries Centers and the implementation of the Gambia Fisheries and Aquaculture policy (2017-2021) have supported responsible fishing practices. Seasonal fishing closures for key species like shrimp and sardinella have been introduced, contributing to the recovery of some fish stocks.⁹⁷ However, comprehensive national data on all 10 targets under SDG 14 remains limited, which hampers accurate reporting and monitoring.

Target 14.2, which calls for the sustainable management and protection of marine and coastal ecosystems, has seen significant progress. Initiatives like mangrove reforestation by TRY Oyster Women's Association and the Department of Parks and Wildlife Management, as well as the designation of Tanbi Wetlands as a Ramsar site⁹⁸, highlight some of the conservation efforts undertaken. Yet, The Gambia still lacks a fully integrated coastal zone management framework.⁹⁹ Other initiatives such as the PROREFISH-Gambia project launched in 2023 is designed to restore coastal ecosystem, upgrade infrastructure and empower communities like Tanji and Gunjur. The project will also promote inclusive and sustainable practices in small-scale fisheries.¹⁰⁰

Target 14.4, which focuses on ending overfishing and restoring fish stocks, remains stagnant. Artisanal fisheries dominate the sector, but weak enforcement mechanisms and the prevalence of illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing continue to threaten marine biodiversity. International cooperation through regional organizations such as the Sub-Regional Fisheries Commission (SRFC) has helped strengthen surveillance, but gaps persist in capacity and technology.¹⁰¹

Policies and institutional Readiness

The Gambia has several sectoral policies relevant to SDG 14, including the Fisheries and Aquaculture Policy (2017-2021), the National Environment Management Act (NEMA), and

⁹⁵ Ministry of Fisheries and Water Resources (2023). *Annual Fisheries Sector Report*.

⁹⁶ UNDP The Gambia (2022). *Sustainable Fisheries and Livelihoods Project*.

⁹⁷ Ministry of Fisheries. (2023). *Gambia Fisheries Strategic Action Plan 2021-2025*.

⁹⁸ A Ramsar site is a wetland site designated under the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, an international treaty for the conservation and sustainable use of wetlands.

⁹⁹ TRY Oyster Women's Association Reports (2021-2023).

¹⁰⁰ <https://www.fao.org/gambia/news/detail/safeguarding-sustainable-fisheries--prorefish-gambia-hands-over-environmental-and-social-management-plans-to-fish-landing-sites-in-banjul-and-the-wcr/en>

¹⁰¹ UNEP. (2023). *State of Mangrove Ecosystems in West Africa*.

the Biodiversity and Wildlife Policy. These policies provide a framework for resource management, environmental conservation, and community-based governance. The Ministry of Fisheries, Water Resources leads on fisheries policy, while the Gambia Maritime Administration oversees maritime regulation and safety.¹⁰²

Institutionally, there is improved coordination between government bodies and CSOs, including partnerships with organizations like the WWF and FAO. Donor-funded projects, such as the West Africa Regional Fisheries Program (WARFP) and UNDP's support to the blue economy, have helped enhance technical capacity. However, institutional readiness is still constrained by limited data, funding, and skilled personnel.¹⁰³

Gaps and Accelerators

Gaps in SDG 14 implementation include weak monitoring and evaluation frameworks, poor data collection on marine biodiversity and fish stocks, and limited investment in ocean science. Enforcement of marine protection laws is inconsistent, and community-based co-management is not yet universal. Moreover, gender inclusion remains insufficient in decision-making processes within the sector.

Accelerators that could enhance SDG 14 progress include scaling up community-based marine resource management, increasing investments in data collection (e.g., satellite tracking, fish stock assessments), and integrating coastal resilience strategies into national development planning. Expanding public-private partnerships in sustainable aquaculture and eco-tourism, as well as promoting ocean literacy in schools and training institutions, can also act as key drivers toward achieving life below water goals.

Conclusion

The Gambia's coastal and marine ecosystems remain central to its economy, food security, and cultural heritage. Progress under SDG 14 has been marked by important initiatives such as the FAO-supported PROREFISH project, enhanced fisheries monitoring, and the expansion of community-led marine protected areas. National strategies, including the Fisheries Strategic Plan and support from development partners, have laid a policy foundation for more sustainable ocean resource management.

