

**THE REPUBLIC OF THE GAMBIA
2022 LEGISLATIVE YEAR STATE OF THE
NATION ADDRESS (SONA)**

**DELIVERED AT THE NATIONAL
ASSEMBLY**

BY

**H.E. ADAMA BARROW GMRG
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF THE
GAMBIA**

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1. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Honourable Speaker,
Honourable Members of the National Assembly,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. I thank Allah, the Almighty, for His grace and glory and for making this Legislative Session possible. The event is a mandatory provision of the Constitution, and it creates the necessary atmosphere to hold an annual interface between the Executive and the Legislature.

2. As this is my first formal engagement with this august body, I will begin by congratulating the honourable members of this session. Once again, congratulations to all of you. I pray that we ably discharge our duties and responsibilities with honour and glory for the nation.

Mr. Speaker,

3. Very complex and challenging circumstances inform my address this morning. It portrays the experience of a transformed nation; a nation of peace-loving people who stood up to dictatorship in a peaceful manner, embraced democracy, and embarked upon reconciliation and national development.

4. These achievements came about through the political context that gave rise to the 2016 coalition and the sense of national unity and commitment which brought about the alliances leading to the last Presidential and Legislative elections.

5. Alongside these developments were the hostile global context and the numerous internal challenges that characterised the country's five-year transition period, 2017 to 2022.

6. The emergence of the COVID pandemic, with its dreadful consequences globally, worsened the country's economic situation.

7. Furthermore, in a twist of fortune, what appeared to be a relief and hope for a new dawn of recovery is dampened by the Russia-Ukraine war.

8. The address highlights my administration's performance, derived from the performance of our formal national institutions. It is sector-specific, based on major public programmes and projects, legislative issues relevant to the functions of this Assembly, matters of national significance, and proposed interventions.

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9. Because it focusses on the institutional arrangements of the last legislative year, I will mention the new Ministries briefly.

10. For reasons of constraint, the address is concise, but additional details on the themes are provided in the accompanying report.

11. The sequence of the sectors is arbitrary, but I will begin with the Finance sector, as this will cast light on the underlying circumstances, considerations and arrangements that influenced the decisions and events mentioned in my deliberation.

2. FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS

Honourable Speaker,

1. Despite the significant impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Gambian economy, growth rebounded to 4.5 percent in 2021. Although the growth remained below the pre-pandemic levels, it was still significant; however, the slowdown of business activities in 2020 and the third wave of the virus in July 2021 affected the economy's recovery.

2. In 2022, the economy could have been well into recovery, with expectations of improved economic performance, increased grant inflows, and private remittances. Unfortunately, it took a different trend, as economies across the globe grapple with the impact of the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war. Consequently, in June, the Government projected a more modest growth of 3.6 percent for 2022.

3. Revenue collection for the first two months of 2022 declined by 14 percent, against the same period in 2021. Prompted by this development, the Government resolved to formulate robust policies that would set up buffers against shocks and enhance domestic revenue mobilisation.

4. Notwithstanding the challenges, the fourth review of the Extended Credit Facility with the IMF was successfully completed in December 2021.

5. We remain committed to sound economic policy management, as detailed in the Medium Term Economic Fiscal Framework (2022-2026). The framework is to improve macro-fiscal stability.

6. With the support of the United Nations Development Programme, the initial stages of the formulation of a Recovery-Focused National Development Plan (RF-NDP: 2023-2027) and a Long-Term Development Vision (LTDV: 2050) have started.

The RF-NDP will succeed the National Development Plan (2018-2021), and the LTDV will succeed Vision 2020 for the country's long-term development targets and transformation.

7. The Gambia was among 44 countries that presented their Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals during the High-Level Political Forum held in New York in July 2022. The Reviews facilitate the sharing of experiences. Partners commended The Gambia for the inclusive and participatory nature of its VNR and the policies and strategies being implemented to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

8. The Gambia's total debt service payment in 2021 was GMD5.01 billion. Of this, GMD 1.9 billion was External Debt Service payment and GMD 3.1 billion was Domestic Debt Service payment.

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9. The debt service payment increased by 11.1 percent from GMD 4.5 billion in 2020 to GMD 5 billion in 2021. There was no Debt Service Suspension Initiative receipt, compared to the preceding year.

10. As update on the Public Finance Management (PFM), the PFM Act is under revision to address the weaknesses. Once finalised, the Public Finance Regulations and Instructions will be revised.

11. Our Public Financial Management reforms include a Treasury Single Account to ensure better treasury management functions. Also initiated is a Public Financial Management Strategy (2021-2025) to address weaknesses in the financial management of Local Government Authorities and ensure effective use of the IFMIS.

12. To conclude, Cabinet has approved the Public Private Partnership (PPP) Bill for tabling by this august Assembly. It speaks to the Revised National PPP Policy and operational guidelines.

3. FOREIGN AFFAIRS, INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AND GAMBIANS ABROAD

Honourable Speaker,

1. During the last five years, the country's diplomacy registered many successes, resulting in visits to The Gambia by various foreign dignitaries and scaling up of bilateral relations with different countries around the world.

2. Our partnerships at the multilateral level have generated support for many projects in diverse areas of development. Furthermore, the Foreign Service contributed significantly to mobilising support to complement the country's COVID response when it mattered.

3. The international community recognises our commitment to dialogue and peace. No wonder the United Nations Secretary-General's yearly report of the Peacebuilding Commission singled out The Gambia as a model for preventive diplomacy. Our commitment to building and sustaining peace continues to attract material and financial assistance from the Secretary-General's Peacebuilding Fund and other international partners.

