

# National Youth Policy Review: Gambia



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## ABSTRACT

The Gambia government, through its ministries and institutions, has put in place several policies covering range of critical issues affecting young people. Among the policies developed in the last ten year are Revised National Youth Policy(2009-2018), National Youth Policy(2019-2028), National Employment(2010-2014), National Health(2012-2020), National Gender Policy(2010-2020), National Reproductive, Maternal, Neonatal, Child and Adolescent Health(RMNCAH) Policy(2017-2021), National Family Planning Policy(2019-2026), National Education Policy(2016-2030), and Migration Policy(2020-2030).

The country has also enacted various Acts such as the NYC Act 2000, Women's Act of 2010, and Sexual Offence Act of 2011 at the National Assembly to provide legal backing for developing policies to create a safe environment for youths to grow to reach their full potential. In addition, The Gambia also ratified the Africa Youth Chart adopted in the 2006 AU Summit held in The Gambia, thus the name: "Banjul Charter." This charter, plus other international frameworks of which The Gambia is a party, were incorporated in the youth-related policies and programs to improve the situation of youths.

However, regardless of all these legal frameworks, policies, and interventions, young people continue to face several challenges in their quest to reach their full potential and better their lives. These challenges range from illegal migration, unemployment, low education and training, gender-based violence, teenage and unwanted pregnancy, and a high rate of

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sexually transmitted diseases among other things. The Gambia is rated by the IOM to be among the countries with the highest number of illegal migrants entering Europe. Over 35,000 Gambians arrived in Europe through the Mediterranean Sea between 2014 and 2018. This excluded the number that could have either died or returned home.

The paper is a desk review of the existing youth policies and legal framework to establish the nature and degree to which they address the needs and challenges of the young people of The Gambia. Various youth-related policies, relevant national assessments and surveys, as well as empirical researches on youths in The Gambia were reviewed. The review revealed that there is a policy gap in the area of employment, education and training, gender equality, and migration. These gaps are due to either the absence of a policy - as was the case of TVET, or the expiration of existing policies developed a decade ago without revisions or replacements. The inadequate presentation of the youth in the political process leading to low participation in the decision-making process is also unveiled. The lack of a legal framework enforcing adequate involvement of youths in levels of governance is seen to be responsible for this. The policies lack proper monitoring and evaluation mechanisms that will ensure effective implementation. Thus, the policies, well written as they are, are not addressing the challenges of youth.

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## I . Country Profile

The Gambia, situated in West Africa, attained independence on February 18, 1965, and the capital city is Banjul. It is bordered to the north, south, and east by Senegal and has an 80km coast on the Atlantic Ocean to the west. The country's borders roughly correspond with the path of the River Gambia. The Gambia has a total area of 11,300 km<sup>2</sup> (4388 sq. miles). Out of this, approximately 1,300 km<sup>2</sup> is water bodies with an 80-km coastline and an exclusive fishing zone of 200 nautical miles with a continental shelf. The agricultural land is 6,550 km<sup>2</sup>, and the arable land is 588,000 hectares, of which 334,000 hectares are under cultivation. In addition, it has a forest area of 4,750 km<sup>2</sup> (i.e., 47.5% of land area). The country has a subtropical climate with two distinct seasons: dry and rainy seasons. The dry season usually starts mid-October and ends around mid-June every year with an average temperature of 32°C / 89.6°F. The rainy season usually begins around mid-June and ends around mid-October. With August being the wettest month of the year, temperatures can reach up to 41°C/105.8°C. According to the Gambia Bureau of Statistics (GBoS, 2016), Gambia has one of the fastest population growth rates, 3.1% per annum, in sub-Saharan Africa. The population in mid-2019 was estimated at 2.3 million. Projected figures indicate that the population will be 3.6 million and 4.9 million by mid-2035 and mid-2050, respectively (Population Reference Bureau, 2020). As a result of the high rural-urban migration, over 50% of the population lives in the western part of the country, which constitutes the urban sprawl of Banjul, Kanifing Municipality, and Brikama LGA (GBoS, 2016).

The Gambia is amongst the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) with a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita of US\$ 777.81 (WB, 2019). Agriculture forms the backbone of the economy, with nearly 70% of the working population involved in the agricultural sector during the rainy season. However, the services sector is the most significant contributor to GDP, about 60%, with agriculture contributing about 30%. The economic growth rate was 6.1% in 2019, reflecting a decline from 7.3 in 2018 and projected to grow by over 5% in the next few years. Headline inflation peaked at 8.0% in 2017 and declined to 6.25% and 7.1% in 2018 and 2019, respectively (World Bank, 2019).

## II . Situation of Young People

### Demographic Characteristic of Youth

According to The Gambia Bureau of Statistics (2013), The Gambia has a very young and youthful population. 42.7% of the population was below 15, 23.4% between 10-14 years, and 38.5% between 13–30 years. Only 3.1% of the population was 65 years and above. Of 1,882,450 people, the youth share (aged 15-35 years) continues to grow. The youth population constituted 724,743.25 at the 2013 Population and Housing Census, representing 38.5% of the total population. The 2013 Census report highlights the youth characteristic in the following revealing manner: slightly more female youth than male youth—52.8% and 47.2%. The youth are almost equally distributed between urban and rural areas—50.1% in the urban areas and 49.9% in the rural areas. However, slightly more male youth lived in urban areas—63.0%, in contrast to 60.3% of females partly due to sex selectivity of migration, with males more likely to migrate than females. Females outnumbered males across all ages and geographical locations except for Banjul LGA, where there were slightly more males than females.