However, despite these efforts, persistent challenges such as overfishing, mangrove degradation, pollution, and limited enforcement capacity hinder the full realization of SDG 14 targets. Key gaps remain in data collection, climate resilience, and private sector engagement in sustainable practices. To accelerate progress, The Gambia must scale up investments in community-based conservation, strengthen institutional coordination, and expand access to blue economy financing.

¹⁰² Fisheries and Aquaculture policy 2018, <https://www.mofwr.gm/downloads>

¹⁰³ FAO. (2022). The Gambia Fisheries Country Profile.

BOX 4: Civil Society Scorecard

The Civil Society Organization (CSO) working group assessed The Gambia's progress toward achieving Sustainable Development Goal 14 (Life Below Water) and rated it at **Level 2, indicating low progress.**

Areas	Rating
Governance and Policy Frameworks	3
Plans and Strategies	2
Institutional commitment	2
Implementation Progress	2
Capacity Building	2
Monitoring, Evaluation and reporting	2
Transparency and Accountability	2
Overall Progress	2
Total	2.1

This rating reflects ongoing challenges such as inadequate marine resource management, limited enforcement of fisheries regulations, and insufficient data collection on marine biodiversity. The assessment underscores the need for enhanced policy implementation, strengthened institutional capacity, and increased stakeholder engagement to safeguard The Gambia's coastal and marine ecosystems.

GOAL 17: PARTNERSHIPS

Introduction and Context

Sustainable Development Goal 17—*Partnerships for the Goals*—is the backbone of the 2030 Agenda, emphasizing the need for multi-stakeholder collaboration, resource mobilization, and systemic capacity-building to support all other SDGs. For countries like The Gambia, where development is heavily dependent on external assistance and institutional capacity remains fragile, achieving Goal 17 is critical to enabling long-term, equitable progress. It encompasses dimensions ranging from official development assistance and trade facilitation to capacity-building, technology transfer, and inclusive governance.

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the government of The Gambia convened its first multi-stakeholder SDG coordination forum, bringing together ministries, UN agencies, donor partners, civil society, and the private sector. This inclusive platform not only shaped the country's Voluntary National Review but also set the stage for long-term collaboration on financing, data sharing, and policy coherence.

These partnerships have yielded concrete benefits across sectors. The EU-funded Youth Empowerment Project¹⁰⁴ teamed up with the Gambia chambers of commerce to train thousands of young entrepreneurs, while GIZ's support to the Technical and Vocational Education Authority helped expand hands-on skills training into rural districts. The GIZ's "Tekki Fii" initiative not only validated enriched TVET curricula but also rolled out career guidance training for 784 TVET beneficiaries, with plans to expand to 3,000 more youth, fostering stronger school-to-work transitions in Banjul, Lower River, and Upper River regions.¹⁰⁵ Fisheries and climate resilience programs supported by FAO and UNDP introduced satellite-enabled monitoring systems, boosting harvest yields and protecting coastal livelihoods. Even at the community level, local councils in Banjul, Kanifing, and Brikama collaborated with grassroots NGOs to co-design digital literacy workshops, ensuring that no region was left behind. Additionally, UNESCO and MoHERST launched a Digitalisation of TVET Strategy in 2023, ensuring that training programs meet labor-market needs and support ongoing skills development in a rapidly changing economy¹⁰⁶

One of the strongest illustrations of SDG 17 in action is the infrastructure and tourism sectors. Through support from the OIC Secretariat, The Gambia has launched major road construction projects, expanded access roads to the airport, and upgraded the Banjul–Bertil Harding Highway, all aimed at improving urban mobility and boosting tourism—a critical sector for job creation and foreign exchange.¹⁰⁷ The Gambia also received approximately USD 167 million in Official Development Assistance (ODA) in 2022, amounting to about 11.5% of the national budget. This support was mainly directed toward health, education, infrastructure, and governance.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ <https://yep.gm/storage/app/uploads/public/630/8bd/7ef/6308bd7ef06e7998988995.pdf>

¹⁰⁵ <https://thepoint.gm/africa/gambia/national-news/eu-giz-tekki-fii-project-supports-youths-in-making-well-grounded-career-choices.com>

¹⁰⁶ <https://gamna.gov.gm/moherst-launches-national-strategy-digitalisation-tvet?.com>

¹⁰⁷ OIC Gambia, 2023

¹⁰⁸ Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2023). Development Co-operation Profiles – The Gambia. Paris, France: OECD Publishing.