4. We maintain fruitful strategic relations with ECOWAS Member States and actively engage and support mediation processes, under the auspices of the African Union and ECOWAS.

5. Within ECOWAS, The Gambia now holds the position of President of the ECOWAS Commission, with effect from June 2022.

6. For the first time in our history, The Gambia has a seat on the United Nations Human Rights Council for a three-year term, effective from January 2022.

At the level of the African Union, The Gambia also received overwhelming votes to sit on the Peace and Security Council.

7. Mr. Speaker, as of January 2022, remittances stood at US\$777 million, representing about 40% of GDP. The plight and role of Gambians in the Diaspora in national development, therefore, remains high on my government's agenda. We will continue to engage with them meaningfully and remain active in global discussions to address migration concerns.

8. Finally, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is reformulating its strategic plan, scheme of service and posting policy. Also underway is the drafting of a Foreign Service Bill and regulation to uphold excellence and efficiency within the sector.

4. AGRICULTURE

Honourable Speaker,

1. Last year, the Agriculture sector registered increases, above national average, in the production levels of crops, such as paddy, maize, millet, groundnut, and sesame.

2. The production of key commodities, like vegetables, fruits, milk, and eggs, also increased. As a result, the per capita availability of these food items has increased, even though both population and demand increased. Due to increased support from FAO and WFP, commercial poultry farming increased by about 40% in 2021.

3. At present, the Ministry of Agriculture is implementing eight major projects, with a total portfolio of USD\$294.13 million mobilised through partner support.

4. These projects are jointly funded by Government and partners, such as the Food and Agriculture Organisation, the World Food Programme, the African Development Bank, and the Islamic Development Bank. The projects are outlined in the report.

5. To boost the incomes of farming households, the Government has in the past five years invested heavily to modernise and transform our agriculture sector. As a result, through donor-funded projects, the sector was able to reach three hundred communities, thus opening 6,000 hectares for rice cultivation, four hundred hectares for vegetable production and more than one hundred poultry schemes to boost the availability of poultry meat and locally produced eggs. These investments and their results have laid a solid foundation for the sector's investment plan.

6. Government plans to create a fund that will carry about 70% guarantee to the financial institutions for credit financing of agricultural investments by either individuals or SMEs. Hopefully, this will induce the needed capital to transform and modernise agriculture in the country.

5. ENVIRONMENT

Honourable Speaker,

1. Regardless of the country's low contribution to global emissions, it has taken a lead role in Climate action through our revised Nationally Determined Contribution to the Paris Agreement, where we committed ourselves with international support to reducing emission by 49.7% by 2030.
2. The international community recognises The Gambia as the only country on track to achieving the Paris Agreement temperature goal of 1.5 degrees centigrade by 2050.
3. Notwithstanding this, The Gambia is vulnerable to the negative impact of Climate Change, as shown by the frequency of windstorms and floods. To mitigate this, the Government developed relevant policy documents and implemented adaptation and resilience building projects amounting to \$36 million in the past five years.
4. Closely related to climate change are issues around the misuse of chemicals and hazardous materials. In this respect, the National Environment Agency has formulated a Bill on pesticide and chemical management for submission to the National Assembly after finalisation.
5. For proper management and use of the coastal and marine resources in the country, the Government will enforce the Integrated Coastal Zone Management Bill after its enactment.
6. To conclude, I commend the sector for their efforts to rehabilitate the degraded mangrove and forest cover in the country. We applaud them also for the increase in non-timber products, such as honey, handicrafts, fruits, and nuts.

6. HEALTH

Honourable Speaker,

1. Over the last five years, my government successfully expanded and developed health care services, through improved infrastructure, personnel, and supplies, on a reformed health financing landscape.
2. A major achievement of my administration is the introduction of The Gambia National Health Insurance Scheme. The Act to establish the Scheme became effective in November 2021 to particularly benefit the poor and the vulnerable, while serving as a social safety net.
3. Key health indicators have improved notably; for example, maternal and child mortality has declined, skilled birth attendance, post-natal care, and nutrition have improved considerably.
4. On training, The Gambia now offers postgraduate training at the Edward Francis Small Teaching Hospital. In addition, the UTG offers health related programmes at bachelor's level.
5. Government's introduction of Community Ambulance Service, following the distribution of eighty new ambulances in areas without health facilities, is widely applauded in the country. We will see how it evolves, as the new National Health Policy (2021-2030) and the National Health Strategic Plan (2021-2025) guide the sector's activities.
6. There is a wide range of construction works in progress to expand services throughout the country. Ongoing, for example, is the construction of a National Emergency Treatment Centre, National Laboratory Centre, and Blood Transfusion Centre in Farato.
7. Development of the Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Bill (2022) is ongoing for submission to the National Assembly when finalised. It is meant to create universal access to health services.

7. BASIC AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

Honourable Speaker,

1. The Basic and Secondary Education sector remains committed to providing result-oriented programmes to improve access and quality education and to remove inequities in education service delivery.
2. As such, the sector will conduct a mid-term review of the 2016-2030 Education Sector Policy jointly prepared by the Ministries of Basic and Secondary Education and Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology.
3. The country continues to register impressive progress at all levels of the education sector, and it is pleasing that female students now have higher Gross Enrolment and Net Enrolment Rates at all levels, from ECD and Lower Basic to the Upper Basic and Senior Secondary School levels.
4. To meet the increasing demand for education, the number of schools increased correspondingly by 102 between 2020 and 2021.
5. With partner support, Government built 2,597 new classrooms and 3,116 toilet cubicles during the last five years. Additional 498 classrooms and 456 toilet cubicles are under construction and 1,076 rooms, for teacher accommodation, are already in use around the country. There are plans to increase the number to ease accommodation challenges for teachers.

