

# ‘Back Way’ to Europe:

How can The Gambia  
better address migration  
and its development  
challenges?



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How can The Gambia better address migration and its development challenges?

### **@ActionAid 2018**

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**Activists** from ActionAid's youth network in Gambia, Activista Gambia, campaigning at the parliamentary elections in April 2017.  
PHOTO: ULRIK NORUP JØRGENSEN/ACTIONAID DK

## Summary

In the four years 2014-17, some 1.7 million people risked their lives by fleeing across the Mediterranean Sea for Europe, a journey in which over 13,000 have died or have gone missing.<sup>1</sup> This report is a contribution to understanding what the proper policy responses to this movement of people should best be. It focuses on young people in one African country, The Gambia, thousands of whom have been seeking a better life in Europe – often called the 'back way'. This study asks: Why have so many young Gambians become irregular migrants and what can be done to help them and The Gambia manage this exodus and promote national development?

## Research methodology

ActionAid conducted extensive secondary research for this study, involving a literature review of work on The Gambia's migration, agriculture, climate change and economic policies. Interviews with officials in government ministries and para-statal organisations and NGOs were conducted in Banjul in November 2017. Focus group discussions and individual interviews with farmers and young people were held in two villages: Njaba Kunda in Central Baddibu district and Bwiam in Foni Kansala district.

The focus of this study is mainly on men since it is they who comprise most of those who have left The Gambia. But male migration also has a major impact on women: it is changing the demographic balance in villages and increasing the agricultural workload on those 'left behind', notably women. This has policy implications for government, meaning that agricultural policy needs to also prioritise supporting women farmers.

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Evidence suggests that addressing these questions involves analysing issues lying at the root of this migration. Until recently, Gambian migration was to a large extent the result of repressive government policies and the lack of political and civil rights. The democratic election of a new government in December 2016, which swept away 22 years of often brutal and repressive rule, means that the prospects for Gambians are much brighter now. But not all Gambian migration was the result of political repression and many young Gambians are still leaving the country.

Unless and until The Gambia improves job prospects and agricultural livelihoods – which also involves seriously addressing climate change – large-scale migration from the country is likely to continue. Young people are leaving because of the lack of jobs and opportunities in rural and urban areas, the lack of adequate support to farming which is being badly affected by climate change and because they see a better life in Europe.

But the other side of this is that migration can be a development strategy and a livelihood choice for people, who have a right to migrate for economic purposes if they choose. The right to movement and the right to leave and return to one's own country are fundamental rights, but often overlooked in the debate about migration and development. Indeed, Gambians who have migrated are contributing to the development of their country by sending back remittances to their families. These remittances averaged

US\$181 million a year during 2013-15, equivalent to around 20% of GDP, one of the highest proportions in the world.<sup>2</sup> Thus the relationship between migration and development is complex. ActionAid holds the view that the human right to seek safety, security, dignity, and sustainable livelihoods is inalienable and indivisible, and therefore calls for the humane treatment of - and reasonable assistance for - all those who are compelled to seek survival and protection.

While the new government is committed to addressing many challenges the country faces, not all of its policies, nor those of The Gambia's donors, are positive and some others are missing. The government needs to focus on prioritising support to agriculture - where 70% of Gambians earn their livelihoods<sup>3</sup> - which means addressing the needs of small-scale women and men farmers and adapting to climate change. Northern governments - which have primarily caused climate change - should also be doing much more to help address this in The Gambia.

And although it is mainly men migrating, the scale of migration is also having an impact of women - especially women farmers who constitute a growing proportion of the country's agricultural workforce. This means that The Gambia's agricultural policy must increasingly focus on benefitting women farmers. Women and families left behind by migrating husbands can be at greater risk of poverty, discrimination, gender-based violence and vulnerability from conflict and natural disasters. Specific approaches are needed to understand and address these emerging trends.

## Migration from The Gambia

Government figures are that over 321,000 Gambians - 17% of the population - have migrated internally, mainly from rural to urban areas.<sup>4</sup> The Gambia has the highest level of rural migration in Africa, with 58% of the population living in urban centres.<sup>5</sup> But large numbers of Gambians are also migrating to Europe: From January 2017 to March 2018, 8,681 Gambians were recorded as arriving in Europe by sea. They were the eighth largest nationality of the arrivals and comprised 4.7% of the total.<sup>6</sup> In 2016, 12,792 Gambians arrived in Italy and Spain by sea.<sup>7</sup> Thus over 20,000 Gambians have left their country for Europe since January 2016.

ActionAid's interviews with various stakeholders, combined with other evidence, suggest four key reasons why Gambians are migrating:

- **Lack of good livelihoods in farming**
- **Lack of jobs in rural and urban areas and lack of skills**
- **Recent political repression and lack of freedom in The Gambia**
- **Aspiration for a better life in Europe, and inequality between Europe and Africa**

## A tale of two villages

ActionAid conducted focus group discussions and individual interviews with farmers and young people in two villages: Njaba Kunda in Central Baddibu district and Bwiam in Foni Kansala district. The focus was mainly on men, who comprise most of those who have left The Gambia.

Njaba Kunda is a village of around 3,600 people in Central Baddibu district 1.5 hours west of Banjul on the north bank of the Gambia river. Its population has shrunk by hundreds in recent years as young people ranging in age from 15-30 have left: 700 from the village (around a fifth) are now in Europe, with others in neighbouring countries. Tragically, 23 people from Njaba Kunda have died since leaving the village in the past three years, many by drowning in the Mediterranean.

Villagers said that if the opportunities for work and income were here, no-one would leave. Villagers need skills training but even if they receive this, there are few local jobs. In a group discussion with 48 farmers, people were asked why youths are leaving. Villagers said because of poverty, and because they were not able to secure good livelihoods through their current groundnut and rice production. Farm production is reducing over the years, with lack of rainfall, an impact of climate change, a key factor. One villager said: 'We don't have alternative skills to farming to find other livelihoods. If the crop fails, you want to leave. We don't have alternatives. We do have sufficient land for farming'.

District chief Alhaji Jagne, said: 'We don't like our youth to migrate. We're mainly groundnut farmers. Our youths are leaving, going abroad. We don't have the means to ensure their survival as farmers here. We have a lot of people who want to work but not a lot of work. The youth feel hopeless and leave this country for abroad'.

Male farmers in the village grow groundnuts, millet, sorghum and maize while women farmers mainly cultivate rice and vegetables. They are small-scale farmers, with holdings ranging from 1-4 hectares.<sup>8</sup> Central Baddibu district, which has 33 villages, has only three extension officers available to visit the farmers, with only one motorbike. Most farmers use only crude hoes as implements with only some able to hire sine hoes and seeders due to the cost. Women farmers, producing mainly rice, say they would prefer to be able to access power tillers, thresher machines and rice milling machines.

The farmers are perfectly aware of climate changes and are experiencing this on their farms. They estimated that crop production has fallen around 40% in recent years, probably as a result of less rain and greater soil depletion. Women farmers said rice production had also fallen and they were expecting this year perhaps 50% of the production they could get from the land.

Young people leaving the village is having two contradictory impacts. On the one hand, many migrants are now sending back money to families from their earnings in Europe, giving people cash. On the other hand, the fact that so many men leaving is also changing the male/female balance in the village and will significantly reduce birth-rates. The migration is placing even greater burdens on those remaining to conduct farming, who are largely women, leaving fewer hands in the fields to undertake farming operations such as ploughing, sowing and weeding.

## How can The Gambia better address migration?

The new government is taking many positive steps to address the challenging economic situation in The Gambia after years of poor governance. Government policy documents are focusing considerably on promoting employment and opportunities for young people. The new National Development Plan (NDP) covering 2018-21, says there should be a strong focus on providing skills training to young Gambians and that investing in youth is critical, among other areas.<sup>9</sup>

Within this positive environment, this research identifies several areas which would improve the policies of the Gambian government and its donors to address migration from the country and the reasons for this. The government should:

- focus on fewer policy areas to ensure they are successfully implemented along clear timelines with adequate resources
- overwhelmingly prioritise support to agriculture, and ensure it spends at least 10% of the national budget on agriculture
- reorient agriculture strategy to invest in agro-ecology, not conventional farming with chemicals and provide more support to farmers to engage in value-added activities.
- use extra revenues to boost extension services and provide farming implements.
- explicitly support women farmers, especially in the agricultural extension services, to support women's needs and increase their participation in the delivery of services.
- work with donors who must significantly increase aid to help The Gambia adapt to climate change, matching their international responsibility for primarily causing it. Support for agro-ecology must be part of that effort.
- re-think the private sector-led approach to economic development in order to ensure private investments effectively deliver economic progress in the country.
- more proactively develop the tourism sector in a way that benefits Gambians and keeps wealth in the country, by increasing jobs and earnings.