## Definition of Youth

The definition of youth varies from country to country. Generally, the period between childhood and adulthood is called 'Youth.' During this period, a person prepares himself/herself to be an active and fully responsible member of society. It is also a period of transformation from familydependent childhood to independent adulthood and integration in society as a responsible citizen. Youth, as a concept, varies from culture to culture and from society to society. In most Gambian societies, the progression from childhood to youth involves some systematic rites of passage or initiation into adulthood. These rites have symbolic significance in that, by participating in them, the individual achieves a new status and position of responsibility in society. Such a new status gains validity through genuine community action and recognition.

However, due to specific influences driven by science, technology, and external culture contact, the boundaries defining the transition from childhood to adolescence to adulthood are shifting. The crossover into each new stage manifests in different ways. The challenges and changes that young people must negotiate do not occur as predictably as in the past. Therefore, defining youth according to some exact age range can be challenging. The 2009-2018 National Youth Policy defined youth as individuals between 13-30 years. In addition, the United Nations and World Bank have defined youth as young men and women between the ages of 15 and 24, while the Commonwealth Youth Program has adopted the age category of 16 to 29 years. A third definition relevant to The Gambia is provided in the African Union's African Youth Charter, which defines youth or young people as every person between 15 and 35 years.

## Youth Unemployment

Unemployment is a major challenge confronting the country's development as it is a leading cause of growing poverty in the Gambia. Young people constitute a more significant percentage of the country's unemployment, mainly due to their lack of competitiveness in labor force resulting from several factors. According to the labor survey-GBOS(2018), in The Gambia, 53.5% of a population of 2,300,000 are the working population, totaling 1,219,525 persons. Of this, 47.8% reside in rural areas and 58.2% in urban areas. The report further shows that 68% of the working population are between age 15 – 35(Youth), and of this, 377,326 youth(44%) are actively engaged in the labor force; 58.5% are employed while 41.5% are unemployed. This indicates that 56% of the working youth population are not economically active, not part of the labor force. In addition, GBOS(2016) report revealed that, of the 377,329 economically active youth, 374,751 persons are employed and 12,958 unemployed, while 303,140 persons are economically inactive. This is above the global average estimate of youth out of the labor force because globally, over seventy-three million youth aged 15-24 are unemployed, around 20% of are neither employed nor enrolled in an education or training program (ILO 2017). It indicates the nonparticipation of many young people in the economy, resulting in a high poverty rate among youths.

Furthermore, youths are more employed in other service sectors such as tourism than in entrepreneurship and agriculture. 26.4% are in other service activities, and 11.2% and 9.2% are in the entrepreneurship and agricultural sectors, respectively(GBOS 2018). This is indicative that majority of the employed youth are highly vulnerable to seasonally unemployed because the tourism sector in The Gambia tourism season runs for only 6months and over 75% of the employees are layoff afterwards.

Meanwhile, according to Lowe(2020), youth in The Gambia are faced with numerous challenges in securing decent employment. The challenges include macro and micro levels factors, such as the low economic growth of the Gambia, disconnection between training institutions and the labor market, deficiencies in the education system, job preferences among youth, and limited access to finance and training programs for youth. Other challenges of youth employment also include limited funding opportunities, lack of feedback on funding applications, the little physical presence of youth employment

programs, particularly in rural areas, weak coordination across various implementing agencies and stakeholders of programs on youth employment, as well as the conditions attached to some grants and loans offered by funding agencies.

## Youth Education and Training

Although the literacy rate of The Gambia has been increasing steadily over the years, it is still below that of the other anglophone countries in the sub-regions like Nigeria and Ghana. The literacy rate had risen from 36.82% in 2000 to 50.78% in 2015, showing a steady increase of 13.96 in five years (Gambia Literacy Rate 2000-2021, n.d.). According to UNESCO(2016), the literacy rate among young people in The Gambia is at 67% as of 2015, while Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal, and Togo are at 75%, 92%, 69%, and 84%, respectively. Furthermore, according to the last census report(GBOS 2013), 32.1% of the youth(15-35) have never attended school, while 33.0% attended school at the time of the census and 34.9% attended in the census past. The rural area has the more significant proportion of its youth who never attended school, with 51.3%, while the urban youth population proportion is only 20.6, showing a low literacy rate among rural youth. Overall, 32% of the youth have never been to school, 16.0% attained primary education, and 23.0% lower secondary, while 24.0% reached upper secondary level. Only 1% had vocational education, and 3% reached a tertiary level(GBOS 2013). Youth with no education tend to increase with increasing age. For example, more than half of those aged 30 years had no education. This may partly be explained by the fact that advocacy and campaigns to increase access to education were intensified in the last two decades.

