



# Integrated Country Strategy

---

---

## The Gambia

FOR PUBLIC RELEASE

**Table of Contents**

1. Chief of Mission Priorities ..... 2

2. Mission Strategic Framework ..... 5

3. Mission Goals and Objectives ..... 6

4. Management Objectives..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

## 1. Chief of Mission Priorities

After 22 years of autocratic rule, a new democratic government took over in The Gambia in January 2017. The political will to transform this country into a well-governed democratic state that abides by the rule of law and respects human rights is generally there, but there are major challenges in terms of poverty; financial coffers virtually stripped bare by the former president; an extraordinarily heavy debt burden; high unemployment, especially among youth; a weak education system; inadequate electric supply; and poor implementing capacity. The advent of the new democratic government has meant greatly improved relations between the United States and The Gambia, but the new government is still in its infancy and its steps toward democracy are sometimes unsteady. Our top priority for The Gambia, therefore, is to support the creation of a truly democratic state, one where government operates under the rule of law, respects human rights, and invests in its people. We will accomplish this by continuously engaging the government on human rights and governance; supporting the government's transitional justice processes; promoting civic participation and strengthening civil society organizations; and facilitating improved education outcomes. In addition we will work to advance development in The Gambia by building the institutional capacity of the Gambian government to deliver vital services; fostering entrepreneurship; and promoting increased trade and investment between the United States and The Gambia.

The Embassy's priorities are consistent with Government of the Gambia priorities as outlined in the country's National Development Plan (NDP) 2018 – 2021, which identifies eight priority areas through which the government will strive to deliver good governance, accountability, social cohesion, reconciliation, and a revitalized economy. Our priorities also reflect the country's youthful population and the dearth of women in politics. Many of our planned activities are focused on youth and women's empowerment.

On the human rights and governance fronts the situation in The Gambia is greatly improved. A Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission to help the country heal from the abuses of the previous regime and ensure that such abuses are never repeated has been established and is expected to begin work in fall 2018. The National Assembly approved a bill establishing an independent National Human Rights Commission. The press is now full of harsh criticism from many quarters, and a number of laws restricting free speech and expression have been abolished, though some restrictive laws remain on the books. Arbitrary arrests and detentions have largely been eliminated, but dubious arrests in the name of national security continue to occur occasionally. The judiciary now operates independently of the executive branch. The National Assembly is no longer a rubber stamp for the Executive. As part of the government's efforts to root out corruption, a Commission of Inquiry has held hearings since August 2017 to identify the financial crimes committed by the previous administration and hold those complicit accountable. Also, a Constitutional Review Commission has been established to create a new constitution devoid of the many undemocratic amendments added by the previous regime and more accurately reflecting the will of the Gambian people. Our planned activities include

programs to strengthen institutions, support the transitional justice process, and build capacity of civil society to hold government accountable to the people.

After the former president absconded with millions and left the country virtually bankrupt, The Gambian economy is on the road to recovery. According to the IMF, The Gambia's economic recovery is "gaining traction": economic growth bounced back to 3.5% in 2017 compared to 2.2% in 2016; inflation is down from a peak of 8.8% in January 2017 to 6.5% in March 2018; the country's currency has been stable; and the food supply is on the rebound. The IMF forecasts that growth will hit 5.0 – 5.5% in 2018 and inflation will fall further to about 5% . However, the country's debt burden, at 130% of GDP, is a major cause for concern. The IMF described the Gambia's debt as at "high risk of distress" and arguably "unsustainable" if it were not for the budget support the country is receiving from the EU and international financial institutions. The country's inability to take on new loans limits the government's flexibility to grow the economy and undertake much-needed projects. Our efforts to support economic growth in The Gambia will focus on building institutional capacity to manage the country's finances, supporting sustainable resource management, encouraging entrepreneurship, and promoting increased trade and investment between The Gambia and the United States.

The international community has responded positively to The Gambia's needs and priorities. At an international conference on The Gambia in May 2018, donors made pledges of more than \$1.7 billion to support the Gambia's National Development Plan (2018-2021). The United States recognized the improvements and reforms made by the new Gambian government by selecting The Gambia for a Millennium Challenge Corporation Threshold Program in December 2017 and by restoring The Gambia's eligibility for African Growth and Opportunity Act benefits in January 2018. Other U.S. agencies have also responded to The Gambia's many needs with various assistance packages.

Until the new government came in we had less than \$300,000 a year in programming and assistance funds to work with to advance U.S. policy and interests in The Gambia, mainly through the Ambassador's Self-Help program and other small grants, and through our public diplomacy programs. With the ushering in of a new, democratic government, that has changed, and with support from various U.S. agencies -- including State, USAID, USDA, DOJ, DHS, and Treasury -- we have been able to greatly broaden and deepen our assistance to The Gambia more than ten-fold. We have embarked on a number of programs to bolster capacity in financial management and financial crimes investigations, strengthen civil society, advance security sector reform, and improve health care, and we have programs in the pipeline to improve agricultural productivity, bolster fiscal transparency, and support electoral and legislative reforms.