Honourable National Assembly Members,

6. Through collaboration with The Gambia College and The University of The Gambia, 1,162 more teachers were trained in 2021. During the same period, qualified teachers for the upper basic and senior secondary school levels increased by 480 and 338 respectively.
7. Although enrolment at the secondary and upper levels remained low in 2021, the sector registered substantial improvements on the pass rate for the 2021 Gambia Basic Education Certificate Examination and the West African Senior School Certificate Examination.
8. Similarly, girls' performance at the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) improved slightly. The Grade 12 WASSCE results show that 2,882 female candidates had five credits or more in 2020, an increase from the 2019 figures of 2,797 female students. Overall performance continues to improve.

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9. Finally, to expand opportunities and education access for out-of-school children, enrolment for the Second Chance Education programme has increased and it now leads from the GABECE to WASSCE. It strongly indicates that this policy decision has a positive impact on our young people, who would otherwise be left with fewer options to better their lives.

10. We appreciate, and will continue to strengthen, the partnerships established with our partners. UNICEF, the World Food Programme, the World Bank, Islamic Development Bank, BADEA/OFID, MRC Holland Foundation, The Kuwaiti Fund and, most recently, EIB/EU stand out among them. We thank them immensely.

8. HIGHER EDUCATION, RESEARCH, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Honourable Speaker,

1. The Education, Research, Science and Technology sector is going through a transformation phase that would lead to the much desired institutional and infrastructural development in the country.
2. In the area of infrastructure, Government has completed about 70% of the civil works of the University of The Gambia (UTG) Faraba Banta Campus Project, after inheriting it with less than 1% implementation status.
3. The upgrading of the WASCAL Campus made it possible to begin doctoral programmes on Climate Change and Adaptive Land Use in-country. Annually, ten Gambians go to other postgraduate WASCAL Centres in the sub-region.
4. Alongside programme delivery within the sector, the REPGam renewal energy Project is working to solarise twenty-three villages and train over two hundred Gambian youths in renewable energy management.

Honourable Members,

5. The GTTI is now the University of Applied Science, Engineering and Technology, and it operates through mentorship programmes. About one-hundred undergraduate students have enrolled as the first and second batches on the Electronic, Mechanical and Civil Engineering degree programmes.
6. The Government will train more students at PhD level to complement the academic and administrative staff of the new university. Meanwhile, the foundation stone was laid recently to relocate the institution.
7. At present, about 486 Gambians have awards and are pursuing higher education courses in the country and abroad. Many of them are in the Sciences. In the interim, the UTG Ph.D. programmes are expanding gradually.
8. The Ministry of Higher Education is equally upgrading the Management Development Institute (MDI) into a degree awarding institution. At present, over twenty-one students have enrolled on the institution's degree programme supported by Soup de Corp of Senegal. These degree programmes will help us to realise the civil service reform objectives and strengthen the workforce.

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9. Similarly, the Gambia College schools of agriculture, nursing, and public health are part of the UTG to offer degree programmes. The Gambia College Annex in Basse complements these efforts by training teachers within URR.

10. Because of the need for skills development programmes, the Julangel and Mansankonko Skills Centres will intensify training efforts in this area. Both are fully operational in URR and LRR. To boost this, the revitalised Ndemban and Kanilai Skills Centres in WCR will begin operations soon.

11. With the support of the Korea International Cooperation Agency and UNESCO, The Gambia TVET Policy (2021-2030) is now in operation.

12. Significantly, as well, the Ministry has validated the country's first-ever National Research Policy to promote research in the country. Incidentally, The Gambia is known for its quality research works, especially in the medical and biological sciences. The policy will strengthen this success.

9. PETROLEUM AND ENERGY

Honourable Speaker,

1. Like other sectors, the COVID pandemic affected Petroleum exploration, which the Russia-Ukraine war has worsened.
2. Despite this, FAR and PETRONAS successfully completed the drilling of Bambo-1 in December 2021. This is an offshore exploration well. We keenly await the results on this endeavour.
3. On energy, a welcome development is the respective commissioning of the OMVG substations in Brikama and Soma last year. Since the inauguration of the Soma substation in October 2021, NAWEC has been receiving power from Senegal through the 225 KV OMVG line.
4. In March 2022, NAWEC signed a 50MW Power Purchase Agreement with Senelec and began receiving 30MW of this capacity in April.
5. In addition to the 20MW solar plant in Jambur, feasibility studies for the 150MW Solar Park in The Gambia are ongoing. Execution ends in 2025. The NAMA project under UNDP will also provide 10MW solar energy between Farafenni and Basse.

Mr. Speaker,

6. Works on the electrification to attain the 2025 Universal Access goal set by my Government is in high gear. This programme will provide electricity access to 685 villages and modernise the NAWEC Transmission and Distribution systems.
8. Recently, The Gambia signed a US\$25 million grant agreement with the Millennium Challenge Corporation of the US, and the National Assembly ratified it for implementation. It will elevate NAWEC's operations and strengthen the governance and regulatory frameworks of the electricity sub-sector.
9. Honourable Members, plans are afoot to solve the water supply bottlenecks through the Indian Government supported project, to which the World Bank and the African Development Bank contribute.
10. Furthermore, my administration has resolved to separate the water business from the electricity business at NAWEC and have them as two independent Corporations. These initiatives will make a difference in the country.