Furthermore, Civil society participation in SDG-related national processes increased by 18% between 2022 and 2023, owing in part to platforms like the SDG CSO Working Group and expanded consultation around the National Development Plan. However, this engagement remains informal and consultative, without structured influence over planning, budgeting, or implementation processes.

Performance on Targets

Performance on SDG 17 in The Gambia remains mixed, with policy declarations often outpacing institutional implementation. While the government has made efforts to engage development partners and reference the SDGs in national plans, most targets under Goal 17 show limited or insufficient progress when assessed against global benchmarks and regional standards.

Target 17.1¹⁰⁹ has been making significant progress since 2021. The Gambia's tax-to-GDP ratio increased marginally from 10.9% in 2021 to 11.7% in 2023, signalling incremental progress in domestic resource mobilization. Despite improvements in tax compliance and administrative reforms, this ratio remains well below the 15–20% threshold recommended for low-income countries. A narrow tax base, high informality, and limited efforts to curb tax avoidance and exemptions continue to constrain progress (GRA annual report, 2023).

Target 17.2 lacks adequate data to make any meaningful depictions of the country in the last five years.

Target 17.3 has made significant progress in mobilizing funds for development purposes. The Gambia has seen a dramatic increase in foreign direct investment (FDI) over the past four years (2020–2024), thanks to business reforms and investor confidence. FDI inflows rose from just \$18 million in 2017 to \$249 million in 2021, before stabilizing at \$236 million in 2022, and accounting for roughly 10.6% of GDP, significantly higher than the regional average of about 3%.¹¹⁰ As of 2023, FDI inflows remained elevated at **8.9% of GDP**, helping diversify economic sectors like tourism, manufacturing, and energy through partnerships with investors from India, China, and Turkey.¹¹¹ In agriculture specifically, the \$40 million **Gambia Inclusive and Resilient Agricultural Value Chain (GIRAV)** project launched in 2021 aimed to support rural livelihoods with climate-smart investments, leveraging World Bank credit lines to boost sustainable development.¹¹²

Policy and Institutional readiness

From a civil society standpoint, The Gambia has shown some policy commitment toward fostering partnerships for sustainable development, but institutional arrangements remain underdeveloped and often fragmented.

The Recovery-Focused National Development Plan (RF-NDP) 2023–2027 explicitly references the SDGs and includes coordination mechanisms meant to align donor support

¹⁰⁹ Target 17.1 Mobilize resources to improve domestic revenue collection

¹¹⁰ <https://gambiaj.com/the-gambias-foreign-direct-investment-soars-14-fold-amid-economic-reforms-unctad/>

¹¹¹ <https://unctad.org/news/gambia-unleashing-investment-potential-sustainable-development.com>

¹¹² <https://unctad.org/news/gambia-unleashing-investment-potential-sustainable-development.com>

with national priorities. The plan outlines a commitment to “enhanced aid coordination and improved development partnerships,” particularly through the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs (MoFEA). However, the operationalization of this commitment remains unclear, with no publicly available partnership framework or harmonized donor mapping system.

Within MoFEA, the Development Cooperation and Aid Coordination Directorate is tasked with managing relations with donors and development partners. While the directorate organizes periodic Development Partner Roundtables, these events remain largely government-led and lack structured participation from civil society or community-based actors. There are no formal feedback mechanisms linking aid coordination to citizen priorities or accountability frameworks.