# Introduction

**Some 1.7 million people fled across the Mediterranean Sea for Europe in the four years 2014-17, risking their lives. Over 13,000 died or have gone missing in their attempts to cross.<sup>10</sup> The plight of refugees, migrants and asylum seekers has captured unprecedented global attention as stories of desperation, death and mistreatment have multiplied. In Europe, these large movements of people have sparked debates about the rights of migrants and refugees and the proper policy responses.**

In 2015, the EU established an Emergency Trust Fund, currently worth €3.2 billion, to help African states affected by irregular migration.<sup>11</sup> However, the European Commission and EU member states have also been criticised for various measures: for seeking to keep out desperate people, sometimes doing deals with other states in order to do so, introducing positive and negative aid conditionalities depending on how countries manage migration, and providing insufficient support when migrants arrive in the EU.

This report is a contribution to understanding what those proper policy responses to this movement of people should best be. It focuses on young people in one African country, The Gambia, who have been leaving their country in the thousands in recent years, many making the perilous sea journey across the Mediterranean to seek a better life in Europe – often called the ‘back way’. This study asks:

- **Why have so many young Gambians become irregular migrants?**
- **What can be done to help them and The Gambia manage this exodus and promote national development?**

The evidence in this report suggests that addressing these questions involves analysing issues lying at the root of this migration, especially government and donor policies in the areas of agriculture, climate change and job creation, in addition to those directly focusing on migration. The study argues that unless and until The Gambia improves job prospects and agricultural livelihoods – which also involves seriously addressing climate change - the migration flow out of the country is likely to continue. Young people are leaving the country because of the lack of jobs and opportunities, poverty in the rural areas, the lack of support to farming which is being badly affected by climate change and because they see a better life in Europe.

The prospects for Gambians are much brighter now, under a new government democratically elected in December 2016 which swept away 22 years of often brutal and

repressive rule that gripped the country from 1994. The regime under President Jammeh also misappropriated a vast amount of money – an estimated US\$100 million in the past two to three years alone – leaving the country largely destitute.<sup>12</sup> The new government under President Adama Barrow is putting in place a series of policies to address myriad challenges amid a political openness that Gambians have not enjoyed for over two decades.

This study argues that, while the new government is committed to addressing challenges, not all of its policies, nor those of The Gambia's donors, are positive and some policies needed to reduce poverty are currently missing. The government needs to focus overwhelmingly on agriculture – where some 70% of Gambians earn their livelihoods<sup>13</sup> – while donors – who have caused climate change – should be doing much more to address it in The Gambia.

Also critical is that the government is embarking on an economic strategy which overwhelmingly sees the private sector and free markets as the primary engines of growth; this is part of a conscious shift towards 'economic liberalisation'. Developing the local private sector is critical, and foreign direct investments can help to make that happen, but, the report argues that an alternative, state-led strategy of economic intervention is likely to be more successful. The economic policies now being drafted appear to have been highly influenced by donors such as the World Bank which routinely promotes the same model of economic liberalisation throughout Africa. The danger is that this model, which is remarkably similar to the strategy drafted under the previous government, will fail to improve the livelihoods of people living in rural areas and fail to create sufficient jobs in a situation which has contributed to the exodus of Gambian youth in the first place.



**Woman** draws water for irrigation at an organic garden by the River Gambia.  
PHOTO: JANE HAHN/ACTIONAID

## Background:

# Development challenges in the Gambia

Poverty remains deep in The Gambia. The percentage of people living on less than US\$1.25 a day remained unchanged from 2010 to 2015 – at around 48%. In absolute terms the number of poor people has slightly risen during this period by around 140,000.<sup>14</sup> The Gambia has a low literacy rate, at 52% of the working age population, posing challenges for future transformation.<sup>15</sup>

## Agriculture

Tourism, groundnut exports and remittances are the largest money-earners for The Gambia and agriculture is by far the most important sector, employing around 70% of the working population, of whom around 70% are women.<sup>16</sup> Agricultural output is generated by around 69,100 farm households involving 500,000 people. Some 30% of the cultivated area is devoted to the production of groundnuts for cash income, with other land set aside mainly for coarse grains (e.g. maize, sorghum, millet) and rice.<sup>17</sup>

Most of those working in agriculture are subsistence farmers cultivating an average of less than one hectare of land.<sup>18</sup> They face major challenges, especially a lack of improved farming implements, poor access to finance and a lack of storage facilities. A particular problem is lack of access to irrigation (only 6% of arable land is irrigated<sup>19</sup>) and reliance on a short, five-month, erratic rainy season. Although The Gambia has abundant underground and surface water resources, very little agricultural production takes place during the dry season.<sup>20</sup> The result is declining or stagnant productivity and current food production meets only 50% of national food requirements.<sup>21</sup>

## Climate change

The Gambia's contribution to global greenhouse gas emissions is negligible, at around 0.01%.<sup>22</sup> But Gambian farming is being seriously affected by climate change that it has not caused and this is set to continue, with potentially calamitous consequences. Since 1960, the country has experienced increasingly erratic rainfall patterns, higher intensity storms, intra-seasonal drought and increasing average air temperatures, accompanied by periodic cold spells, heat waves and increasing frequency of dust storms.<sup>23</sup> Weather changes are already affecting agriculture:

- **Between 2002 and 2007, for example, total rice production dropped by about 68% and coarse grains production fell about 27%, mainly due to drought.**<sup>24</sup>
- **In 2016, an unusually short rainy season resulted in a sharp drop in agricultural production of at least 50% based on pre-harvest assessments.**<sup>25</sup>

The increase in temperature and decrease in rainfall has caused a reduction in land available for agriculture and a 21%-44% decrease in food crop production. In 2010 alone, urban floods affected more than 35,000 people and damaged 2,371 houses.<sup>26</sup>



The country is becoming hotter and experiencing less rain:

- **The current annual mean temperature of approximately 28°C is projected to increase by between 3°C and 4.5°C by 2100, indicating a significant heating trend.<sup>27</sup>**
- **From 1950 to 2000 annual rainfall amounts have decreased by about 30%. By 2100 average rainfall is projected to be less than 500 mm per year. This means that the rainfall total recorded in the drought year of 1982/3 of 480 mm will become the norm by 2100.<sup>28</sup>**

It is expected that climate change will also result in declining fish production and an increase in flooding, reducing the available arable land.<sup>29</sup> Analysis also suggests a significant future sea level rise in The Gambia: of 1.23 metres higher by 2100 than in 1995. This would inundate 8.7% of the country, putting 50% of Banjul at risk.<sup>30</sup> The rising river Gambia has already salinised large areas of land, reducing soil fertility for farmers and making farming even harder.

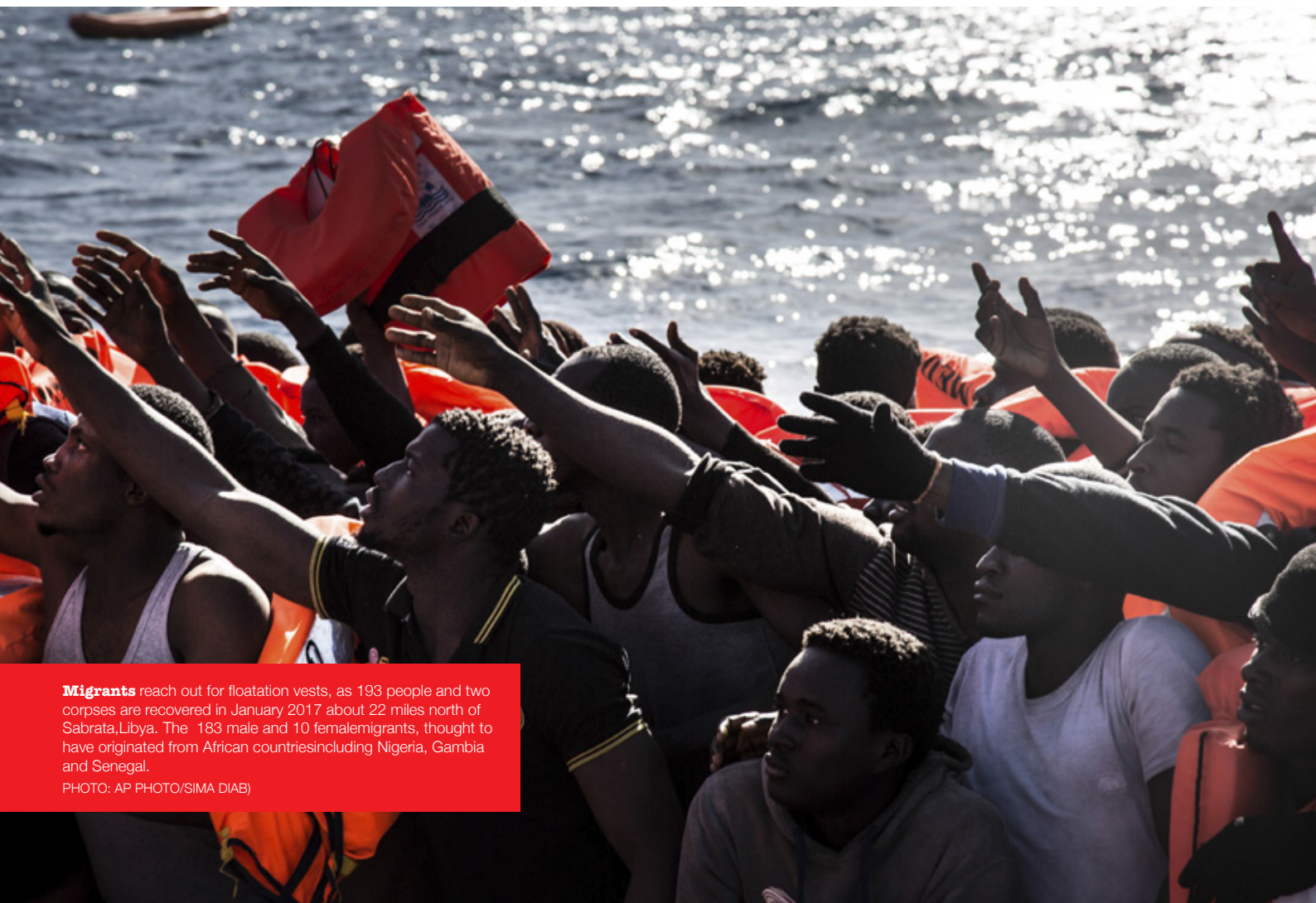
## Unemployment

With a population of around 2 million, youths (defined as those aged 13-30) constitute 37% of all Gambians.<sup>31</sup> Unemployment is very high and has been increasing: while GDP has been growing by over 5% per annum in many recent years, the unemployment rate reached 29% in 2012 (the last Labour Force Survey) across the whole working age population but was even higher, 38%, for youths.<sup>32</sup>

