

CHAPTER 1: GENERAL INFORMATION ON THE COUNTRY

1.1 Geographical situation

The Gambia is a very small country located on the west coast of Africa, surrounded on three sides by Senegal, extending inland at widths varying from 24 to 48 kilometers along the banks of the River Gambia, with a total area of 11,632 square kilometers. The Gambia's geographical location is in the drought threatened sahelian scrub land which means it has very limited natural resources. This has adverse economic and social repercussions. The Agricultural area is only 4,300.00 Sq Km and a wet land area of about 2,077.55 Sq Km. The prevailing climatic pattern favours only a short agrarian production regime (on average three months) which is the main source of employment and food supply for 80% of the population who reside in the rural areas. However, the vegetation is generally Savannah grassland and has a sahelian Climate, typified by a long dry season (December to June), and a wet season (July to November). It has an average rainfall of about 811.5mm and an average temperatures ranging from 18 to 30 degree Celsius during the dry season (December to June) and 23 to 33 degree Celsius during the wet season (July to November). The relative humidity is about 68% along the coast and 41% inland during the dry season and generally about 77% throughout the country during the wet season.

The Gambian economy is mainly agricultural with groundnut production contributing about 15% of the GDP. Other major agricultural produce are rice, maize, cotton, vegetable and fruit which collectively account for about (10%) of the GDP. The current contributions of Agriculture to GDP, shows a declined as compared in the mid-70s which attributed about 40% of the GDP, thus, reflecting the strategies and action plans incorporated in the national sectoral policy framework. In view of the foregoing, government has laid down programmes aim at diversifying agricultural production and to develop other non-farm activities which started to yield gains, particularly, the performance of livestock and fisheries.

1.2 Demographic context

The Gambia is a small country in West Africa and is surrounded on three sides by Senegal and boarded on the west by the Atlantic Ocean. The population is estimated at 1.038 million and 1.361 million at the 1993 and 2003 population censuses with population densities of 97 and 127 persons per square kilometer respectively. The population of the Gambia is mainly young with more than half (about 63.55%) is below 25 years. Elderly persons of 65 years and above account for 3.36% of the population. The urbanisation rate increased from 30.8 % in 1983 to 37.1% in 1993. In 2003, this rate is estimated at 50.3%; which means that presently, more than half the population live in urban areas.

The Gambia's social diversity is reflected in the different ethnic groups. The main ethnic groups are the mandinkas (39.5%), Fula (18.8%), Wollof (14.6%), Jola and Karoninka(10.6%) and rest comprises of the minority groups. The majority of the population are Muslims (95%). A small minority are Creoles (1%), most of whom are Christians. Despite this ethnic pluralism, there is a measure of homogeneity in cultural practices. It has also a fairly undeveloped human capital base, with an illiteracy rate of 75 percent and primary school enrolment rate of 56 percent in (2002).

Table 1 : Basic demographic indicators

Indicators	1983	1993	2003	2006f
Population				
Total	687,817	1,038,145	1,360,681	1,509,928
- Urban	211,889	385,400	684,158	820,193
- Rural	475,928	652,745	676,523	689,735
Urbanisation rate %	30.80 %	37.12 %	50.28 %	54.32%
Population density per Km ²	64	97	127	138
Annual population growth rate (%)	3.8	4.2	2.7	2.7
Structure of Population per age group %				
- 0 to 14 years	43.76%	43.80%	41.98%	43.11%
- 15 to 49 years	45.12%	45.60%	48.13%	49.43%
- 50 to 59 years		3.95%	3.94%	4.05%
- 60 years and above	10.03%	4.98%	5.05%	5.19%
- (Not Stated)	1.08%	1.68%	0.90%	0.92%

Source : Gambia Bureau Of Statistics (GBoS); f = forecast

This population is increasing rapidly; the average annual growth rate estimated at 3.8% in 1983 increased to 4.2% in 1993. This remarkable growth, one of the highest in world, is attributed to high fertility and in-migration. The annual growth rate reduced slightly in 2003

to 2.7%. This population of 1.361 million inhabitants in 2003 is unequally distributed in the eight Local Government Areas (LGA) of the country (see Table 2).

Table 2 : Distribution of population per Local Government Area (LGA)

Local Government Area	1993			2003			2006f		
	Urban	Rural	Total Population	Urban	Rural	Total Population	Urban	Rural	Total Population
Banjul	42,326	0	42,326	35,061	0	35,061	33,131	0	33,131
Kanifing Municipal Council	228,214	0	228,214	322,735	0	322,735	358,133	0	358,133
Brikama	41,761	193,156	234,917	236,446	153,148	389,594	310,590	142,866	453,456
Mansakonko	10,206	54,940	65,146	13,302	58,865	72,167	14,324	60,096	74,420
Kerewan	33,102	123,360	156,462	34,720	138,115	172,835	35,196	142,876	178,072
Kuntaur	5,305	62,469	67,774	5,040	73,451	78,491	4,920	77,108	82,028
Janjangbureh	8,556	79,691	88,247	16,598	90,614	107,212	19,500	94,174	113,674
Basse	15,930	139,129	155,059	23,409	159,177	182,586	44,399	172,615	217,014
Total	385,400	652,745	1,038,145	687,549	678,897	1,360,681	820,193	689,735	1,509,928

Source : Gambia Bureau Of Statistics (GBoS)

1.3 Political and administrative organisation

The Gambia gained her independence from Britain in 1965 and became a Republic in 1971 and was one of the very few multiparty democracy systems in Africa. The Gambia formed a short-lived confederation of Senegambia with Senegal between 1982 and 1989. In 1991 the two neighbouring countries signed a friendship and co-operation treaty.