Additionally, institutional readiness also improved with the establishment of the Ministry of Communications and Digital Economy (MOCDE) and creation of the National ICT Agency, marking a strong political commitment to digital transformation.¹¹³

Furthermore, The Gambia Bureau of Statistics (GBoS) has made progress in localizing SDG indicators, but is hampered by capacity constraints, lack of funding, and limited collaboration with non-state data producers. Civil society efforts to contribute citizen-generated data or shadow monitoring are not formally recognized within national reporting systems, limiting their influence on planning and implementation.

In summary, while the policy environment reflects growing awareness of the importance of partnerships, institutional readiness to implement Goal 17 inclusively and accountably remains weak. There is an urgent need to formalize CSO participation, mainstream partnership planning across ministries, and strengthen national coordination platforms.

Gaps and Accelerators

Despite policy commitments to enhance partnerships and mobilize resources, several structural and operational challenges continue to limit meaningful progress on SDG 17:

- **Lack of an SDG Financing Strategy:** There is no comprehensive national financing framework that links domestic resource mobilization, ODA, private investment, and innovative financing to SDG implementation. As a result, funding remains fragmented and often donor-driven, with limited national oversight.
- **Inadequate Data Systems:** The Gambia Bureau of Statistics (GBoS) is under-resourced and unable to produce reliable and disaggregated data across most SDG indicators, especially those related to trade, financing, and institutional capacity. This weakens evidence-based planning and reporting.
- **Limited Private Sector Engagement:** The private sector’s role in financing or co-implementing SDG programs remains largely untapped. There are no institutional incentives or frameworks for public-private partnerships, especially for infrastructure, climate adaptation, and digital transformation.

To address these persistent gaps, several targeted interventions could serve as accelerators for SDG 17 implementation in The Gambia:

- **Develop a National Partnership and Financing Framework:** A comprehensive, government-led strategy should be developed to align public and private investments,

¹¹³ <https://mocde.gov.gm/downloads/>

donor funding, and innovative financing tools with national SDG targets. This would enhance fiscal coherence and sustainability.

- Establish an Aid Transparency and Results Tracking Portal: A public dashboard should be developed to track donor contributions, SDG-aligned spending, and program results. This would support greater accountability and public trust in partnerships.
- Strengthen GBoS and Non-State Data Ecosystems: Investments should be made in statistical infrastructure, including training, digital tools, and partnerships with civil society to improve data quality and coverage. Citizen-generated data should be formally recognized in reporting mechanisms.

Interlinkages

SDG 17 is a foundational enabler of all other Sustainable Development Goals. In The Gambia, the state of partnerships, financing, and institutional coordination directly shapes outcomes across the development spectrum. The effectiveness—or absence—of strategic collaboration impacts not just resource mobilization, but the delivery and quality of services in education, health, climate, and governance. In the context of The Gambia, building stronger alliances—whether with bilateral donors, regional bodies, civil society, or the private sector—enhances the country’s ability to mobilize resources, share knowledge, transfer technology, and implement innovative solutions. For example, partnerships have supported the expansion of technical training for youth, improved healthcare delivery, and strengthened infrastructure development. As such, SDG 17 is the glue that holds the entire SDG framework together, ensuring that no goal is pursued in isolation and that no one is left behind.

Conclusion

While The Gambia has made commendable efforts to articulate its commitment to SDG 17—through policy frameworks, periodic donor engagements, and statistical alignment—actual progress remains limited and uneven. The current model of partnerships is overly dependent on bilateral aid and lacks the coherence, transparency, and inclusiveness necessary to transform development outcomes.

From a civil society perspective, the absence of a comprehensive SDG financing strategy, weak multi-stakeholder institutional frameworks, and the exclusion of non-state actors from decision-making continue to undermine the spirit of Goal 17. Moreover, without disaggregated data and accessible reporting systems, it is difficult to assess whether partnerships are delivering results equitably and effectively.

To revitalize the role of partnerships in national development, there is an urgent need to institutionalize civil society participation, broaden private sector involvement, and ensure that all forms of cooperation are accountable, transparent, and aligned with national priorities. Strengthening SDG 17 is not merely about mobilizing funds—it is about building a culture of collaborative governance where every actor, from the grassroots to global partners, is recognized as a co-architect of The Gambia’s sustainable future.