10. TOURISM AND CULTURE

Honourable Speaker,

1. The pandemic hit the tourism sector badly, but we expect them to bounce back soon. In 2021, arrivals stood at 102,460, marking an increase of over 14%, and the future looks bright. Since the beginning of the 2021-2022 tourism season, fifty-three flights arrive per week.
2. Meanwhile, the Ministry is exploring various ways of diversifying the sector, and is expanding in-country destinations, activities, and products.
3. Turning to the culture sub-sector, in April of this year, the National Centre for Arts and Culture embarked on a Multimillion-Dalasi project geared towards “*Strengthening National Capacities for Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) and Contributing to Sustainable Development in The Gambia, 2022-2024.*” Funded by UNESCO, the project aims at complementing efforts to safeguard our heritage. We will continue to support this important sector.

11. GENDER, CHILDREN AND SOCIAL WELFARE

Honourable Speaker,

1. To begin with regulation, Government will continue to initiate policies and programmes that address the needs and aspirations of the people, especially the vulnerable population, hence the formulation of the Gender Policy 2023-2032.

2. Currently, the Disability Act 2021 is in force, and will inform the formulation of a Disability Policy and Programme of Action (2022-2032).

3. To address emerging issues on child protection, the Children's Act (2005) is also under review to give way to the National Children Policy (2022-2032).

Honourable Speaker,

4. Gender and women empowerment is a critical enabler of sustained and progressive development; therefore, the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Welfare will table a Cabinet Paper on a national gender mainstreaming strategy.

5. We will remain steadfast to enhance the capacity of women in small and medium scale enterprises (SMEs) by scaling up the Women Enterprise Fund.

6. I am happy to state that the Fund surpassed the targeted small and medium scale enterprises from 10,000 to 23,000 enterprises. Government provided the entire GMD17 million fund.

7. Through the Family Strengthening Programme, the Ministry provided D750, 000.00 support to three hundred vulnerable families and 150 vulnerable elderly persons. This programme assists vulnerable families and persons through cash transfers.

12. YOUTH AND SPORTS

Honourable Speaker,

1. To promote youth and sports development, the Ministry of Youth and Sports is working to re-organise and restructure its satellite institutions by reviewing their Acts and policies. The outcome of the regional forums on the review of the National Sports Policy and the National Youth and Sports Acts will guide the remaining stages of the process.
2. In the meantime, the National Youth Service Scheme has enrolled 150 young people for apprenticeship and skills acquisition training. An additional 150 passed out and proceeded to other institutions. The next phase is to accelerate the programme in the coming fiscal year.
3. During the year under review, the President's International Award Skills and Enterprise Training Centre graduated 225 youths in nine different trade areas, but the proposed mandatory National Service for young Gambian university graduates is still on hold.
4. In the same vein, a series of training programmes has been running in various areas for the youths and women in partnership with NEDI, GIZ EU-TF, Go for Africa, and other partners.
5. The Award programme continues to focus on its nation-wide expansion to reach all young people across the country. The current participation level stands at 8765 young persons. Over 689 youths have already completed the mandatory aspects of the programme.
6. Mr. Speaker, The Gambia's performance in international competitions is improving rapidly, as demonstrated in the last African Cup of Nations, the Commonwealth Games and the last Turkey Athletics Competitions. We congratulate our athletes on their impressive results.
7. To strengthen this, construction of mini stadiums is progressing on eight sites across the country. We are aware of the maintenance works required at the Independence Stadium, and the contracts have been tendered to address the matter.

13. OFFICE OF THE VICE PRESIDENT

Honourable Speaker,

1. The Government formulated a National Social Protection Policy to establish, by 2035, an inclusive, integrated, and comprehensive social protection system. It is meant to contribute to broader human development, greater economic productivity, and inclusive growth.
2. The year, 2021, was an engaging year for the National Disaster Management Agency (NDMA). The country experienced serious domestic fire outbreaks, windstorms, and flash floods, which continue to affect lives and livelihoods.
3. In response, Government supported 1,952 households affected by windstorms, each receiving GMD7, 500 monthly for three months. In view of the COVID pandemic, my administration distributed rice countrywide through NDMA. Furthermore, it disbursed GMD450,000 for rice, oil, sugar, mattresses, and other essential items to support 1,161 Senegalese affected by the Sanyang riot.
4. Honourable Members, evaluation and revision of the National Population Policy (2007-2011) is in progress. In addition, the National Population Commission will lead the revision of the Act for the National Population Commission and its Secretariat to further define the mandate and authority of the Secretariat as an institution.
5. Following the development of a new population policy, the Secretariat will lead the development of an accompanying strategic plan and re-establish and train the Network of Parliamentarians on Population and Development. We thank UNFPA for their invaluable support.
6. As part of the Civil Service Reform Programme, 2018-2027, PMO is striving to transform the Public Service into an efficient motivated workforce. So far, my government has successfully revised the Pay and Grading structure to rationalise the civil service remuneration package. Effective from July 2022, we increased salaries by 30%.
7. The National Assembly passed the 2022 Public Service Pensions Bill in February of this year and I assented to it. The new Act centralises the administration of Civil Service Pensions under the Personnel Management Office (PMO). This is designed to yield a more rational pension and gratuity scheme for civil servants.

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8. To improve performance, PMO, with support from the Commonwealth Secretariat, is working on a Performance Management System to hold all Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) accountable annually. The MDAs will have to sign a performance contract with the Office of the President for assessment. The top ten Ministries will receive recognition and incentives on an annual basis.

9. In May of this year, the new Ministry of Public Service, Administrative Reforms, Policy Coordination and Delivery took over responsibility for the entire Civil Service, including the supervision of PMO to achieve my administration's Public Service reform agenda and vision.

14. INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION INFRASTRUCTURE

Honourable Speaker,

1. There is a strong desire to digitally transform the economy, improve the national ICT infrastructure, and strengthen our ICT policies and regulatory frameworks. Key among the steps taken to realise these targets are the formulation of the ICT4D Master Plan in 2020 and the ongoing review of the IC Act 2009.

2. Added to this, the Government, through MOICI, is implementing the Project Preparatory stage in advance of the five-year World Bank funded US\$45 million Western Africa Regional Digital Integration Project.

The project will support the roll out of numerous digital development interventions, which includes the establishment of a second Submarine Cable to provide adequate backup for the ACE submarine Cable. It also has components on strengthening cyber security.

3. The formulation of an e-commerce Policy and Strategy is another key activity of the project, as Government accelerates efforts to support the growth of this important industry.

4. This intervention will lead to the next phase of the digital addressing initiative in the West Coast Region. The initiative will facilitate assigning digital addresses to about 80,000 properties by December 2022.

5. To fully utilise the economic potential of our national broadband infrastructure, the administration went into a partnership with the EU through the Belgian Development Agency for the implementation of The Gambia Digitalization Project. The objective is to strengthen the sector policy and regulatory frameworks, develop an integrated infrastructure masterplan for effective mobilisation of private sector investments, and formulate an e-commerce policy.

6. In a bid to spurring technology-enabled research and innovation, Government is championing the establishment of innovation and tech hubs in all regions of the country. The purpose is to increase employment and employability opportunities for the youth and women, especially those in rural Gambia.

7. As regards Cyber Security and Cyber Crime, the sector will table the Data Protection and the Privacy and Cyber Crime Bills for this august body to consider.

8. The quest to transform the sector led to the creation of the two separate Ministries of Information and of Communication and Digital Economy.

15. TRANSPORT, WORKS AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Honourable Speaker,

1. In 2021, the Transport, Works and Infrastructure sector registered impressive achievements, despite challenges posed by the COVID pandemic and slow economic growth.
2. In the road sub-sector, my administration successfully completed the 82 million US-Dollar China-Aid roads and bridges project in the URR.
3. Likewise, relying on local resources and funding, the major rural secondary paved roads programme on the North and South Banks is progressing satisfactorily.
4. In the capital City of Banjul, the Government rolled-out the Banjul City Rehabilitation Project to reconstruct the city's dilapidated roads, sewerage, and drains, using local funds. Relentless efforts will continue to modernise Banjul.
5. With support of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa, and the Islamic Development Bank, the Greater Banjul Area projects are moving forward steadily. Equally, the construction of fifty kilometres of urban feeder roads in the Greater Banjul Area has commenced.
6. Furthermore, Government has finalised the maintenance and reconstruction contracts, using the Road Funds for the proper upkeep of selected roads in the Greater Banjul Area and the North Bank and Central River Regions. The estimated cost is GMD 617,296,691.73
7. In addition, my administration has rolled out a massive reconstruction programme of markets in growth centres where the need is most urgent. Already, the new Soma (LRR) and Farafenni (NBR) markets were completed last year and are fully operational.
8. Similarly, constructed at a cost of D112 million Dalasis and inaugurated earlier this year, the new Basse main market is now a magnificent centre of attraction and a busy business hub in URR.
9. Linked to public structures, the Public Building Facilities Management Bill is with this Assembly for consideration. It is a new framework for effective management of Government estates, offices, and overseas buildings.

10. Turning attention to the Port, the Banjul Port Expansion Project is ongoing, and expansion of the Container Storage Yard is now complete. The Banjul Jetty Extension and Basse Dry Port Development Projects are the next areas of focus.

11. Ferry Services play a vital role in linking the North and South banks. Although ferry crossing remains a challenge, in the year under review, the Ferry Services Authority improved the Banjul-Barra route service and restored the Barajally ferry service.

12. The procurement of a new ferry at a cost of €10 million to augment the Banjul-Barra route service is at an advanced stage. The Gambia Port Authority expects its delivery in 2024. This new ferry will have the capacity to carry 44 cars and 600 passengers.

13. A new ferry route between Banjul and Albreda is under consideration. The route will run from Banjul through Mandinari and Bonto to Albreda.

In addition to parts of the West Coast Region, it will serve the southern parts of Nuimi and communities along the Hakalang corridor.

14. Mr. Speaker, the COVID-19 pandemic continues to pose a significant threat to international aviation. In 2021, the Banjul International Airport staff welcomed and processed about 200,473 passengers. This marks a slight increase of 0.05%, compared to 2020. The estimated growth rates are small, and the indication is that The Gambia may reach pre-COVID passenger levels by 2025 at the earliest.

15. On the airport, through the support of Saudi Fund for Development, a new state-of-the-art VVIP Lounge is under construction ahead of the Organization of Islamic Conference Heads of State and Government summit, which The Gambia will host.

16. DEFENCE

Honourable Speaker,

1. In line with the Security Sector Reform process, the Ministry of Defence has developed three important policy documents, namely: The National Security Policy, National Security Strategy, and the first ever National Defence Policy. The drafting of the strategic plan has commenced.
2. Other outdated military regulatory books, which include The Gambia Armed Forces (GAF) Act 1985 and the Terms and Conditions of Services for Officers and Soldiers (1993), have been redrafted, taking cue from international best practices. Development of the supporting regulatory frameworks is also in progress.
3. GAF is broadening engagements with civil society to maintain a cordial relationship with the public. In addition to collaborating closely with other security agencies, it provides security, participates in maintaining peace and order, and goes further to support war veterans.
4. Following the recent conflict in Cassamance between the MFDC and the Senegalese Armed Forces, GAF played a crucial role in diffusing the tension and restoring calm. Its troops continue to conduct routine patrols in the area to maintain peace and security.
5. Besides plans to expand provision of educational and health services, GAF intends to construct a military hospital capable of conducting surgical operations.
6. I must mention before concluding that over 500 GAF personnel benefitted from training facilitated by the British Army during the past five years, different from other training programmes and joint tactical activities.
7. Under the Turkish-Gambia Military Cooperation Agreement, another 500 personnel of the GAF Quick Reaction Force recently completed training in Turkey. We are grateful to the British and Turkish Governments for their massive support.