The Gambia has since independence experienced political stability except during the period of the 1994 peaceful coup followed by a nearly two year-ban of political parties. The 1996 constitution and subsequent parliamentary elections in 1997 have so far maintained stability and have completed a return to constitutional and civilian rule in the country. The country undertook another round of presidential and legislative elections in late 2001 and early 2002. Dr Yahya A.J.J. Jammeh, the leader of the 1994 political change was been elected president in all subsequent elections.

In 2004 the political landscape of the country saw the creation of a political alliance grouping the main opposition parties, NADD (National Alliance for Democracy and Development) and an MOU was signed among all the political parties registered in the country. In October 2006 presidential election President Yahya Jammeh was re-elected a third five-year term of offices.

The Government of the Gambia has, however, made significant strides in improving gender equality, economic and political good governance. Some of the key indicators include the appointment of four Cabinet ministers, one of which is the Vice President, the establishment of the Independent Electoral Commission, the Office of the Ombudsman, the Governance Commission, safeguarding the independence of the Judiciary, Gambia's qualification for the Millennium Challenge Account of the United State, the creation of the Anti-corruption Commission and a number of policy and legal reforms. In addition, the government of the Gambia made crucial policies and legal reforms in the areas of Public Financial Management, Public Procurement, The Judiciary, the Civil Service, Decentralization and Local Government, institutional reorganization of the Central Bank of the Gambia.

1.4 Socio-economic characteristics

The economy of the Gambia is basically agricultural with 67% and 80% of the population in 1993 and 2003 engaged in agricultural activity, e.g. groundnuts farming. The economic situation has been stabilising from 2004 with the overall GDP growth rate of 5.3%, lower than the 2003 growth rate of 7.0% but still improving compared to 2002 where the country experienced negative growth of -3.2%. This was mainly due to a generalised Crop failure as a result of the exceptionally low rainfall experienced in 2002. The growth rate in 2004 was underpinned by the strong recovery of the agricultural sector in terms of better harvests and also inflows attributed to private remittances and investments from Gambians in the Diaspora. This was a relatively slight improvement since the external current account deficit – including official transfers – deteriorated from 5% of GDP in 2003 to 12% in 2004, partly reflecting the worsening in the balance of trade, as strong import growth was driven by the recovery in output, and other donor-financed capital expenditures. Gross international reserves rose by more than US\$ 22 million that is by over 30% in 2004 as increased foreign

inflows and a stabilising exchange rate allowed the Central Bank of the Gambia (CBG) to increase its purchases in the inter-bank market.

The IMF in 2005 entered into another SMP with the Government (October 2005 – March 2006) with a view to getting a fresh PRGF.

As regard the trade regime, the Gambian economy is open, liberal and the location of the country and its relatively efficient port facilities make it attractive as a gateway to the West African region. The external sector is dominated by re-exports. The Gambia has been part of the exchange rate mechanism of the West African Monetary Zone (WAMZ) since April 2002, and ratified both the West African Central Bank statutes and WAMZ Agreement in August 2004. Imports are subject to a maximum tariff of 18%. Export taxes are restricted to fish and fish products (10%).

Under the old Integrated Framework (IF) programme of the EU a comprehensive study was undertaken on the country's export potential, including an analysis of its export trade and the identification of potential "winner" products. A request for assistance from the new Integrated Framework was introduced with the objective of integrating the country into the global trading system, and to mainstream trade in its national development plan, particularly the PRSP

Regarding the social aspects, the rural population is being depleted by rural-urban migration and by the scourge of HIV/AIDS. However, the country still has a relatively low prevalence rate, estimated at 1.1% and 0.6% for HIV-1 and HIV-2 respectively (2005 HIV Sentinel Surveillance Report). These, coupled with the high incidence of poverty, unemployment, poor infrastructure and high dependence on a narrow agricultural commodity base, groundnuts in particular, make for a very precarious existence for individuals and families, and for the country, a tenuous national development challenge.

Basic social indicators show that poverty is pervasive and increasing from 34% in 1994 to 69% of the population in 1998 (Household Poverty Report). Poverty is predominantly a rural

phenomenon. Within the five rural Divisions, more than 62% of population are described as 'very poor' (i.e. an income below 75% of the food basket). In contrast, the same figure for the urban area is 19%. Average incomes in the Greater Banjul Area is almost triple that of the rural divisions. However, urban poverty has also risen with the increased rural-urban migration, narrow employment base and the associated low wages and salaries.

The primary goal of the government under the PRSP in the health sector is still to improve access to health services and ensure country-wide provision of an essential healthcare package. The Gambia has achieved substantial progress in health during the past fifteen years. Performance in the sector is relatively good when compared with other Sub Saharan African countries. Equally, there has been substantial improvement in education and access to water supply. The gender disparity in the social sectors has reduced drastically over the years. However, constraints and challenges still persist in these social sectors.