Vocational education has far too long been neglected in The Gambia. This is manifested in the 1% attainment of vocational education by the youth as of 2013. Public policies, societal perceptions, accessibility, and lack of training alignment to the labor market are the main factors contributing to the youths' low uptake of vocational education. The majority of the youth prefer primary and secondary education or even no education to vocational education in The Gambia. This mainly is due to the misconception that vocational training is for the failed people and those who dropouts of formal schools. The nature and remuneration of jobs performed by people with vocational and technical skills and the unemployment rate among those with vocational skills certificates are among the reasons that makes it less attractive to young people. The overall employment rate of TVET graduates differs from one year to another, and it is difficult to provide a realistic estimation given the scarcity of data. The National Youth Service Scheme( NYSS ) and Gambia Technical Training Institutes(GTTI) tracer study found that, in 2009, the employment rate of vocational education graduates was 44.6%. However, they declined during the years 2010 and 2011 to reach 34.7% in 2013. However, in The Gambia, like in many developing countries, vocational education has only recently been given some degree of attention and focus from the government, private sector, and populace. The consequences of this lack of attention towards vocational education are the growing problem of youth unemployment and underemployment, which is a recipe for high crime rates, poverty, and political instability.

## Youth Illegal Migration

Migration from the Gambia seems to be rising as many young Gambians choose to follow this path. It has caused The Gambia to be fundamentally a country of outmigration. According to IOM(2017), 90,000 Gambians live outside of the country: half of them reside in the United States, Spain, or the United Kingdom, a quarter are spread across West Africa, and the remaining quarter in other European countries. Within the country, 23% of the population is affected by internal migration, and urbanization heavily contributes to this phenomenon. Over 35,000 Gambians arrived in Europe by irregular means between 2014 and 2018, with many others in Africa along the Central Mediterranean Route opting for voluntary return(IOM 2020). Recent data shows that Gambians constituted 6% out of 48% of all arrivals by sea in Italy in the first seven months of 2017. The emigration of workers, especially the youth, is a major concern to the Gambia. The surge of young people

taking the perilous journey across the harsh Saharan desert and into the rough Mediterranean Sea to reach Europe has had serious implications on communities and national development. Men are most likely to embark on an irregular journey, and an increasing number of minors are following the same path. Sex tourism, domestic servitude, and forced labor are other migration-related pressing issues in the Gambia.

## Youth Sexual and Reproductive Health

Access to sexual and reproductive health information and services has been a major challenge adolescents and youth face in The Gambia. As adolescents approach puberty, they will one day be up against making life-changing decisions about their sexual and reproductive health. The Gambia Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) (2013) shows that most adolescents lack the knowledge required to make those decisions responsibly, leaving them vulnerable to coercion, sexually transmitted infections, and unintended pregnancy. Over the years, teenage pregnancies and other challenges hindering adolescent girls' growth and well-being in The Gambia has little or no access to sexual and reproductive health information and services through health facilities and other community settings. The culture of non-discussion of sexuality and sexual health within families or between parents and children likely plays a vital role in the incidence of early sexual debut, risky sexual behaviors, and teenage pregnancy (UNFPA 2020). Research done in one neighborhood suggested that early sexual activity, teenage pregnancy, low contraception uptake, and abortion pose a public health threat to adolescents living in Bafuluto and surrounding communities (Lohani, 2018).

Although there has been some progress on teenage pregnancy between 2013 and 2019, a lot is desired. DHS (2013) shows that 19.4% of women aged 20-24 years gave birth before age 18 while 4.1% gave birth before age 15, whereas DHS (2020) shows that 6.4% aged 15-17 began childbearing and 0.7% of women gave birth before age 15. The report further revealed that only 23.2% of married women aged 25-29 currently use modern family planning methods. In addition, only 25% of the same age group heard about or saw planning messages on all electronic and print media in the past months. The most alarming revelation is that 6.7%, 13.7%, and 19.6% of unmarried women aged 15-19, 20-24, and 30-34, respectively, and 29.3%, 23.9%, and 23.9% of married women aged 15-19, 20-24, and 30-34, respectively, have an unmet need for family planning (DHS 2020).

## Youth Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV), as defined by The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), refers to any act perpetrated against a person's will and is based on gender norms and unequal power relationships. Women and girls face physical, emotional, and sexual abuses that undermine their health and ability to earn a living, disrupt their social systems and relationships and rob them of their childhood and education. SGBV is due mainly to individual behaviors that allow violence in the family, workplace, and community. Men are also sometimes victims of SGBV, but the preponderance of evidence suggests that women are much more likely to be abused. Similar to other countries in the sub-region, The Gambia has a high GBV prevalence rate. In the status quo, 1 in 4 women aged 15-49 years will become sexual and gender-based violence victims, and 26% of ever-married women have experienced physical, sexual, and emotional violence by their husbands or intimate partners (UNFPA 2020). The most prevalent SGBV in The Gambia are rape, child marriage, female genital mutilation (FGM), and other domestic violence. Genital mutilation (FGM) and Child Marriage continue to terrorize women and girls in The Gambia. According to The Gambia Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) (2018), 75% of girls between the ages of 15-19 have undergone FGM, and 30% of women aged 20 to 24 years were first married or in union before age 18.