As the United Nations Development Programme has noted:

**'The growth in GDP, mainly contributed by the services and low manufacturing sectors, has not sufficiently expanded to generate adequate employment opportunities to absorb the increasing urban young job seekers most of whom have little or no employment skill and are highly concentrated in the Greater Banjul Area. Each year, the labour market demonstrates a weak absorption capacity as growing numbers of Gambians demand jobs that do not exist',<sup>33</sup>**

Most Gambian workers are engaged in low productivity jobs with low wages and have no formal education. The proportion of the labour force with technical and vocational education and training is low, at around 11%.<sup>34</sup> The government, recognising this problem, and with some donor support, has been promoting various projects to increase skills and job prospects.



**Migrants** reach out for floatation vests, as 193 people and two corpses are recovered in January 2017 about 22 miles north of Sabrata, Libya. The 183 male and 10 female migrants, thought to have originated from African countries including Nigeria, Gambia and Senegal.

PHOTO: AP PHOTO/SIMA DIAB)

# Migration from the Gambia

How many Gambians are migrating and to where?

Government figures are that over 321,000 Gambians - 17% of the population - have migrated internally, mainly from rural to urban areas.<sup>35</sup> This has contributed to The Gambia having the highest level of rural migration in Africa, with 58% of the population living in urban centres.<sup>36</sup> Most (73%) of those living on less than US\$1.25 a day live in rural areas, where households are more than twice as likely to be poor than in urban areas; this accelerates rural urban migration.<sup>37</sup>

## Gambians in Europe

From January 2017 to March 2018, 8,681 Gambians were recorded as arriving in Europe by sea. They were the eighth largest nationality of the arrivals and comprised 4.7% of the total.<sup>41</sup> In 2016, 12,792 Gambians arrived in Italy and Spain by sea: 11,929 to Italy and 863 to Spain. In Italy, Gambians comprised the fifth largest nationality; in Spain, the third largest.<sup>42</sup> Of those arriving in Italy in 2016, 3,257 (27%) were unaccompanied children. Nearly all the others – 8,397, were men; women comprised 213.<sup>43</sup>

Many of those arriving in Europe apply for asylum. In 2015, 8,000 Gambians applied for asylum in Italy.<sup>44</sup> In the first 6 months of 2016, 4,000 Gambians did so.<sup>45</sup>

Gambians' irregular migration to Italy, witnessed in recent years, is a relatively new phenomenon. Figures before the current wave of migration are that The Gambia's emigrant stock was 71,000 in 2013. The top destination countries by 2013 were Spain, the UK, the US, Nigeria, Sweden and Senegal.<sup>46</sup>

By mid-2016, the UN High Commission for refugees listed 26,570 Gambians as a 'population of concern' abroad: this included 10,070 refugees and 16,500 asylum seekers pending cases – in all countries, not necessarily Europe.<sup>47</sup>

But large numbers of Gambians are also migrating to Europe:

- **From January 2016 to February 2017, 14,036 Gambians arrived in Europe across the Mediterranean by sea.**<sup>38</sup>
- **Throughout 2017, even after the fall of the Jammeh regime, Gambians have kept crossing the Mediterranean, albeit at a reduced rate: 7,669 Gambians arrived in Europe by sea from January-October 2017.**<sup>39</sup>

Thus 21,705 Gambians have been documented as arriving in Europe by sea since January 2016 – around 1% of the country's entire population. This is the equivalent of 57,000 Danes or 656,000 Britons leaving their country.

It is not known how many Gambians have died crossing the sea to Europe, but the Central Mediterranean route, taken by the overwhelming majority of Gambians, is the deadliest of all the crossings. Over 5,000 migrants died crossing the sea to Europe in 2016, and nearly 3,000 have died in the first ten months of 2017.<sup>40</sup>

## The importance of remittances

Remittances from the Gambian diaspora abroad back to families in the country have become so large that it is not in the country's interest to see migration end completely. According to the World Bank, remittances to The Gambia amounted to an average of US\$181 million a year during 2013-15, equivalent to (a very large) 20% of GDP in 2014 (the 10<sup>th</sup> highest proportion in the world).<sup>52</sup> Remittances have tripled from 2006 to 2014<sup>53</sup> and can be expected to have significantly risen since, in the more recent wave of migration to Europe. Recent figures are not available on the highest remittance-sending countries; in 2012, they were Spain, the US and UK.<sup>54</sup>

The government notes that remittances have been increasing at a rate of about 12% per annum for over a decade and that they 'offer a great opportunity for investing in major infrastructure projects in the country if appropriate institutional set up is put in place'.<sup>55</sup>

## Who are the migrants?

The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) undertook a study in 2016 comprising interviews with 6,485 refugees from West Africa, the Horn and North Africa arriving in Italy.<sup>48</sup> It found that with Gambians:

- Their average age was 20 and 91% were single with only 8% married
- Some 70% travelled alone
- 24% were engaged in secondary migration, starting the journey towards Europe after having spent one year or more in another country than The Gambia
- The cost of the journey varied according to the respondent. The majority (60%) said they spent US\$1,000-US\$5,000. Some 3% said the journey cost nothing, 11% said less than US\$1,000 and 1% said more than US\$5,000, with the rest unknown. This compares to an average per capita income in The Gambia of US\$473.49
- 88% reported not having any relatives already residing in the intended country of destination (which was predominantly Italy)

The IOM study did not disaggregate Gambian refugees by gender; it is likely, from previous surveys and ActionAid's findings in the villages, that nearly all are men.



There is some contradiction in the surveys as to the level of education attained by those migrating. The IOM study found that only 3% of migrants had been educated to tertiary level whereas 32% had finished primary and 48% finished secondary. However, an earlier (2015) study for the IOM found that 63% of Gambian migrants had been educated to tertiary level.<sup>50</sup> Similarly, the World Bank notes that in 2010-11, 28% of Gambians educated to tertiary level emigrated and that 19% of Gambia's emigrants to OECD countries in 2011 were tertiary educated.<sup>51</sup> These earlier phases of migration appear to have involved people with different levels of educational attainment.

## Why are Gambians migrating?

The Gambia has not produced an official study analysing reasons why people are migrating. The reasons for migration are often complex.<sup>56</sup> However, ActionAid's interviews with various stakeholders, combined with other evidence suggests four key reasons which are often inter-related. These are summarised here and this section should be read in conjunction with the evidence provided by villagers in the next section.

### Lack of good livelihoods in farming

Farming is hard work in The Gambia and decreasingly productive and profitable. Young people increasingly see little future for them in a sector which receives insufficient support. ActionAid's interviews suggest that would-be migrants would be deterred from migrating if they had greater prospects to be successful at farming. This supports the conclusions of a recent UNDP study, which noted:

**'Low agricultural production and productivity: the youth in The Gambia are migrating out of agriculture. Increasingly they have no incentive to remain or go back to the sector.... While it is accepted that agriculture presents probably the best opportunity for increasing employment and reducing poverty, the challenge is that it largely remains a rural activity with the more educated youth more likely not to take up agriculture as a career'.<sup>57</sup>**

As the same UNDP study notes, 'the cycle of poor performance of the [agriculture] sector, among other factors, has driven the youth out of agriculture into the services sector.'<sup>58</sup> The problem is that there are few jobs in the services sector either.