BOX 4: Civil Society Scorecard

Using the scorecard developed for this report, CSOs rated The Gambia's progress on Goal 17 as **level 2: Low progress**.

Areas	Rating
Governance and Policy Frameworks	4
Plans and Strategies	3
Institutional commitment	2
Implementation Progress	3
Capacity Building	3
Monitoring, Evaluation and reporting	2
Transparency and Accountability	3
Overall Progress	3
Total	2.9

The Gambia has policies, plans, and strategies in place to achieve this goal. The country is also making notable progress across several thematic areas of SDG 17, including finance, capacity building, and trade. The Gambia's commitment to SDG 17 is evident through its establishment of partnerships at both national and international levels. These partnerships involve collaboration with United Nations (UN) agencies, European Union, civil society organizations, the private sector, and international entities to advance sustainable development initiatives.

There are ongoing efforts to mobilize funds for multi-sector development across the country; however, it is crucial that these initiatives intentionally include and address the needs of persons with disabilities to ensure inclusive and equitable development outcomes.

Recommendations

Goal 3: Good health and Well-being

- Advocate for the MoH budget growth and mobilization of funds through public-private partnership through the ministry of Finance and economic affairs so that Gambia's progress to UHC gets optimally funded.
- Institutionalize operational research to guide program decisions.
- Using the Primary Health Care approach as a strategy to give health education to the people especially those in hard-to-reach areas to enable informed decision making and build trust in the health system.
- A mandatory planning of activities at the central level with regions for efficiency and synchronization of activities by programs.
- Roll-out of the Essential Healthcare Package to all (including integration of Severe Acute Malnutrition /ICCM, NCDs, and SRH in PHC) through the allocation of funds for supply procurement in the annual budget
- Institutionalize one plan and one M&E framework for enhanced coordination

Goal 5: Gender Equality

- Produce official disaggregated data on women's contribution to national politics and the economy, including unpaid and domestic work;
- Fight misinformation about gender equality, hate speech and violence; include sexual education and reproductive health in the school curriculum from elementary education
- Strengthen actions to combat child marriage;
- Enforce the laws on Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) across the country.

Goal 8: Decent work and Economic Growth.

- Invest in education, science, technology and innovation, with special projects for groups in vulnerable situations, creating opportunities for digital immersion, and supporting the development of professional capacity for work and entrepreneurship
- Intensify investment in youth employment integration programs, especially women and People with Disabilities, and invest in the development of the professional, scientific and technological capacity of this population;
- Expand training centers for young professionals, and create financing lines of credit for ventures proposed and led by young people,
- Invest in education, science, technology and innovation, with special projects for groups in vulnerable situations, creating opportunities for digital immersion, and supporting the development of professional capacity for work and entrepreneurship;

Goal 14

- Develop short and long-term policies for fishery production chains, including investment programs to enhance infrastructure and marketing, particularly for national small-scale fishing production;
- Compile and disseminate official statistical data on national fishing and fish stocks, biennially publishing the country's progress in implementing measures against Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing
- Expand and improve the collection and analysis of data on the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, nationally and internationally, and develop robust monitoring and evaluation systems to ensure transparency, accuracy, regularity, and disseminate updates
- Encourage research to monitor coastal and marine ecosystems, and to assess and combat the acidification trends

Goal 17:

- Expand the country's development cooperation policy, and approve legislation enabling organized resource deployment as a donor country, ensuring the effective use of resources for international cooperation, aligned with achievement of the 2030 agenda.
- Regulate the exchange rate spread charged by Gambia banks for the reception of external resource
- Reduce the costs of remitting international resources