Domestic violence could have both physical and psychological consequences, and it comes in several forms and circumstances. The most prevalent in The Gambia and among youth people is spousal violence which comes in physical, sexual, and emotional spousal violence. According to DHS(2020), women who have experienced physical violence since age 15 increased from 41% in 2013 to 46% in 2019-20. It further revealed that experience of physical violence in the last 12 months decreases with increasing age, from 16% among women aged 15-19 to 6% among women aged 40-49, and that the age of women ever experiencing sexual violence generally increases with age; less than 1% had experienced sexual violence by age 10 and 7% by age 22. Overall, 48% of women aged 15-49 experienced either physical or sexual violence. This shows a high prevalence of spousal violence among youth married women than the child and older women. What is more worrying is the increasing trend of violence as married women aged 15-49 who have ever experienced spousal violence of any form from their current or most recent husband increased from 26% in 2013 to 39% in 2019-20(DHS 2020). More than 13% increment in just a span of 7 years.

### III. Policy Context

This chapter introduces an organogram of governmental branches that execute youth-related policies at a national level and a brief description of the role of each relevant governmental branch. It will also look at the policy context and the legal and policy frameworks for youth development in The Gambia.

#### Governmental Institutions related to youth

The government of The Gambia has established a wide range of institutions that work as an arm of the Ministry of Youth and Sports to steer youth affairs. These satellite institutions were all established by the Act of parliament through bills presented by the Ministry of Youth and Sports. The number of institutions established for this purpose is four. Each is assigned specific roles such as coordination and project implementation, skill training for out-of-school youth, and entrepreneurship development geared toward the empowerment and development of the young people.

##### 1) Ministry of Youth of Sports

The Ministry of Youth and Sports is the leading governmental institution charged with responsibility for developing, promoting, and regulating youth matters. As a result, it is responsible for overseeing and coordinating the implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of policies and associated programs and projects. It also has an overseeing and supervisory responsibility for the Satellite Agencies of the Ministry dealing with youth matters such as the National Youth Council(NYC), National Youth Service Scheme(NYS), National Enterprise Development Initiative(NEDI), and the Presidents International Award(PIA).

##### 2) National Youth Council

An Act of Parliament established the National Youth Council(NYC) in 2000. Its main goal is to strive for the empowerment and development of young Gambian men and women. Governments provide a subvention for NYC annually without necessarily controlling or interfering in the running of the organization. It is a semi-autonomous and non-partisan



specialized agency of government designed to be the voice and the umbrella organization for youth organizations. All voluntary and charitable youth organizations, youth NGOs, and CBOs are encouraged to be affiliated to the National Youth Council of The Gambia to ensure proper coordination of youth issues at the national, regional, and sector levels. In this respect, it represents the interests of all young men and women irrespective of their ethnic, political, or religious affiliation in all facets of development.

Its principal functions include: conducting research on youth development; monitoring the implementation of the National Youth Policy and decisions of the National Youth Conference; mobilizing resources for youth development; working closely with charitable organizations involved in youth-related work or activities; organizing youth conferences and festivals; promoting networking with other national youth bodies and youth organizations abroad; planning and implementing national youth programs; maintaining a databank on youth organizations and activities in the country; registering national youth organizations and determining the registration fees; and carrying out such other functions that may be desired in furtherance of the objectives of the Council and Supervising the operations of the Regional Youth Committees.

### **3) National Youth Service Scheme**

The National Youth Service Scheme(NYSS) was established in 1996 to provide the youth with the requisite skills to address the acute problem of unemployment. The primary objective of NYSS is to inculcate discipline in youth, develop ethical and moral conduct and positive attitude acquired through shared experience, and promote national development.

The NYSS seeks explicitly to train the youth to appreciate the dignity of labor, instill in them the spirit of self-reliance and encourage them to create rather than seek jobs.

### **4) President International Award(PIA)**

The President's International Award started operations in the Gambia in 1979, first at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and then at the Ministry of Education. After separating the education portfolio from the youth and sports portfolios, it came under the auspices of the Ministry of Youth and Sports. It is also a member of the International Award Association within the Duke of Edinburgh's Award in the UK.

It provides a balanced progressive program of extracurricular activities for young people throughout the world. It has four mandatory sections: Service, Skills and interest, physical recreation, and adventurous journeys divided into three different Awards, namely, Bronze, Silver, and Gold. In addition, it provides livelihood skills training to young people in carpentry, welding, electrical installation, home management, secretarial duties, computer technology and business studies, and basic Maths and English to enhance their writing skills. There is also an apprentice training program for out-of-school young people, which runs for three years.

### **5) The National Enterprise Development Initiative(NEDI)**

The National Enterprise Development Initiative(NEDI) was established in 2004 under the Vice President's Office but operationally supervised by the Ministry of Youth and Sports(MoYS). The primary purpose of its establishment is to empower the Gambian youth and women through the provision of training in business entrepreneurship, start-up capital to operate businesses in the informal sector, and business advisory services to ensure sustainability. However, even though it was set up in 2004, it was not until 2013 that it was fully institutionalized through the National Enterprise Development Initiative Act(2013).