### Lack of jobs in rural and urban areas and lack of skills

ActionAid's interviews suggest that it is also the lack of opportunities – of finding good jobs and of acquiring skills to obtain the scarce jobs that do exist – which is driving many to migrate. As the government notes:

**'The increasing joblessness and under-employment among the young people leaves many of them with a sense of desperation and helplessness forcing many of them to seek opportunities elsewhere including illegal migration to Europe... The root causes to the migration flow is the lack of skills and employment opportunities.'**<sup>59</sup>

One survey finds that more than two thirds of unemployed youth (95% of males and 57% of females) would consider moving to find work. Thus many move from rural to urban areas in search of work, but then consider leaving The Gambia altogether if they cannot find suitable work in urban areas.<sup>60</sup>

## Political repression and lack of freedom in The Gambia

ActionAid's research suggests that economic reasons are a key factor behind some young Gambians migrating, and this can explain why Gambians have still been migrating in large numbers during 2017. However, evidence also suggests that the political repression of the previous Jammeh regime was also a major contributory factor. For example, the 2016 IOM study noted above found that 50% of Gambians interviewed cited conflict/war/political reasons as their main reasons for leaving the country, with 27% saying economic reasons (although the latter was the highest among all nationalities except Senegalese).<sup>61</sup>

## Aspiration for a better life in Europe, and inequality between Europe and Africa

Many in The Gambia - from villagers to state officials - refer to the 'greener pastures' that its citizens are looking for. This is cemented by pictures of Europe, especially on TV screens, that make life look better there. A senior official in a youth-related semi-government organisation said: 'Some migrate because of their perception of Europe, that it's easier to do well there than here. This perception comes from the media highlighting Europe and life there, showing rich people and big houses'.<sup>62</sup> Some people say that Gambian youth see their favourite footballers in Europe enjoying lavish lifestyles and think they can replicate this. There is a general point that this migration appears to be rooted in inequality, linked to aspiring to a better life and income level.

For many of those who previously undertook the journey to Europe, there may well have been a fifth factor in deciding to leave: a misperception of how tough and dangerous that journey was likely to be. 'Those doing the back way, or those who have done it, phoning their relatives or friends, rarely relate their tough experiences. Partly, this is about meeting the expectation of their peers, not wanting to say they have suffered', one senior official in a youth-related organisation said.<sup>63</sup> However, this is likely to be no longer the case: Gambians are now more aware that so many have died crossing the Mediterranean.



**Women** at work in rice fields in the village of Nema Kunku in the North Bank region of The Gambia. ActionAid's partner ADWAC has built a dyke here to mitigate the effects of climate change, a great example of the type of climate change adaptation that ActionAid believes should receive greater funding.

PHOTO: JANE HAHN/ACTIONAID

# A tale of two villages

## Njaba Kunda village

Njaba Kunda is a village of around 3,600 people in Central Baddibu district 1.5 hours west of Banjul on the north bank of the Gambia river. Its population has shrunk by hundreds in recent years as young people ranging in age from 15-30 have left: 700 from the village are now in Europe, with others in neighbouring countries.

Tragically, 23 people from Njaba Kunda have died since leaving the village in the past three years, many by drowning in the Mediterranean. All men, they are the brothers, husbands, fathers of those they left behind. The survivors are now in Italy, Spain, Germany, England, Sweden, France, Norway, Austria and other countries. Although the rate of migration has recently fallen, young people are still leaving the village.

[**Ibrahima Conateh**] was one man from the village who died six months ago crossing the Mediterranean from Libya; he leaves behind a wife and four children. Young men have been leaving the village for several years: In 2008, five men from the village died when a boat capsized crossing to Europe. Another villager, **Sedia Jaiteh**, a 27 year old, was killed by criminals in Tripoli, Libya, leaving behind his wife in the village.

In a group discussion with six 22-36 year olds in the village, all with contacts and relatives now in Europe, the villagers say that some of those now in Europe regret what they have done, leaving their home and not necessarily finding an alternative livelihood, but others have found small jobs and prefer Europe. However, they say that few can now return to the country: one reason is the sheer difficulty of doing this, the other is the humiliation that returning might bring, having fled and then come back empty-handed.

**Lamin Jaiteh**, a 36 year old farmer who has just returned from having spent five years in Angola in search of work, said that if the opportunities were here, no-one would leave. Villagers need skills training but even if they receive this, there are few local jobs. His 22 year old sister, Aja, says that one problem is the sheer lack of income to be derived from farming currently; even the biggest farmers struggle to make US\$500 in a season. **Mustafa Jaiteh** was recently trained in agricultural techniques in Benin by the Songhai initiative. Now that he has returned to his village, he cannot access start-up capital to put his entrepreneurial plans into practice; the lack of access to affordable loans is a notorious, long standing problem for Gambian farmers. If Mustafa had such capital, he says he would invest it in poultry farming, horticulture and perhaps biogas.

**District chief Alhaji Jagne, said:**  
 »We don't like our youth to migrate. We're mainly groundnut farmers. Our youths are leaving, going abroad. We don't have the means to ensure their survival as farmers here. We have a lot of people who want to work but not a lot of work. The youth feel hopeless and leave this country for abroad.«

In a group discussion with 48 farmers, some associated with the Village Development Committee, people were asked why youths are leaving. Villagers said because of poverty, and because they were not able to secure good livelihoods though their current groundnut and rice production. Farm production is reducing over the years, with lack of rainfall a key factor. One villager said: 'We don't have alternative skills to farming to find other livelihoods. If the crop fails, you want to leave. We don't have alternatives. We do have sufficient land for farming'.

Young people leaving the village is having two contradictory impacts. On the one hand, many migrants are now sending back money to families from their earnings in Europe, giving people cash. On the other hand, so many men leaving is also changing the male/female balance in the village and will significantly reduce birthrates. So many youths leaving is placing even greater burdens on those remaining to conduct farming,



**Dembo Kanteh, chair of the Njaba Kunda VDC:**  
 »If The Gambia is to transform, the climate change is real but also there is the expectation that farmers need to exploit water underground – with irrigation. Also, we need to establish factors for production. Youths are not exposed to skills. Vegetable production is seasonal. We don't have processing capacity and equipment or access to storage to prevent rotting. We also don't have access to markets where we can guarantee selling. These are some of the solutions which will enable the youth to stay. If these things are available it would reduce migration.«

leaving fewer hands in the fields to undertake farming operations such as ploughing, sowing and weeding. This major impact is on women who already comprise most of The Gambia's farmers, but whose

role in agriculture is growing still more with male migration. This changing demography has implications for The Gambia's decision-makers, who will need to recognise the role of women much more in agricultural policy-making.

## Farming in the village

Farmers in the village grow groundnuts, millet, sorghum and maize while women farmers mainly cultivate rice and vegetables. They are small-scale farmers, with holdings ranging from 1-4 hectares. In terms of fertilising their land, only around one fifth use chemical fertiliser and another fifth use animal manures. The rest, the majority, do not fertilise their soil at all. Most farmers said they would prefer to use animal manure as fertiliser but only a small number are able to do so since only they have livestock. They prefer to use manuring to chemicals since the latter are too expensive and require applying providing more and more to the land each year. None of the farmers said they were regularly using composting, such as using residues from groundnut stocks.

Central Baddibu district, which has 33 villages, has only three extension officers available to visit the farmers, with only one motorbike. The villagers say that the extension officer does occasionally visit and gives important advice on practices such as countering soil erosion and on manuring.

Most farmers use only crude hoes as implements with only some able to hire sine hoes and seeders due to the cost. Women farmers, producing mainly rice, say they would prefer to be able to access power tillers, thresher machines and rice milling machines.

The farmers are perfectly aware of weather changes and are experiencing this on their farms. As well as less rainfall, much of the village's farmland has become salinised from the rising level of the Gambia river, causing crop production to fall. Dykes are needed in this situation, to keep the salt water out, but few have been constructed in the area. All farmers in the group discussion said that food production has been falling and that many had increased their planting areas to cope with the shortfalls. They estimated that crop production has fallen around 40% in recent years, probably as a result of less rain and greater soil depletion. Women farmers said rice production had also fallen and they were expecting this year perhaps 50% of the production they could get from the land.

When asked what the government could best do for them, the farmers mentioned power tillers to improve tilling of the land, an improved road to access their rice fields, which are several kilometres from the village, thresher machines, milling machines and sine hoes.

## Bwiam village

The village of Bwiam, in Foni Kansala district 1.5 hours south of Banjul, has a population of around 5,000 people in around 200 households. Fewer young people have left this village than have left Njaba Kunda but the number is still large: around 300 have left in recent years, some to closer countries such as Mali and Burkina Faso but many have also gone to Europe, including Italy, Spain, Sweden and Germany. Two of those who left, both men in the late 20s, died while crossing the Mediterranean.

**Ousman Bajang**, the chair of the Village Development Committee, has not heard from his son in a year. He said: 'When my son left I just had a call. He said I'm in Niger, in Niamey. He said we cannot live in these conditions, my sisters don't have proper schools'. Ousman does not know if his son is safe in Europe or not. Several other people in the VDC have sons or cousins in Europe. The villagers say that no-one who has left has returned since people may not accept them after going all the way to Europe and then coming back, which would be seen as a failure.

In a discussion with 16 members of the VDC, the villagers say that people are leaving

because of limited opportunities for young people, especially in finding work and in farming, and that young people are not being supported to acquire skills – either for farming, especially to adapt to climate change, or for urban jobs. Young people see pictures of life in Europe which tempts them to leave. Some people are still leaving the village – one young man left in the past few days.