17. TRADE, INDUSTRY, REGIONAL INTEGRATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Honourable Speaker,

1. In the past five years, the Ministry of Trade implemented programmes and projects that attracted investments and supported the development of trade and the private sector in the country.
2. With regret, however, the Covid-19 pandemic and the recent Russia-Ukraine war have impacted negatively on food importation around the world. These external shocks have led to price hikes.
3. To mitigate the impact, Government has been adopting measures since 2020; for instance, we support local producers, particularly the flour milling companies, to cushion the cost of production and minimise the price of flour.
4. To promote stability, the Ministry is working with importers to increase importation and supply of essential commodities and stabilise commodity prices.
5. Review of the National Trade Policy is in progress to develop appropriate instruments that would improve The Gambia's competitive edge and strengthen the productive sectors.
6. That aside, as The Gambia prepares to start trading under the AfCFTA framework, we now have a ten-year AfCFTA National Implementation Strategy, 2021-2031. To optimise benefits from the AfCFTA, the Senegambia Bridge will serve as a catalyst to attract strategic investments and contribute to the diversification of the economy.
7. In a related matter, we participate actively in ECOWAS integration programmes, and have a National Regional Integration Policy and Strategy, 2021-2025.
8. On investment and export promotion, the Trade Ministry, through GIEPA, developed a new National Export Strategy (2021-2025). It outlines key priority areas for the realisation of our national export development aspirations.

Mr. Speaker,

9. During the last five years, GIEPA attracted thirty-nine companies in manufacturing, agriculture, tourism, and fisheries, among other areas of interest. This amounted to a total investment of US\$154 million and created 2,274 jobs.

10. The Ministry of Trade will launch the Entrepreneurship Development Fund this year to support cottage industries and businesses with a soft revolving loan scheme on a more sustainable basis. The institutional structure of the Entrepreneurship Development Fund, Trust Committee, has been set up, and GIEPA serves as the secretariat for the Fund.

11. My government has reduced the business incorporation fee from GMD 10,000 to GMD 4,000 and assessed the market conditions for the establishment of a Credit Reporting System to improve on the business environment.

12. On employment creation, the sector launched The Gambia Labour Force Survey in 2021 to provide up-to-date statistics on the labour market. As a result, a new National Employment Policy and Action Plan (2022-2026) are available to pursue Government's commitment to addressing employment issues.

13. During the reporting period, the Tekki Fii Programme and the Youth Empowerment Project supported over 4,500 Gambians with skills training and provided finance and start-up support to more than 1,500 young entrepreneurs. The YEP Mini Loan Scheme, implemented in partnership with the Social Development Fund, provided GMD 11 million of private capital to young entrepreneurs. Under YEP, young entrepreneurs had close to GMD 25 million disbursed to them as small business grants.

14. To strengthen Labour Administration, the Ministry reviewed and updated the Labour Act 2007 and established an Employment Service Centre to link job seekers and employers.

15. There is an accompanying five-year strategic plan to effectively operationalise the Employment Service Centre.

18. THE LEGAL SECTOR

Honourable Speaker,

1. As the Constitution remains a top priority, my government is determined to oversee the crafting of a new Constitution for The Gambia; therefore, the Ministry of Justice will resume work towards tabling a draft Constitution before this august Assembly.
2. As part of its mandate, the Ministry will continue leading the review and harmonisation of existing legislations, with particular focus on laws that suppress freedoms and rights.
3. For now, Bills on criminal justice reform and mutual legal assistance are before this Assembly. I hope they will be dealt with eventually.
4. Among other Bills tabled before the National Assembly is the Anti-Corruption Bill 2020, which seeks to establish an Anti-Corruption Commission after enactment to uproot corruption.
5. Cabinet recently approved the Intellectual Property Bill (2021) to streamline the administration of intellectual property rights in The Gambia and have a centralised intellectual system.
6. Following the submission of the TRRC report last year, Cabinet approved the relevant Government White Paper in May 2022 for implementation.
7. Mr. Speaker, within three years of existence, the NHRC proved to be fully compliant with the Paris Principles. As a result, the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions granted it 'A' status. To the credit of Government and the Commission, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights also granted it affiliated status; thus, it can share submissions with them on human rights issues within the country. We will support its attainment of first-class accreditation status.
8. The Ministry is committed to the construction of the African Commission on Human and People's Rights Headquarters as part of Government's contribution towards hosting the Secretariat. Its purpose is to transform The Gambia into the Capital of human rights promotion.
9. On the international front, The Gambia will pursue to the end the case for justice for the Rohingyas before the International Court of Justice. It is encouraging that The Netherlands and Canada have joined us to end the genocide of the Rohingya.

Mr. Speaker,

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10. The role of the courts in providing access to quality justice delivery constitutes the pillars of a stable democracy, peace, and development.

11. As a result, my administration is committed to supporting the Judiciary's growth and development, recruitment of judicial experts, particularly qualified Gambians, and maintenance of its independence and impartiality.

12. To achieve this noble goal, the Executive will collaborate with the Chief Justice and the Judicial Commission. We honour them and celebrate their achievements with them.