NEDI operates in all seven regions of The Gambia and supports retail shopping, bakery, fishing and fish selling, catering, tailoring, and butchery. Its establishment aims to empower Gambian youth and women and the availability and affordability of essential food items and services to the Gambian populace.



## Overview of the existing youth policies

Although not close to sufficient, The Gambia government, through its ministries, has over the years developed several policies that are geared toward achieving the development targets stated in the National Development Plan (NDP) 2018-2021. The NDP came into effect in 2018 after a change of government in December 2016 as a replacement to the then national plan- Programme of Acceleration Growth and Employment 11 (PAGE). The goal of the plan (NDP) is to “deliver good governance and accountability, social cohesion, and national reconciliation and a revitalized and transformed economy for the well-being of all Gambians.” It hopes to realize the goals through eight strategic priorities, which are: restoring good governance, transforming the economy, modernizing agriculture, investing in education and health, building infrastructure and restoring energy, promoting tourism, reaping the demographic dividend through an empowered youth, and making the private sector the engine of growth, transformation, and job creation.

Youth development is a crossing-cutting issue; it cuts across all government sectors, including almost all policies across sectors. However, based on the magnitude of some specific challenges faced by young people in the country and their significance on the country’s development, sectors responsible for employment, education, and health have youth-related issues more prominent in their policies. In addition, the national institutions in charge of youth issues also develop specialized policies and strategies covering the overall issues hindering youth prosperity.

## The National Youth Policy

The current National Youth Policy (2019-2028) is the fourth of its kind to address the need for youth development and empowerment through employability and enterprising to ensure they reach their full potential to contribute to its sustainable development. The policy succeeded the 2009-2018 Revised National Youth Policy, whose implementation faced numerous challenges from local to international. The Gambian youth is affected by and responsive to emergent dynamics globally, including changing lifestyles, new cultures influenced by cultural contact through ICT, Satellite TV, and immigration from other countries in the region. New and emergent trends and value orientations have themselves undergone both deliberate and inadvertent transformations in the various dimensions of human nature. At the national level, the past 22 years of dictatorship (during which most current youths were born and raised), the social structure of The Gambia underwent changes that made the youth a social being different from what they would have been if they were raised in more normal/typical times. In this context, there was a need for a new youth that reflected the current realities of youth, thus developing the 2019-2020 youth policy.

The 2019-2020 policy seeks to provide guidelines and direction for all stakeholders involved in implementing policies, programs, and projects to develop youths in The Gambia. The policy focuses on critical areas, such as a common understanding in government of the scope of sectoral policy involvement in youth development, the accompanying ramifications for youth development programming, budgeting and partnership in the implementation of this policy, the coordination function of the Ministry of Youth and Sports (MOYS) in the implementation of this policy by a network of partner institutions and the restructuring, and funding of MOYS to suit the successful accomplishment of this task, the roles, rights and responsibilities of the categories of stakeholders in the business of youth formation and harnessing for national development, arrangements for three-year rolling strategic plan implementation of this policy, and its monitoring and evaluation to inform on-going progress and probable review. In addition, due to the varying nature and need for youth based on age, sex, family background, occupation, ability, geographical local, and social status, this policy identifies target groups for specific attention due to their vulnerability and circumstance of living.

The principal goal of this policy is to establish a holistic and harmonious youth cohort imbued with adequate knowledge and competencies, solid professional ethics, spiritual and moral values, and a level of independence, patriotism, and commitment that gives them life options to choose development and progress in alignment with the national vision. The priorities areas based on the socio-economic and political realities of the country and the alignment to international best practice and commitment to youth development and empowerment includes: rethinking and redefining youth development as a deliberate formation process, advocating for the rethinking and realignment of the national educational systems to meet the quality and numerical knowledge and skill needs for national development, institutional Partnership Collaboration in Youth Development Programming and Investment, institutionalizing and strengthening coordination of policy implementation, establishing coequality between STEM, and general academic education and availing it to all youths of various aptitudes, advocate for mainstreaming youth in economic planning and programming as perquisites to growth and employment creation, identifying and taking advantage of high employment potency sectors such as agriculture, fisheries & technology-related services, curbing migration through formidable alternatives; assuring all youths access to quality health and education, and promoting sustained diversified and viable entrepreneurship development schemes and opportunities for youths.

## National Employment Policy

The Gambia is currently operating the National Employment Policy and Strategies 2010-2014, and this was preceded by the National Employment Policy and National Employment and Action Plan 2003-2008. The latest policy, National Employment Policy and Action Plan 2021-2025, is being developed-the first draft has been issued to stakeholders for comments. The National Employment Policy (NEP) and the National Employment Action Plan (NEAP) 2003-2008 were formulated to address the country's acute unemployment and underemployment problems, especially amongst youths and women. The NEP and NEAP provided the framework to support poverty reduction activities by creating decent and productive employment opportunities.