Many of the villagers say that those now in Europe are sending money back to them, providing them with a source of cash. For this reason, some say that it is better for them to go to Europe and earn such money than struggle at home in harsh conditions for agriculture with limited alternative opportunities. However, others say that by draining the community of its young people, the prospects for future farming become even more difficult.

### **Ousman Bajang said:**

»Farming equipment is not available and we can't get loans or money for farming. Mango production is a problem because there is no place to process or store them. If we could process mango there would be a lot of income. How can we get these materials in the community? There are heaps of watermelon everywhere but they perish after a few months. The next level of our farming is what is lacking, to add value.«

The village head of Bwiam, **Lamin Badji**, said:  
 »A reason why a lot of youth are leaving is because they pity the situation facing their parents. It's not their desire to die by crossing the Mediterranean. My own son is in Italy. It's because of the challenges they face. The rains are not predictable. We Africans have less means to solve our problems. The whole village has one power tiller. Bwiam has never had a tractor. How can we develop if we don't have access to farm implements?«

The village head (*alkali*) of Bwiam, **Lamin Badji**, is pleased his son is in Italy. Lamin Badji says: 'I see it positively because we get some support from him and can use this money to buy support to

feed the family'. His son sends the occasional **D5,000**, for example at festival times. Matarr, who is 18, was able to sell some of his livestock and received some support from a relative, and went to Libya in 2016 before crossing to Italy and is now in Rome. Matarr had achieved certificate as an electrician in Banjul but always had the ambition to go to Europe and support his parents from there. His father says he didn't want to ply the same trade as his fellow villagers.

## Farming in the village

The villagers are mainly farmers, growing groundnuts, rice, cassava and millet, with an average of around 1 hectare of land. There are some other jobs in the village, such as petty trading, carpentry and welding, with some employed as teachers or local government officials. The VDC members all say they use chemical fertiliser and also undertake manuring and composting. One hectare of land requires four bags of fertilizer at a price of either D1,200 (US\$25) (the unsubsidised price) or D750 (US\$16) (the subsidised price), meaning that the cost is very high for the farmers.

Most of the villagers say that they would prefer to promote organic farming since using chemicals reduce the quality of the soil year on year. But one deterrent to this is the lack of animal manure for all farmers in the village; another is lack of knowledge of the best ecological approaches: some of the farmers say they apply fertiliser on top of manures, which is unlikely to increase yields.

There is only one agricultural extension officer in the entire district, which comprises 42 villages and around 25,000 people. The VDC members say the officer hardly ever visits the village.

Women rice farmers use only simple hoes but express the desire to use equipment such as power tillers, tractors and seeders pulled by animal draught. A power tiller costs around D195,000 (US\$4,130) and a seeder D12,000 (US\$254). The farmers are also affected by weather changes, especially less rainfall, increasing soil degradation, more heat and deforestation nearby which is affecting soil fertility. All the farmers say that crop production fluctuates year on year but is tending downwards.





**Muhammed Ceesay** lives in Bomba Kolong, and became part of ActionAid's agro-ecology and resilience project two years ago. Thanks to the project he could afford to buy a donkey cart, which has made it easier to collect firewood and transport himself and his family.

PHOTO: ACTIONAID

# How can the Gambia better address migration and its development challenges?

## Current government policies: Positives

The new government is taking many positive steps to address the challenging economic situation in The Gambia after years of poor governance. Government policy documents are focusing considerably on promoting employment and opportunities for young people. The new National Development Plan (NDP) covering 2018-21, says there should be a strong focus on providing skills training to young Gambians and that investing in youth is critical.<sup>64</sup> For returning migrants in particular, there will be special



programmes to develop skills. The Gambian government is well aware that the lack of jobs and opportunities for the country's youth lies at the root of migration and this is explicitly recognised in the NDP.<sup>65</sup> The government has also, at the time of writing, recently validated a National Migration Policy.

Critically, the government is also putting in place cross-government strategies to address other key issues. For example, the new NDP makes a point of focusing policy on empowering Gambian women and promoting gender equality. It also promotes environmental sustainability, including the need to address adaptation to climate change, raise awareness of disaster risk reduction and improve early warning systems.

The government is also making progress in cutting wasteful, unnecessary expenditure. It has reduced the budget of the President's Office by 75%, pledged to reduce 'ghost workers' in the civil service and aims to reduce recurrent spending on vehicles.<sup>66</sup> It has sold aircraft acquired by the former president Jammeh which is expected to yield 0.5% of GDP.<sup>67</sup> These measures should raise valuable revenues which could be invested in public services.

## Policies for government and donors to improve

Within this positive environment, this research identifies seven areas which would improve the policies of the Gambian government and its donors to address migration from the country and the reasons for this. The following analysis draws especially on ActionAid's interviews in the villages, on other interviews and on the secondary literature.

The overwhelming need is to improve the prospects for agricultural livelihoods and other jobs in The Gambia for young people. These seven areas do not represent everything the government should be doing since it is already promoting many positive policies.

### **1 – Government strategy should focus on fewer policy areas and ensure they are implemented**

The new National Development Policy is, in many ways, an impressive and thorough document, but outlines a large number of priorities: eight 'strategic priorities', covering different sectors, and six 'critical enablers', covering cross-cutting issues. It lists particular priorities for the first two years of the programme but these still number seven policy areas. At this stage, it is not clear what is being prioritised; a separate Financing Strategy for the NDP has not yet been drawn up. There is a clear danger that policy-making, and financing, will be spread too thinly over a large number of policy areas.

## The EU's Trust Fund migration projects in The Gambia

The European Union is promoting two migration-related projects in The Gambia which are valuable in supporting job skills for returnees and assisting in their reintegration. Since February 2017, the EU Trust Fund for Africa – set up in 2015 to support African countries affected by irregular migration - has been funding an €11 million Gambia Youth Empowerment (YEP) project which runs until February 2021. The project aims to:

- 'encourage the return of skilled Gambian migrants by supporting the creation of jobs across the country and supporting the re-integration of these into the economy and society';
- 'Raise awareness about skills training and development for 100,000 youth';
- 'Ensure that 7,000 youths complete technical or vocational training programme or an apprenticeship'; and
- 'Provide entrepreneurship services – such as business advisory support and access to finance – for at least 8,000 youth'.<sup>68</sup>

The YEP project, although widely supported in The Gambia, is also widely criticised for being managed by an NGO, the International Trade Centre, which holds the funds, and not by the government. Thus the key migration aid project in the country has been outsourced to an organisation coordinated by an expatriate, although it does also involve Gambians.

The same criticism is often levelled at the EU's other migration-related project, also financed from the EU Trust Fund, which has also been outsourced, this time to the IOM. This aims at 'strengthening the management and governance of migration and the sustainable reintegration of returning migrants in The Gambia'. A €3.9 million project running for three years, the project's intended beneficiaries are 1,200 Gambian return migrants from Africa, 300 Gambian return migrants from Europe and 250 communities in The Gambia.<sup>69</sup>

The project aims to assist the reintegration of returning migrants mainly by providing 1,500 beneficiaries with 'direct minimal support in the form of delivery of a lump sum on arrival'. In addition, 'at least 250 communities in the Banjul, North Bank and Upper River regions will have access to accurate information on migration through community outreach, community theatre plays, communication and information activities that aim to help migrants make informed choices, mitigate the risks associated with irregular migration, raise awareness of migrants rights and responsibilities within host communities and counter negative narratives of migration representing a "burden" and/or a "danger" to hosting countries'.<sup>70</sup>

These projects are welcomed by many Gambians, with the qualifications that they are managed by non-Gambian organisations and that the extent to which they will be independently monitored is not clear. Another concern is how deep the training provided will be and whether it will really lead to finding jobs. [Lamin Jaiteh] from Njaba Kunda village, said he knew from his contacts about the EU migration projects: 'The problem is they only give people a short training. They don't provide ongoing skills training and use people from other countries, for example, to train people. People need ongoing training on things like protecting the land, using land, ecological techniques, together with financial support. It's a package'.

The NDP seems to repeat a key problem with its predecessor strategy. This was *The Gambia National Development Plan, PAGE II, 2017-2020* (hereafter PAGE II), which was in second draft form at the time the previous government fell, and was never validated. This strategy also contained much useful analysis but it covered virtually everything and prioritised little. Previous Gambian policy documents have been over-ambitious: for example, the government's Vision 2020 envisaged transforming The Gambia into a middle income country by 2020 yet the country's annual per capita income is US\$473.<sup>71</sup>

An ongoing danger is a lack of true prioritisation, spreading human and financial resources too thinly across too many areas. This is a critical issue when civil service capacity is recognised to be low and when Gambian governance is recognised to be weak. It is hard to see how such a wide-ranging economic strategy, covering all sectors, can be successfully delivered by civil servants whose average wage is below US\$1.25 a day.<sup>72</sup>

Various interviewees in this research said that The Gambia has many good policy and strategy documents on paper but which are not always implemented in practice. Policy goals need to be realistic and plans to cover too many areas can be unimplementable with current levels of resources. Political will to ensure implementation of smaller number of priorities is key.

NGOs and others should hold the government to account for their good policies on paper and monitor the extent to which they are implemented. The government and donors could conduct independent evaluations of their projects and make these public. Thanks to The Gambia's new openness under a new government, NGOs can also encourage journalists to further scrutinise government policies.