13. The sub-sector is aware of the need to expand the implementation of post-transitional justice mechanisms, redress victims of rights violation, and scale up advocacy on healing and reconciliation. We will remain supportive of the Judiciary, as it addresses these issues and evolves to maintain public trust and respect.

19. FISHERIES, WATER RESOURCES AND NATIONAL ASSEMBLY MATTERS

Honourable Speaker,

1. The fisheries sector contributes about 12% to GDP and provides direct employment to over 30,000 people. It has an enormous potential to contribute to diversifying the economy and reducing the unemployment rate.
2. A new policy, medium-term strategic document, and plan of action for the sector are ready for validation. Once finalised, the Ministry of Fisheries will work towards amending the Fisheries Act and regulations.
3. With partner support, the sector is expanding use of fish processing and preservation technologies to contribute to the economic viability of small-scale fish smoking enterprises of women. They constitute up to 80% of post-harvest fisheries operators in the sector.
4. In a joint operation to combat illegal, unregulated, and unreported fishing, The Gambia Navy, Police Force, and volunteer fishermen recently seized and destroyed over five hundred illegal fishing traps and tried five culprits before competent District Tribunals. It flags the need for sustained vigilance.
5. Mr. Speaker, my government will table two agreements before this Honourable Assembly for ratification. They are agreements between the Government of The Gambia and the Government of Senegal on Fisheries and Aquaculture and the Government of Ghana on Fisheries.
6. The sector will also introduce to this honourable body a Bill to provide an up-to-date comprehensive Water Act for The Gambia and a Bill to establish a new National Water Resources Management Authority.
7. Correspondingly, the National Meteorological and Hydrological Services provider and partners are collaborating with the World Metrological Organisation to implement the National Framework for Climate Services and intensify action to address climate risks and related issues.
8. I encourage the private sector and other actors to team-up with the Government to fully harness the opportunities created and reduce the hazards associated with the climate system.

20. LANDS, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS

Honourable Speaker,

1. As population growth poses challenges to land usage, land resources are under tremendous strain globally. Accordingly, my administration recognises that prudent management of this precious resource is essential for poverty reduction and national food security. The Ministry of Lands, Regional Government and Religious Affairs must execute this function effectively and impartially.
2. On programmes and projects, the sector is currently implementing twenty ward sub-projects, with a total fund disbursement capacity of GMD 23, 231, 460. 00.
3. These sub-projects take the form of water supply systems, gardening, and culvert construction. The second phase accommodates twelve additional wards in CRR North and South.
4. Moving on, the Directorate of Governance and Decentralisation is set to roll out the Integrate Financial Management Information System (IFMIS) to all the Local Government Councils to improve sound fiscal management. The COVID outbreak delayed the process initially.
5. The project cost estimate is D7, 810, 200. 00, which the Government and UNDP will provide.

Honourable Members,

6. The sector is reviewing the Local Government Act 2002, the Finance and Audit Act 2004, and the Local Government Service Scheme. The objective is to make them responsive to Government's evolving local governance and decentralization policy.
7. In recognition of the role of the village heads, *Alkalolu*, in their communities, my administration now pays every *Alkalo* a monthly responsibility allowance of GMD3,000, with effect from January 2022.
8. Finally, the NGO Bill is ready for enactment as the NGO Act 2021.

21. INTERIOR

Honourable Speaker,

1. The Gambia Police Force (GPF) continues to protect life and property and preserve law and order for peace and stability. To this end, GPF, with the support of local and international partners, has refocused its strategic plans and core values to align them with the National Security Policy, National Security Strategy, and the Security Sector Reform Strategy.

2. Related to these, the GPF has developed fourteen operational instruments, Standard Operating Procedures and guidelines, and a National Community-policing Strategy.

3. To briefly comment on its operations, the GPF currently has twenty-five community-policing programmes and 175 active community-policing structures, supported by community policing volunteers.

4. Together with the other security services, I commend them for their effective participation in the last two national elections. They promoted impartiality and democratic policing values.

5. To avert attrition and enhance adequate security for the upcoming OIC Summit, from 2021 to date, the GPF recruited 1,200 personnel and conducted sixty-three training programmes for 1,812 police officers in critical areas of policing.

6. On the other hand, The Gambia Immigration Department (GID) collaborated with the Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance to amend the current 1965 Immigration Act and align it with international standards, as referenced in their Strategic Plan (2019-2024). This amendment will lead to the enactment of the Immigration Service Act 2023.

7. GID contributes to the national revenue in several ways. In this respect, the Department collected GMD91, 980, 370.00 in 2020, which increased by about 12% in 2021 to GMD103, 362, 940. 00. Revenue collection for 2022 is likely to be higher. We commend them for this achievement.

8. The Gambia Fire and Rescue Service (GFRS) works to safeguard life and property. In this light, the GFRS received and responded to 1,128 emergency calls in 2021.

Of these, 823 were related to fire accidents and 305 were rescue calls. They rescued 228 persons alive, but there were 29 fatalities. This highlights the need for vigilance in our homes and at sea.

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9. The Gambia Prisons Act of 1953, Amendment Bill 2022 had Cabinet approval prior to its submission to the National Assembly. The enactment of the Bill is meant to repeal key colonial legal provisions on prison officers and inmates and institute international standards and best practices.

10. The review of the Drug Control Act 2003 for amendment is at an advanced stage. The new Bill incorporates international protocols and treaties, and the Ministry will table it here for consideration.

11. In the interim, it is necessary to impress upon the anti-drug agency the need for vigilance to free the nation from drug abuse and trafficking.