However, despite this policy and strategies, unemployment and poverty increase. According to The Gambia Bureau of Statistics, the unemployment rate of the labor force increased from 5.8% in 2003 to 7.9% in 2008. Agriculture, which is seen as the highest absorption sector for employment, only increased by 1%. In addition, the performance review analysis shows that enrollment figures in technical vocational education training (TVET) increased substantially in 2006 (8,345) and dropped in 2007 and 2008 (7,869 and 5,711, respectively).

Meanwhile, the current employment policy and strategy 2010 -2014 was developed based on the lessons learned from the evaluation of the 2003-2010 policy. Its goal is to promote full employment as a priority in national, economic, and social policies, and enable the economically active population to attain and secure sustainable livelihood through full productive and freely chosen employment and work by the year 2020. The objectives are: to minimize the rates of unemployment and underemployment-unemployment to be reduced at least by 5% per annum; to promote a well educated, trained, skilled, versatile, self-reliant, and enterprising labor force; to pursue poverty reduction policies through labor-intensive programs and improvement of the labor environment; to improve the existing labor administrative system for the promotion of decent work, worker participation in decision and an efficient industrial conflict resolution mechanism in the labor market.

Furthermore, unlike the basis for the 2010 -2010 employment policy, which was based on the lesson learned from the preceding policy, the upcoming 2021-2025 is based on the finding of GBOS 2018 labor survey results, which highlights the high unemployment and underemployment despite the existence of the previous policies. It captures the government's vision for achieving employment goals as indicated in the National Development Plan (NDP 2018-2021) strategic priority 8, "making the private sector the engine of growth, transformation, and job creation." Its objectives, among other things, include utilizing the country's labor force properly, enhancing employable skills, creating a conducive environment for job creation, promoting

entrepreneurship, integrating employment issues in macroeconomic policies, promoting the smooth transition from the informal economy to formality, and promoting labor-intensive technology in public investments.

## National Health Policies

The Gambia government, through the Ministry of Health, designed and implemented a general national health policy aimed at improving the operations and ensuring quality service delivery of the overall health sector. The current policy (National Health Policy 2012-2020) was designed in 2012 to enhance the delivery of quality health services to reduce the high prevailing morbidity and mortality rates.

In addition to general national health policy, other specific policies such as National Reproductive, Maternal, Neonatal, Child and Adolescent Health (RMNCAH) Policy 2017-2021 and the National Family Planning Policy 2018 were developed with support from united agencies (WHO, UNFPA, UNICEF) and other development partners to help accelerate the improvement of the reproductive health status of mothers, neonates, children, adolescents, and youth. The strategic objectives of the RMNCAH policy 2017-2021 include, among other things, reducing the unwanted pregnancies and unmet need for contraceptives, childhood morbidity and mortality, incidence and prevalence of STIs and HIV among mother, children, and adolescents, and gender imbalances and harmful traditional practices, increasing knowledge of reproductive biology, and promoting responsible sexual and reproductive health behavior among adolescents.

The National Family Planning Policy 2018 succeeded a policy that ended in 2000, creating a gap until the initiation of this policy in 2018. It aligns with the National Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child and Adolescent Health Policy (2017-2026) and the National Health Policy (2012-2020), the National Gender Policy (2010-2020), and the National Youth Policy (2009-2018) which all contain clauses to safeguard the sexual and reproductive health of all individuals in The Gambia. The policy aims to improve the reproductive health status of women, men, adolescents, and youths of the Gambia through the promotion and provision of rights-based comprehensive, quality, affordable, and sustainable sexual and reproductive health information and services. It also aims to increase access to comprehensive family planning information and services to reap demographic dividends of well-managed population growth.

## Education Policy

The only existing national policy on education in The Gambia is the Education Sector Policy 2016-2020. The policy is a sector-wide policy that separates education into two: Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education and Ministry of Higher Education and Research Science and Technology. The duration of the policy is pegged to SDGs to align the strategies to the SDG's goals and target. It was prepared through a highly participatory process involving relevant government institutions, the private sector, and development partners such as UN agencies and NGOs with a theme: "Accessible, Equitable and Inclusive Quality Education for Sustainable Development."

The policy priorities are divided into five components: Access to education, Quality Education, Vocational and Technical Education, Tertiary and Higher Education, and Capacity Building. The objectives include increasing school enrollment and completion rate, improving efficiency and effectiveness of teaching and learning, improving institution and management TVET system, and improving sector-wide service delivery. The policy recognized the importance of TVET education in creating employment and self-employment opportunities for youth, thus contributing to the country's socio-economic development. The formulation and implementation of operational Policy on TVET was planned to provide a national TVET framework with clear directions on established linkages between TVET and pre-vocational delivery, general education, tertiary and higher education,

labor market needs, and quality service delivery. The first TVET roadmap 2020-2024 was launched to reinforce skills in the country and increase employability and integration of youth in the economy. While the policy emphasizes the importance of TVET and the need to formulate and implement a specific TVET policy, no such policy ever existed- however, my finding revealed that the first such policy development process and methodology was launched on July 23, 2020, and is still under development.