## **2 – Government should overwhelmingly prioritise support to agriculture, and ensure it spends at least 10% of the national budget on agriculture**

Agriculture is the backbone of the economy and employs most Gambians and it is in agricultural areas where poverty is deepest. Improving agricultural prospects will likely contribute most to encouraging young Gambians try to make a success of farming. Agriculture is also the sector most likely to push Gambian development forward. Thus there is a strong case that focusing on agriculture, and committing many resources, should be the country's clear and perhaps overwhelming priority.

But, in addition, a clear focus is needed to support women farmers in particular, partly since they comprise a growing proportion of agricultural workers as more men have migrated.

## Prioritising agriculture: the UNDP/government analysis

In 2014, the UNDP produced an important analysis for the government which included a strong call for prioritising agriculture. This was never implemented.

It noted that 'successful structural transformations in many countries were preceded by productivity growth in agriculture' and that 'the agricultural sector and fisheries... are the dominant sectors in terms of their potential to generate employment and have the highest propensity to absorb labour especially the poor'.<sup>77</sup> Critically, it noted that:

**'... Achieving Vision 2020 may not be feasible without a reorientation of the economy's structure to give agriculture and natural resources sector the required attention and investments. While that is being done, attention should be given to ensuring adequate linkages within the broad ANR sector and with other sectors such as light manufacturing and agro-processing, which will then lead to a more vibrant services sector'.<sup>78</sup>**

Prioritising agriculture was recognised as especially critical for increasing opportunities for the youth of the country:

**'Agriculture, despite all the constraints, still constitutes the best response to the growing youth employment challenge and poverty in the country. Not only does agriculture have the capacity to employ large numbers of youth, but it also provides valuable inputs for the development of industry and service activities. It is this recognition that motivates the government's "Back to the Land" call to "grow what we eat and to eat what we grow", as well as Vision 2016 for food self-sufficiency in The Gambia.'<sup>79</sup>**

The UNDP added a further important point, highlighting the importance of developing agriculture first: 'The economic structure of The Gambia, where services are the dominant sector, is atypical in the sense that the base agriculture and industry is not sufficiently developed to support and ensure a beneficial services sector'.<sup>80</sup>

Agriculture not been prioritised by the government in recent years. The PAGE II draft strategy recognised that 'agriculture is by far the most important sector as it employs a majority of the population and its evolution has a major impact on poverty'.<sup>73</sup> Yet the government has been spending only around 6% - 6.5% of its national budget on agriculture. Officials at the Ministry of Agriculture say that spending on agriculture may actually amount to only 4%, with the rest going to 'natural resources'.<sup>74</sup> This spending compares to the government's formal commitment to meet the 10% target agreed by African ministers in the Maputo Declaration of 2003. The Jammeh government announced an intention in 2010 to spend at least 10% on agriculture and natural resources by 2015, but this did not happen.<sup>75</sup>



According to officials, the 2018 approved budget includes a commitment to spend 10% on agriculture<sup>76</sup> but this commitment has not yet been made public and it is not clear by when this spending will be achieved. Agriculture is one of the eight priorities covered by the NDP, but since the financing strategy has not yet been drawn up, it is not clear how much expenditure will actually go to supporting agriculture. It is not currently clear that agriculture will genuinely be the overwhelmingly priority of the new government.

If The Gambia devoted more resources to agriculture, the country could better address some of its really pressing needs. Major priorities must be to increase national food self-reliance (away from meeting only 50% of food requirements) by increasing crop production, which accounts for 75% of household incomes for the 70% of Gambians who are farmers.<sup>81</sup> Agriculture has real potential, with abundant water resources available and land, with only around 54% of total arable areas in the country currently under cultivation.<sup>82</sup>

Officials at the Ministry of Agriculture recognise that if the country invested more in irrigation, especially in the most fertile areas, as it has in some pilot projects under way, the country could feed itself – but this is a question of the amount of investment.<sup>83</sup> Investing more in groundnut processing capacity in Gambia - instead of farm-



**Neneh Camara** is a member of the Mandika-speaking Kanyeleng group in Touba Kolong. She practices agro-ecological techniques to improve the quality of the foods she grows and resilience against climate change.

PHOTO: YUSUPHA SAMA/ACTIONAID

ers producing and exporting the raw material - is also widely seen as a major priority. Exports of groundnuts have declined in recent years due mainly to erratic rainfall. But farmers in The Gambia lack adequate capacity to process nuts to sell optimally in foreign markets or to press the nuts into oil. At the final stage of the value chain, current processors are unable to sell in the stringent Hand Picked Selected market given the strict aflatoxin (poisonous carcinogens) content limitations, meaning that The Gambia's groundnuts are instead sold in the less lucrative bird feed market.<sup>84</sup>

### **3 — The government should reorient agriculture strategy to invest in agro-ecology, not conventional farming with chemicals**

The government has been largely encouraging and subsidising conventional ('industrial') farming more than supporting agro-ecological approaches. In particular, it has been encouraging the greater use of chemicals (fertiliser and pesticides) by farmers. The full version of the new National Development Plan \*which has not been published at the time of writing) is said to call for the continued provision of chemical fertiliser to farmers although it is not clear if this will entail a subsidy programme.<sup>85</sup> Officials at the Ministry of Agriculture say that the government is considering a fertiliser subsidy programme, and that it is looking at affordability and accessibility for farmers.

The Gambia, in effect, has a fertiliser subsidy programme. Fertiliser prices were reduced from D1,200 (US\$25) per bag to D750 (US\$16) in early 2017. However, the government does not refer to this as a subsidy programme; the fertiliser cost is reduced by the government waiving import taxes on fertiliser to make the imports cheaper. Since this represents a loss in tax revenues it is a de facto subsidy. How much is lost in tax revenues is not clear.

Government policy is largely a continuation of past policy: PAGE II had a focus on ensuring the delivery of chemical fertiliser and pesticides to farmers and suggested that the government would adopt a 'smart subsidy' programme.<sup>86</sup>

The main problems with chemical fertiliser (and chemical pesticides) is that they are expensive for farmers and can degrade the soil over time. ActionAid's analysis and experience is that agro-ecological approaches promote cheaper and more effective approaches for small-scale farmers (see box below). The use of chemical fertiliser should be reduced over time. The government is promoting some forms of agro-ecology in farming but this has not been a clear priority. Some officials argue first, that some farmers want to use chemical fertiliser and pesticides and that the government is therefore responding to demand and, second, that manures are often not available to farmers. Some officials even argue that, because many farmers are older and illiterate, they find it more difficult to practice organic farming, which, they say, often

comes with a heavier workload, for example in manual composting, compared to using chemicals.<sup>87</sup>

Another key aspect of conventional farming is often a reliance on expensive, imported seeds. PAGE II lamented the lack of 'certified seeds' but did not mention local varieties of seeds, seed saving or community seed banks, all of which can be far more important, relevant and affordable to small farmers<sup>88</sup> As part of an agro-ecological approach, the government should be promoting locally adapted seed varieties that are high producing; it is doing this to an extent on rice but for other crops appears to focus more on imported seeds.

An EU funded report for the government's national climate change policy notes that strategic priorities for adapting to climate change include organic farming and agro-forestry in addition to soil and water conservation measures and sustainable forest management.<sup>89</sup> It recommends:

**'Shifting public financing away from activities that encourage GHG emissions, such as deforestation, use of chemical fertilisers and fossil fuel subsidies, to free up these resources for public financing of climate resilient development'.<sup>90</sup>**

The report also notes the importance of 'seeds that are affordable by small farmers'.<sup>91</sup>

#### **4 — The government should use extra revenues to boost extension services and provide farming implements**

Agricultural investments are needed in many areas and it is not clear currently where the government will make its major investments within the agriculture budget. Two areas stand out, especially following interviews with farmers: boosting the capacity of the extension services and ensuring that many more farmers have access to improved farming implements. Women farmers must be clear beneficiaries of these programmes and need to be explicitly targeted and participate in them.

A good extension service can provide advice to farmers on the best farming techniques and can be especially critical in promoting agro-ecological approaches, on which some farmers can learn from the successful practices of others: a vital task in an era of devastating climate change. The extension services have been undermined in the Jammeh years. PAGE II noted that the extension officer/farmer ratio is 'greater' than 1:2,000 and aimed to reach 1: 1,500 by 2020.<sup>94</sup> However, a 2009 government document noted that the ratio then was 1: over 3,500.<sup>95</sup> Recent ActionAid research suggests the ratio may be even greater, at 1: 4,000. This means that many, probably most, Gambian farmers, are simply not seeing extension officers at all.

## ActionAid's Agro-ecology and Resilience Project<sup>92</sup>

A major ActionAid project in The Gambia shows how agro-ecological farming can be successful for small-scale farmers, especially women, who comprise most of the country's farmers.