22. DEPARTMENT FOR STRATEGIC POLICY AND DELIVERY

Honourable Speaker,

1. The Department for Strategic Policy and Delivery (DSPD), under the Office of the President, provides policy support to the sectors and convenes National Economic Council meetings and organises Retreats for Permanent Secretaries. It also supports the Cabinet Office.
2. The Department coordinates the Programme for Accelerated Community Development (PACD), which is a special initiative of the Office of the President. Through this project, Government facilitates access to proper infrastructure, safe drinking water, roads, energy, and labour-saving equipment in rural communities.
3. Also, the DSPD collaborates with UNDP, the MDAs, and the Regional Offices away from Banjul and KMC to implement the project. So far, it has provided water systems for thirty-one communities in the five regions.
4. On Electricity supply, ten communities are now connected to the main grid, with an additional seven communities targeted on the North Bank. More than 10, 000 households in the area will benefit from this intervention. The project will gradually spread to other parts of the country.
5. I am pleased to observe that the food security component of the project provided 19 tractors with accessories and 19 post-harvest processing equipment to 38 communities in the country. This is to support rural farmers, especially women.
6. To ensure sustainability of the project assets and boost revenue generation, this initiative will include capacity building on asset management and revenue generation. Private sector participation is being mobilised to stimulate private sector investments in rural infrastructure, particularly renewable energy assets.
7. My administration, through the Department of Strategic Policy and Delivery, continues to coordinate The United Nation Peace Building Fund activities in The Gambia to boost peacebuilding efforts in the country. We acknowledge, with gratitude, the UNPBF's contribution to the implementation of the National Development Plan.
8. Closely related to this, the Ministry of Interior and the DSPD, working with civil society organisations, continue to play a key role in developing the first-ever Infrastructure for Peace (I4P), the centrepiece of which will be a National Council for Peace and Social Cohesion.

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9. Still on coordination, the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs and the DSPD currently coordinate the development of the UN Cooperation Framework under the guidance of the UN Country Team. A joint Government-UN Programme Coordination Group is working to ensure that all assistance for the country accords with our national priorities.

10. The DSPD is now relocated to the Ministry of Public Service, Administrative Reforms, Policy Coordination and Delivery for better results.

23. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Honourable Speaker,
Honourable Members of the National Assembly,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. As my address shows, ours is a story of success, despite the major huddles that slowed down my administration's performance and the country's development over the past five years.
2. With resounding success, we have reclaimed our rights and freedoms, restored democracy in the country, and rescued our dignity and honour as a nation. We have gone through the transition phase in peace, registering phenomenal successes in various aspects of development embracing infrastructure development, energy, education, health, agriculture, and transitional justice, amid other achievements.
3. On the world stage, we have imposed our country's visibility, and our partnerships and relations with the world are growing fruitfully. The Commissions and other structures we initiated were relevant, necessary, and functionally useful.
4. Looking ahead, following the remarkable 2021 and 2022 elections, we now have a new Cabinet of national character, a new Legislature of diverse composition, and a revitalised, strengthened, and respectable Gambian Judiciary. Our reformed institutions and evolving civil service provide sufficient grounds for optimism, as we begin the march to 2026.
5. Today, the Government respects and listens to the voice of the people, hence the multiple energised political parties that continue to make their presence felt. We must note, however, that The Gambia has a hopeful, inspired, but needy population; therefore, the responsibility lies on all of us to fulfil their aspirations.
6. The first Cabinet Retreat, held in June of this year, confirms my government's resolve to do this and deliver on our promises. Because it was not all rosy during the last five years, we know that there are loose ends to tie, gaps to fill and missing links to fix.
7. The retreat focussed on selected themes to address the longstanding challenges facing the country, as well as emerging ones.
8. I must observe, however, that we will tackle the thematic areas within the administration's broader and holistic approach to national development. Thus, infrastructure, health, agriculture, digital technology, the economy and other areas of development will continue to receive due attention. The minority groups, women, the youth, and people with disability will attract special focus in the process.

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Mr. Speaker,
Honourable Members of the National Assembly,

9. My Government offers the nation a new socio-political order, not tied to social preferences, partisan politics, or any form of extremism. This is a national order purely for patriotic service and development. I plead that we embrace it as a construct that calls for uprightness, sincerity, and diligence.

10. The notion is that the honourable members of this Assembly have three functions to perform; that is, representation, legislation, and oversight. Your responsibilities certainly go beyond these three.

11. The mantle of leadership cast upon you, by virtue of your membership of the Legislature, and the fortune of being a family head or belonging to a family and community, thrust social functions and responsibilities upon you to foster peace and cohesion in your communities, constituencies, and the nation at large.

12. You have the responsibility to educate your constituencies, the opportunity to initiate development projects and programmes, and the option to engage Government. We are open to dialogue, and I ask that we work together.

13. Aside from being legislators, you have the ambassadorial role of representing the nation at international forums and holding meetings with foreign dignitaries and philanthropists. This creates opportunities for you to promote national policies and plans and raise funds for national development.

14. The diverse composition of this Assembly spells a new era in Gambian politics and a new outlook for the Legislature. The people's expectations are high, so you must not allow party interests to overshadow your tenure and performance.

15. In whatever you do, let the interest of the nation come first. To deliver, it is imperative that you work along bipartisan lines to fulfil the people's aspirations and safeguard the honour of those who chose you to represent them.

16. As I always emphasise, the opportunities are much greater today, and there is no justification for any citizen to anticipate gloom for the country.

17. May Allah grant us a successful legislative session, full of grace, development and lots of opportunities and advancement for the citizens and residents of The Gambia within an environment of sustained peace, stability, and security.

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18. I thank everyone, especially our development partners for their support, and I wish this August Assembly fruitful deliberations.