## Migration Policy

The Gambia launched its first Migration Policy 2020-2030 on December 24, 2020, with support from International Organisation for Migration(IOM) Office in The Gambia. The purpose of the policy is to provide a national framework for migration management to better coordinate and define roles and responsibilities of the various stakeholders involved in migration management and provide guidance for the revision of the national legislation on migration so that it effectively addresses current migration challenges. Its objectives, among other issues, are to manage migration in a manner that contributes to national development, including the promotion of diaspora engagement and reducing the potential negative impacts of brain drain, to promote orderly and safe migration of Gambian citizens through the provision of timely and accurate information regarding opportunities abroad and sensitization about the dangers of irregular migration, to reduce irregular migration through better border management and promotion of alternative to irregular migration for the youth, to include through boosting national employment, and to facilitate the development of a sound mechanism for the safe return and sustainable reintegration of Gambian migrants to their home country and communities.

Given the recent launching of this policy, one may not assess its impact on the current migration trend. However, due to the several interventions through projects and programs implemented by the government and development partners such as IOM and GIZ, illegal migration persisted but decreased. Nevertheless, the fact that the practice continued is a grave concern due to the precarious nature of the journey and its impact on the country's human resources today and in the future.

## National Gender Policy

The Gambia Government enacted the National Policy for the Advancement of Gambian Women(NPAGW) in 1999. The policy provides a legitimate point of reference for addressing gender inequalities at all levels of government and by all stakeholders. The policy's major achievement includes increasing awareness on gender as a development concern, increasing enrollment and retention of girls in schools, improved health care delivery, increasing women's participation in decision making, and reducing gender stereotyping and discrimination. The recommendation of the NPAGW midterm review was the basis for the development of a gender policy to address the limitation in the NPAGW adequately, ensure the sustainability of the achievement of the NPAGW, and address emerging development issues relating to gender as dynamics were changing from only women empowerment to the promotion gender equality and equity. The new National Gender Policy 2010-2020 was subsequently developed and had the following priorities: Gender and Education, Gender and Health, Gender and Sustainable Livelihoods Development, Gender and Governance, Gender and Human Rights and Poverty Reduction, and Economic Empowerment. The objective includes, among things, to advocate for the provision of equal access, retention and quality education to all school-age children by 2020, to support for the retention of girls and boys at all levels of education by 2015, to encourage equal training and recruitment opportunities of female and male teachers in schools by 2015, to lobby for the elimination of all forms of discriminatory and harmful sexual and cultural practices, to empower women and men to protect and care for themselves, particularly concerning HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases, and to advocate for the development of specific integrated programs on counseling in family life, behavioral change and moral education and reproductive health for adolescents and youths.

## Legal Frameworks underpinning youth policies

The country's fundamental law, The Constitution of the Republic of The Gambia(1997), sets the broad policy and legal context for the National Youth Policies.

The National youth council was established by an Act that the President and the Nation Assembly enacted on May 10, 2000. It was regarded as the millennium gift of the president to the young people. As the name implied, National Youth Council(NYC) Act 2000 established the National Youth Council responsible for coordinating the policies, programs, and matters connected.

In Addition to NYC 2000, the Women's Act of 2010 was also enacted by the President and National Assembly in May 2010 to provide a legal framework for implementing the National Policy for Gambian Women and Girls(2010-2020) following similar policies. In the same vein, the Sexual Offence Act 2011 and subsequently amended to Sexual Offence Act 2013 were also enacted by the National Assembly to protect all persons, especially vulnerable groups, including women, children, and mentally and physically disabled people, against all forms of sexual violence and abuse. The Act applies to the crime of rape and other sexual offenses.

Internationally, the development of the youth policies was in a context guided by other national policy initiatives and reflective of various international conventions, agendas, and programs on youth empowerment and development to which The Gambia is committed. In particular, the following instruments were considered in contextualizing the youth policies:

I. Charter of the United Nations – The Gambia, as a member of the United Nations, agrees to the attainment of the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, which enables young men and women to enjoy full participation in the life of society. In addition to the Charter, The Gambia is also a State Party to other International Instruments of the United Nations dealing with the rights of individuals and society such as:

Universal Declaration on Human Rights(1948);

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights(1976);

International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights(1976);

International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women(CEDAW)(1979); and

Convention on the Rights of the Child(1989).

II. United Nations World Programme of Action for Youth - The principles and purposes of the United Nations World Programme of Action for the Youth for the Year 2000 and beyond have helped inform the revision of the National Youth Policy at many levels. The ten priority areas identified and suggested by the World Programme of Action and the five newly identified priority areas adopted at the 2005 United Nations General Assembly were primarily taken into consideration in developing National Youth Policies;

III. African Union-The African Union has adopted several regional instruments related to the development and empowerment of the African youth. As a member of the African Union and State Party to these regional instruments, The Gambia is legally required to domesticate them into her national policies and legal tools. Consequently, the policies have taken into account the provisions of these instruments to the extent possible. These instruments include:

African Youth Charter adopted in Banjul in July 2006;

African Youth Decade Plan of Action(2009-2018)(Road Map for the Charter);

African Charter on Human and People' Rights(1986);

Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights relating to the Rights of Women in Africa(2003); and African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child(1999).