Following a severe drought in the region in 2012, ActionAid initiated the Agroecology and Resilience (AER) project in Senegal and The Gambia, with funding from the US-based MAC Foundation. With an emphasis on women's empowerment, agroecology and disaster risk reduction strategies, the project works to strengthen communities' own capacity to analyse the challenges they face and to create change. The project began in 2013. Since then, the region has continued to face the escalating impacts of climate change including drought, late rains, flooding, as well as rising sea levels and increased salinity in coastal, island and river estuary areas. These challenges have tested the project, showing its many achievements, and providing lessons on areas that can be further strengthened.

The AER project particularly aims to empower women and uses agroecology and disaster risk reduction (DRR) strategies to strengthen communities' ability to cope with the impacts of climate change on their food systems, livelihoods and safety.

ActionAid's resilience approach works with communities to use agro-ecological approaches to agriculture. By working with nature, increasing biodiversity, and avoiding harmful agro-chemicals that can impact the environment and human health, agroecology can provide multiple benefits to farmers, including improved resilience to climate change. Techniques include: using compost, manure and mulching instead of chemical fertilisers; using botanical herbs such as neem for treating pests and ensuring safe storage of seeds; and diversifying seed and crop varieties. These practices and technologies do not only avoid harming the environment. Farmers use these approaches to ensure good and sustainable production, and at the same time to become less dependent on expensive agribusiness inputs such as pesticides, fertilisers and purchased seed. Farmers can thus retain more of their income, power, knowledge and responsibility.

Key successes of the project include:

- Smallholder farmers, particularly women farmers, report more resilient crops and much better harvests in the face of climate change. Part of the success of agroecology is as a result of adding compost and mulch to soils instead of chemical fertilisers. This enables soils to retain more water so that crops can grow for longer and produce better yields.
- Seed and crop diversification (ie growing multiple crop species and different varieties of each crop that are adapted for different pur-



poses and types of weather) also helps farmers to spread risk and reduce losses.

- Community seed banks means that farmers have access to locally-adapted seeds at planting time, saving them money that would otherwise be spent on purchasing seed, and enabling them to use varieties that perform better in their local context and in the face of climate challenges.
- Farmers report a significant increase in their creation and use of natural pesticides instead of chemical pesticides, and greater awareness of the negative health implications of chemical pesticides.
- Agro-ecological approaches are reducing farmers' costs in fertilisers, pesticides and seed, helping them to save more of their income, so that their livelihoods are more resilient.
- Farmers are finding that making and using compost brings huge advantages to their farming. They find that compost helps to retain soil moisture, provides immediate and long-term nutrients for crops, and contributes to better post-harvest management and fewer losses, as the produce lasts longer without spoiling. They are showing and promoting their experiences to other farmers, and many are actively training their peers, so as to spread the knowledge and help others to benefit from the same approach.
- The project's investment in tools such as milling and de-hulling machines, has led to a significant reduction of the physical burden on women, freeing up hours and days of their time. Investments in solar water pumps and rain-filled water tanks have also reduced women's burden of fetching water, particularly in communities facing water stress. Many are choosing to spend this extra time clearing additional land or engaging in other productive activities (to increase their incomes and food security) and/or to spend more time with their families, reporting better relations with their husbands as a result.

Open pollinated, traditional, early maturing seed varieties reduce dependence on commercial inputs and encourage crop diversification. Seeds can be treated with botanical pesticides prepared from locally available resources which are used as part of an integrated pest management approach. Practices such as intercropping, mixed cropping and cover crops alongside soil fertility enhancement using animal manure, locally made compost and mulching also help to build resilience and reduce costs. Measures to control flooding and soil erosion include contour bunds and, when resources allow, the desalinisation and restoration of wetlands through dyke construction. Post-harvest handling and management is critical to enhancing food security and the seed and cereal banks are an essential part of this.<sup>93</sup>

The government recognises that the extension services need to be improved and expanded but it is not clear how this will be done and what expenditure it will entail.<sup>96</sup> Both PAGE II and the NDP make only passing mention of extension services.

Farmers interviewed in this research say their priority need is access to more farming or processing implements. The key needs include improved hoes, sine hoes, seeders, milling machines and de-hulling machines for groundnuts, and power tillers. It is not clear the extent to which the government will subsidise or provide farmers with access to such equipment, but such a focus would be worthy of a government subsidy programme. This equipment is often expensive. In Njaba Kunda, farmers said sine hoes cost around D15,000 (US\$318) and power tillers D100,000 (US\$2,120).

The Gambian government has often been focused too much on tractors. PAGE II, for example, noted in a section on 'mechanisation' only the need for tractors and animal draught.<sup>97</sup> But such heavy machinery, already very expensive for farmers, requires technical know-how and more money to maintain when it breaks down, and is often not seen by farmers as useful as other implements. It is critical to consult with farmers and farmers' organisations to assess real needs.

## **5 — Donors must significantly increase aid to help The Gambia adapt to climate change, matching their international responsibility for causing it**

The Gambia has barely caused global climate change: as noted above, its contribution to global greenhouse gas emissions are around 0.01%.<sup>98</sup> Yet climate change, caused mainly by industrialised nations, is increasingly inflicting havoc on the country as has been noted above. Thus a key question is whether those same states are helping The Gambia cope with climate change to the same degree that they are responsible for causing it.

Our calculation is that The Gambia is likely to be receiving only around US\$50 million a year for climate change-related projects, amounting to around 19% of GDP. For example:

- OECD countries allocated US\$31.1 million in 2015 and US\$22.4 million in 2014 for climate change adaptation in The Gambia; this is aid from OECD countries' bilateral aid programmes.<sup>99</sup>
- The Gambia is also receiving aid from multilateral sources, principally UN agencies, to which OECD countries are contributors. The UN's Global Environmental Facility is promoting climate change-related projects in The Gambia worth around US\$83 million over 3-4 years.<sup>100</sup>

- In addition, the UN's Green Climate Fund is providing US\$20.5 million to The Gambia, having provided a first tranche of US\$6 million in 2017.<sup>101</sup>

Some agricultural aid projects, promoted by the UN agencies, IFAD, FAO and also the European Union, are also likely to be benefitting the environmental conditions for agriculture, such as by promoting water and land management – but many of these are not necessarily directly focused on supporting climate change adaptation.

An EU funded report for the government's national climate change policy notes that 'all key economic sectors likely to be affected by climate change impacts in The Gambia require enhanced resources as well as the capacity to use these effectively; in short, enhanced climate finance readiness'. These sectors include agriculture, livestock, water resources, health, infrastructure, transport, human settlements, physical planning, coastal zone management, energy, tourism, environment, forestry, fisheries and biodiversity inclusive of wildlife.<sup>102</sup>

The government has good plans in place to address climate change and deserves greater support. The Gambia has developed a National Climate Change Policy, with support from the EU, and climate policies are being mainstreamed across departments. The National Development Plan recognises that climate change is playing a major role in undermining agriculture and pledges to raise finances to combat it.<sup>103</sup> However, currently, The Gambia has insufficient capacity and resources to address climate change adequately.

A senior official in the Ministry of Water Resources says The Gambia has only 10 stations around the country monitoring rainfall and only three weather forecasters currently active. He says that greater capacity is especially needed to analyse climate data, following its collection. The country has an early warning system but this is 'not very functional, partly due to lack of funding', according to the official. He adds that there is meant to be a cross-Ministerial team that should coordinate an early warning system but that this meets only infrequently. What is needed is a multi-hazard early warning system coordinated across government ministries and which truly reaches farmers.<sup>104</sup>

## **6 — The government and donors should re-think the private sector-led approach to economic development**

The full draft version of the new National Development Plan focuses on making the private sector the engine of growth in The Gambia. It seeks to double foreign investment and sees its principal strategy as promoting public-private partnerships (PPPs) in areas such as infrastructure, telecommunications and tourism. But it is also seeking to promote PPPs in some services sectors such as agriculture, health and water supply.

The NDP is also said to be willing to provide easy access to land for industrial parks and zones in the country – which may involve risks in terms of land tenure rights for local communities.<sup>105</sup>

PAGE II also had a 'focus on delivering economic growth through the private sector', which was seen as the 'locomotive' and 'engine of growth' to drive the economy. PAGE II also focused on 'export-led growth' and maintaining a 'liberal trading environment to promote competition and enhance the investment climate'. Indeed, it called for The Gambia to promote a 'deliberate shift towards economic liberalisation'.<sup>106</sup> PAGE II envisaged the role of the government as providing an enabling environment for the private sector and providing public goods.<sup>107</sup>

Neither PAGE II nor the NDP makes the case for a private sector-led strategy compared to an alternative of a much greater role for the state in the economy and neither makes the case for why foreign investment might be so beneficial to the country; it seems to assume this is what the Gambia needs. It seems likely that the NDP has been overly influenced by The Gambia's key donors, especially the World Bank which promotes private sector-led growth in Africa as a standard package – despite the fact that it has had few successes. The World Bank is providing US\$56 million in aid in an emergency financing project approved in June 2017. This aid supports The Gambia to, among other things, 'create an environment more conducive to robust private sector-led growth'.<sup>108</sup>

If anything, the NDP goes further in prioritising the private sector than PAGE II. Officials say they want to promote a mixed approach, utilising the state through parastatal organisations (i.e., The Gambia's existing state-owned enterprises) and the private sector in others, especially in promoting PPPs.<sup>109</sup>