General Recommendations

- Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) should strengthen collaboration and coordination to enhance their collective influence on SDG implementation and advocacy.
- CSOs should develop and utilize mechanisms for systematically collecting, monitoring, and reporting on SDG progress at the national and local levels.
- TANGO should lead or facilitate training programs for CSOs on using specific SDG indicators, data collection methodologies (quantitative and qualitative), and basic data analysis tools. Develop a "CSO SDG Monitoring Toolkit" for The Gambia.
- CSOs should advocate for the full and meaningful inclusion of persons with disabilities in the design, implementation, and evaluation of development projects. Advocacy efforts should emphasize accessibility, equity, and the collection of disaggregated data to ensure that the needs and rights of persons with disabilities are adequately addressed in national SDG strategies.
- A stronger and more structured interface is needed between the Government, civil society, and the private sector to facilitate effective data collection, sharing, and coordination on SDG-related indicators. Establishing formal data-sharing protocols and multi-stakeholder platforms will help ensure the availability of timely, relevant, and disaggregated data for national SDG monitoring and reporting.
- Develop a Long-Term CSO Advocacy Strategy for SDG Accountability
- The periodic issuance of shorter "Spotlight Reports" by CSOs, focusing on specific SDGs and critical cross-cutting issues such as youth unemployment, climate adaptation, gender-based violence

Conclusion

As The Gambia submits its third Voluntary National Review report, it is important to appreciate the opportunity this process brings for the collective assessment of countries' progress against targets. This review tracks the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, including the goals and their targets, with a particular focus on the poorest, most vulnerable, and marginalised groups. VNRs are expected to facilitate concrete and tangible actions to ensure the realisation of the 2030 Agenda.

As one of the major stakeholders in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, civil society organisations through TANGO contributed to the National VNR report coordinated by the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs (MOFEA). CSOs produced this complimentary report to ensure that elements not included in the national VNR are expressed. While national alignment is well noted, understanding and mainstreaming SDGs into local plans is crucial. Local governments need to feel ownership and see their role in SDG implementation. Currently, many view SDGs as extra work rather than integrated into their activities. They need to understand that SDGs complement and align with their existing efforts, not create new ones.

There is a lack of a Whole Society approach at the local level, which calls for local government to collaborate with the private sector, labour, civil society, and other stakeholders including academia to co-define solutions. While the SDGs are global, their achievement depends on our ability to make them a reality in our cities and municipalities. As stressed in the Synthesis Report of the UN Secretary-General, “many of the investments to achieve the sustainable development goals will take place at the subnational level and be led by local authorities”. Public participation and collaboration are lacking in many municipalities and, where attempted, it has been more of a ticking boxes approach. This should be rectified.

One positive element of the development of the first CSO shadow report 2024 is that was inclusive and collaborative, ensuring that diverse voices were heard from a range of stakeholders including academia, civil society organisations, and the private sector. Engagement in the VNR process and inclusion in the government's SDG committee have strengthened civil society's capacity to monitor and evaluate SDG implementation effectively, enhancing efforts to hold the government accountable.

Challenges identified—and which we would like to see improved—include a lack of understanding of the SDGs across all stakeholders, incoherent policy, and inadequate data. Furthermore, the involvement of CSOs has been constrained in certain cases due to inadequate allocation of time and resources for meaningful participation. Limited funding and resources for CSOs in The Gambia restrict our ability to fully engage in the VNR process and contribute effectively. With this rich experience, we have outlined gaps in the implementation of specific SDGs and made recommendations for each goal. We also identified accelerators—or key priorities with a multiplier effect on society—per goal that need to be extended to the local level with appropriate budgeting. There should be an enabling environment in local municipalities that fosters collaboration, strategic alliances, and stakeholder partnerships for the SDGs at both local and national levels.

The Government of The Gambia is urged to establish a dedicated institution or designate an existing Ministry as the central oversight authority responsible for the monitoring and evaluation of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) progress. This body should coordinate

the systematic collection, verification, and dissemination of data related to the SDGs, ensuring transparency and accessibility for all stakeholders. Strengthening such an institutional mechanism will promote evidence-based decision-making, enhance accountability, and improve the effectiveness of national development planning and implementation

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Annex: TANGO's Thematic Working Groups

- Agriculture, Climate Change and Environment
- Gender Thematic Group
- Health and Population
- Governance, Human Rights and Legal Reforms
- Youth, Children and Persons with Disabilities
- Education, Life Skills and Sustainable Development
- Transitional Justice
- CSO Coalition on Elections
- CSO Coalition on Security Sector Reform

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