IV. The ECOWAS Youth Policy – The National Youth Policies recognizes the ECOWAS Youth Policy as the basis for the overall development of all young people in the sub-region.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

As evident in this paper, young people in The Gambia face numerous challenges that hamper their growth and development and expose them to so many hazards in their quest to attain better living conditions. The government of The Gambia has put in place so many good policies; these range from specific National Youth Policy to other sector policies that, to a greater extent, incorporated youth issues into their policies. However, a wide range of problems are either not adequately captured or wholly omitted in the policies. Policies such as Youth Participation in Politics and Decision Making, Technical and Vocational Education Training(TVET), and Entrepreneurship Development are missing. In addition, issues such as migration, education, employment, and health are not adequately captured with poor policies.

Youth participation in decision-making is not given the importance it deserves as it is usually left at the authorities' discretion without any legal backing. At the National Assembly, only one young person is selected to represent the youth. Among the five nominated members, the constitution accords to the president for selection, the president, in consultation with the National Youth Council, selects a youth representative. While this is a good gesture from the president, it is not enough, considering the population and importance of young people. Furthermore, there is no legal instrument that makes such participation mandatory. As per the local government Act, one young person is selected as part of the council in all municipalities at the local council levels. While this is found in the local government Act, the constitution has no provision for it.

Furthermore, policies such as National Employment Policy(2010-2014), National Gender Policy(2010 -2020), and National Health Policy(2012-2020) are outdated. Since they were formulated ten years ago without any periodic revision in-between, they may have lost their relevance and effectiveness due to the dynamic nature of youth issues and the rapidly changing social, political, and economic environment at both local and global levels. The absence of operational strategies and the lack of proper monitoring and evaluation of existing policies also result in the ineffectiveness of the policies. Undoubtedly, the content of the policies in place is quite appealing as they are usually written by experts who have considered lots of relevant and pressing issues and consulted with a wide range of stakeholders. However, the effectiveness of the policies in addressing the challenges of youths is highly questionable and very minimal, if any. Regardless of the formulation and rollout of these policies to effectively tackle the obstacles hindering the progress and prosperity of youth, young people continuously face challenges such as unemployment, lack of marketable skills, illegal migration, lack of quality, affordable and accessible tertiary education, unwanted pregnancies, and gender-based violence.

In addition, the National Education Policy 2016-2030 is broad and ambitious. It intended to cover all sectors of education: Basic, Secondary, Tertiary, and Technical and Vocational Education Training. However, the policy fails to provide precise mechanisms to address all these domains or provide operational strategies to design specific sub-policies for this crucial sector. As a result, there appears to be a policy gap in addressing issues that are affecting quality and affordable and accessible education, especially in tertiary education and TVET.

## Recommendations

Based on the analysis of the current situation of young people and the review of the relevant policies in place to address their issue, the following recommendations are proposed to help adequately bridge the existing gaps policies to effectively address the problems and change the status quo of youth in The Gambia.

**Employment Policy:** Government should put more focus on self-employability and private sector employment creation. There should be a specific policy and strategy on enterprise and entrepreneurship development. Hopefully, this will address unemployment issues caused by lack of skill and education or mismatch between skill and labor market. It will reduce the burden on the government, which is now the principal employer, and improve earnings as entrepreneurs tend to earn better than salary earners, thereby increasing productivity and national income and reducing poverty.

**Education and training:** There is a need to separate or sub-policies for both the Ministry of Basic and Higher Education to ensure that critical and unique challenges faced by each of them are captured and adequately addressed. The TVET policy that is being developed should be robust and wide to capture all aspects of TVET and involve all stakeholders locally and globally. It should focus on the quality, relevance, accessibility, and affordability of TVET education; and provide mechanisms for effective collaboration between the labor market(demand) and training institutions(supply) to ensure demand-driven labor focus and improve the quality of the training.

**Migration Policy:** A revision of The Gambia immigration act should be made, or a separate Act should be enacted to cover the migration issues in detail. The reintegration process of returned migrants should be explicit in the policy and given the attention it deserves. An operational and strategic plan should be implanted, and effective monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the policy should follow.

**National Gender Policy:** A review of the existing policy and new policy development is recommended as the current policy has expired and has been in existence since 2010. A policy that meets the taste of time is necessary to bridge the existing policy gap. The upcoming policy should pay attention to gender-based violence and related issues, develop, and implement strategies that will adequately address the root cause of GBV.

**National Health Policies:** A design of a new National Health Policy and review of the existing policy is essential for the bridging of the policy gap that exists in the health sector. While the sector has put in place relevant sub-sector policies, there is a need to implement the operational strategies, especially in adolescent sexual and reproductive health. A robust monitoring and evaluation framework should be rolled out with clear roles and responsibility for its different stages and accountability mechanisms put in place.

**Youth Participation in Governance and Politics:** A legal instrument that will serve as a base for developing policy for effective youth participation in decision making is needed. The Act should cover all levels of governance, from local to regional to national levels. The minimum number recommended by the international bodies such as the United Nations and other bodies to which The Gambia is a party needs to be included in the Act accordingly.



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