Yet a concerning feature of this promotion of the private sector is the approach to tax. PAGE II said the government would continue providing tax holidays and tax exemptions to investors.<sup>112</sup> The NDP is said to call for reducing the corporate tax rate.<sup>113</sup> By contrast, the government should be seeking to maximise tax revenues: these increased from 13.2% of GDP in 2010 to 17.8% in 2015<sup>114</sup> but are forecast to be only 15.2% in 2017 and only 17.6% by 2020<sup>115</sup>. Thus tax collections stand below the internationally recognised target for developing countries of at least 20% of GDP. As the new government has itself said in its recent Letter of Intent to the IMF, 'the revenue base of the Government of the Gambia is very narrow and based mainly on tax'.<sup>116</sup>

The Gambia should indeed promote private sector development more and promote certain conditions for the competitive markets to thrive in some areas. But this is not the same as saying that the private sector should be the engine of growth around which all economic policy is shaped. In most successful examples of postwar economic development in developing countries, the state has played a major role in eco-



## Problems with PPPs

PPPs are increasingly promoted as a way to finance development projects in developing countries and the last decade has seen a huge increase in the amount of money invested in PPPs. However, private finance only provides about 15–20% of total infrastructure investment. The lion's share is still, and will likely continue to be, provided by the public sector. Therefore, questions remain about why so much focus is placed on the private sector rather than improving public sector delivery.<sup>110</sup>

PPPs have recently been critically scrutinised by NGOs. Recent research on a number of PPP projects in developing countries by the European NGO network, Eurodad, for example, uncovers a large number of problems.<sup>111</sup>

This research finds that PPPs:

- are, in most cases, the most expensive method of financing, significantly increasing the cost to the public purse
- are typically very complex to negotiate and implement and all too often entail higher construction and transaction costs than public works
- place important capacity constraints to the public sector
- suffer from low transparency and limited public scrutiny, which undermines democratic accountability.

conomic development, often promoting very different policies than those now promoted by the World Bank and other neo-liberal institutions. These practices have often included trade protection (to protect the local economy from cheap imports), restrictions on foreign investment (to build up domestic companies) or performance requirements placed on foreign investors (requiring them to, for example, employ a certain percentage of staff as nationals or procure a certain percentage of their good and services from local suppliers), the government of provision of services and subsidies (often including subsidised credit and loans) and intervention in markets through, for example, guaranteeing agricultural producer prices.<sup>117</sup>

None of these policies explicitly appear in either the NDP or PAGE II. The government is planning to maintain the state-owned enterprises, although it is possible that some may be being slated for privatisation. It is also possible, as noted above, that some PPPs may even be being considered in key services such as water supply and health.

In agriculture, the NDP says more about promoting an enabling environment for the private sector to promote agriculture than about state policy to lead it. Yet it is unclear how the private sector can drive agricultural development in The Gambia when it is currently so undeveloped, when little capital is available and when climate change

presents so many risks. PAGE II also had a focus on transforming agriculture to 'a modern market-oriented commercial sector with well-integrated value chains and a viable private sector led agro processing industry'.<sup>118</sup>

The Gambia has, to an extent, already tried incentivising the private sector to lead agricultural development – with little success. For example, The Gambia's National Agricultural Investment Plan notes that the government encourages increasing private sector involvement in economic development and has provided investment incentives including no importation tax on agricultural machinery and inputs, no export tax on agricultural products and duty waivers on fuel for use in the agricultural sector among others. Yet it states: 'Despite these incentives, many private sector actors do not have sufficient start-up capital to meaningfully invest in the ANR sector, considered a risky and unsustainable venture. Commercial banks are reluctant to provide loans for these types of investments.'<sup>119</sup> This is one reason why state leadership is needed.

A strong role for the state is likely to be needed to guarantee agricultural success in The Gambia. This includes: major expenditure and investments; a re-capacitising of extension services; subsidising the costs of farming implements; providing subsidised credit and loans to farmers (which currently the private sector will not provide); more support to farmers' cooperatives and organisations; and greater development of off-farm industries and processing. The government is considering setting up an Agricultural Development Bank but it is not clear what role this will play.

## **7 – The government should more proactively develop the tourism sector to increase jobs and earnings**

A major potential way to create more jobs, incomes and opportunities in The Gambia for the country's youth is to maximise the gains from tourism. The sector currently provides 35,000 direct jobs and a further 40,000 indirect jobs, amounting to 12-16% of GDP and earnings of US\$85 million a year for the country.<sup>120</sup> It has attracted US\$45 million foreign investment in the last five years.<sup>121</sup>

However, The Gambia does not appear to be optimising its gains from this sector and it seems to be foreign companies that benefit disproportionately. Again, the problem is that the government is relying too much on the private sector and playing an insufficient state role in shaping private investment. A recent study of the tourism sector for the government concludes that the 'benefits from the tourism sector appear to be skewed in favour of tour operators', particularly the international ones, rather than the hotels or the small or medium tourist enterprises (SMTEs) which provide most of the essential services to the industry. It noted that the:

**'ITOs' [international tour operators] immense bargaining power forces hotels/SMTEs to reduce their prices, sometimes to the extent of them incurring losses, reducing their ability to renovate their facilities and maintain the quality of services required for them to compete internationally'.<sup>122</sup>**

The study also noted that the country:

**'depends solely on the 19 tour operators, especially foreign-based ones, to bring tourists to the country, which gives them immense power and control over the local accommodation providers, such that they are forced into exclusivity contracts which are not favourable to them... the exclusivity agreements between them and the hotels are preventing restricting and distorting competition in the supply of tourists to the industry'.<sup>123</sup>**

The draft version of the full National Development Plan says nothing about addressing these fundamental problems. It does, however, seek to maximise gains from tourism, increase revenues and to improve tourism by encouraging investments in hotel quality and tourist attractions. But one thing absent from the NDP which was included in PAGE II was the call to 'increase Gambian participation' in the tourism sector.<sup>124</sup> It was not clear what this meant, but options would be to place the kinds of performance requirements on the tourism sector noted above: for example, to require (rather than simply encourage) tourism investors to enhance linkages to the local economy, for example by promoting greater local employment, undertaking management training, procuring local goods and services and, overall, requiring larger Gambian participation and ownership in the tourism supply chains. The Gambia's current tourism policy, the Tourism, Culture and Hospitality Strategic Plan 2015-20, drawn up under the previous government, makes no such requirements on foreign investors. It has a section on 'corporate social responsibility' which is exceedingly weak, placing no obligations on actors in the tourism sector; faith is put in private actors acting responsibly, voluntarily.<sup>125</sup>

It appears that private companies in the tourism sector are being given tax and other incentives, although the precise details are unclear. PAGE II stated that a number of initiatives have been taken to attract foreign investors such as allocating free land and providing Special Incentives Certificates (SICs) such as tax holidays.<sup>126</sup> PAGE II focused on creating an 'encouraging business climate' and a 'conducive space for the private sector to improve quality standards'.<sup>127</sup> The new government has said it is planning to sell land in prime tourist areas, which could yield 0.5% of GDP and attract tourism investment.<sup>128</sup>

# Summary of recommendations

Now is an auspicious time for the government to put in place new policies to maximise The Gambia's development prospects. Among other things, the government is planning to review its agriculture policy and also revise the 1996 tourism policy. It should also revisit the National Development Plan with a view to promoting the following policies:

- Government strategy should focus on fewer policy areas to ensure they are successfully implemented along clear timelines and supported with adequate resources.
- The government should overwhelmingly prioritise support to agriculture, and ensure it spends at least 10% of the national budget on agriculture.
- The government should reorient agriculture strategy to invest in agro-ecology, not conventional farming with chemicals. It should also support farmers more to engage in value-added activities and ensure increased access to markets for farmers. The government should also invest in its National Adaptation Plan process, ensuring that the Ministry of Agriculture is also engaged in this.
- The government should use extra revenues to boost extension services and provide farming implements and clarify in which specific circumstances and sectors private sector investments can be useful to improve farmers' livelihoods.

- Women farmers, who comprise a growing proportion of the agricultural workforce as more men migrate, should be an explicit focus of government policy. Agricultural investments, especially in the extension services, need to be targeted to women's needs and involve the participation of women in the delivery of services.
- Donors must significantly increase aid to help The Gambia adapt to climate change, matching their international responsibility for causing it. Support for agro-ecology must be part of that effort.
- The government and donors should re-think the private sector-led approach to economic development in order to ensure private investments effectively deliver economic progress in the country.
- The government should more proactively develop the tourism sector in a way that benefits Gambians and keeps wealth in the country, by increasing jobs and earnings.
- Government and donors should continue and strengthen programmes to increase training and job prospects for Gambia's youth, notably in the agriculture and off-farm sectors (processing, transport, storage, transformation).
- Ensure that The Gambia does not enter in trade or investment agreements that would restrict the regulatory space needed to promote domestic economic actors and development.





**Fatoumata Jawara** was elected to the Gambian parliament, with the help of Activista Gambia.  
PHOTO: ULRİK NORUP JØRGENSEN/ACTIONAID DK

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