We will also continue the small but effective streams of support, such as the Ambassador's Self-Help Fund and the Julia Taft Refugee Fund, and exchange programs, such as the IVLP and the Mandela Washington Fellows program, which have been the mainstays of our assistance to The Gambia for many years. These programs, as well as the Peace Corps, which has around 90 volunteers embedded in rural communities throughout the country engaged in agricultural,

environmental, public health, and educational programs, have helped the United States win the hearts and minds of the Gambian people. We will also continue to use social media, particularly our popular Facebook page, to reach and influence Gambian youth. We welcome the increased assistance and the expanded engagement it has facilitated, but along with the increased assistance has come a concomitant increase in the Embassy's workload in terms of reporting demands as well as visitors, which have both increased exponentially. Increased post staffing and improvement of our physical plant are needed to advance our goals. The current political/economic reporting officer maintains key contacts with government and opposition political parties, serves on the Global Fund Oversight Committee, and works to promote interest in trade with the United States. With challenges presented by the ongoing risk of socio-political instability, and the Department's interest in The Gambia's regional relationships, Post believes splitting the Pol/Econ position into two full-time, separate political and economic positions is necessary to meet growing demands on the reporting section. Post also requires the addition of an Assistant Regional Security Officer (A/RSO) for the Regional Security Office. The RSO section's workload has always been heavy due to the host government's lack of capacity to effectively provide support and increased with the addition of a Marine Security Guard detachment in 2014. The RSO workload is also exacerbated by increased regional security threats, and increased U.S. programming, assistance, and TDY visits. The addition of an ARSO to handle the additional workload and serve as an essential backup for RSO is critical to ensuring the Mission and its employees are safe.

Embassy Banjul's Chancery is housed in a converted 1970's-era motel that lacks both the proper security setback and sufficient space to accommodate our current workforce. In addition, the Chancery is afflicted with significant structural problems and frequent flooding. The Office of Overseas Building Operations has identified two tracks to solve the Embassy's building issues –repair the current Chancery's structural issues in the short-term, and identify a suitable site for a New Embassy Compound (NEC) in the long-term. In 2017, we moved employees based at the Warehouse Annex to the Chancery in order to bring post into compliance with worldwide DS standards. Squeezing additional staff into the Chancery, just two years after reconfiguring the building to accommodate an eight-person Marine Security Guard detachment, has further exacerbated the Embassy's facilities challenges, underscoring the need to move quickly on plans to build a NEC. Banjul is currently an out-year project on the Capital Security Construction Program schedule. To address the chronically poor state of the Embassy's physical plant in a timely and efficient manner we require the addition of a Facilities Manager.

With the dramatic influx of U.S. agencies providing assistance to The Gambia, Embassy Banjul is poised to significantly contribute to helping The Gambia stay on its democratic trajectory and to positively impacting the social welfare and economic condition of the Gambian people. However, we need additional staff to achieve our goals. With the additional staff described above we can help The Gambia fulfill its democratic and economic aspirations and, in turn, ensure that The Gambia remains a reliable partner to the United States.

## **2. Mission Strategic Framework**

### **Mission Goal 1: Strengthen Democratic Institutions, Support Good Governance, Advance Human Rights, and Bolster Education.**

**Mission Objective 1.1:** The Government of The Gambia practices good governance, including through inclusion of civil society and other stakeholders in the decision-making process.

**Mission Objective 1.2:** The Government of The Gambia promotes human rights, strengthens its institutions, and promotes accountability to prevent a reoccurrence of the abuses of the past.

### **Mission Goal 2: Promote Inclusive Country-led Development.**

**Mission Objective 2.1:** The Government of The Gambia has the capacity and resources to manage the economy to support growth and increase the wellbeing of all citizens.

**Mission Objective 2.2:** Economic engagement in The Gambia by the American and Gambian private sectors increases, improving economic conditions in the country and increasing employment.

### **Management Objective 1: Mitigate the impact of chronic staffing disruptions and seek innovative solutions to support the Mission's increased diplomatic engagement.**

### 3. Mission Goals and Objectives

#### **Mission Goal 1: Strengthen Democratic Institutions, Support Good Governance, Advance Human Rights, and Bolster Education.**

**Description and Linkages:** A year and half after its unexpected victory at the polls, support for new political freedoms remains strong, but the Barrow administration is struggling to meet citizens' expectations related to improved living conditions and greater economic opportunity. One of the major obstacles to progress is weak institutions that struggle with a lack of capacity and unclear mandates. The government must reform and strengthen its institutions, enable transparent and democratic governance, protect human rights, and carry out transitional justice processes in order to prevent future abuses and contribute to national healing. The legislature, civil society, and ordinary Gambians need to become more effective at influencing and monitoring government activity. **This goal directly contributes to AF/AFR Joint Regional Strategy (JRS) goal of Strengthen Democracy, Human Rights, and Good Governance.**

#### **Mission Objective 1.1: The Government of The Gambia practices good governance through inclusion of civil society and other stakeholders in the decision-making process.**

**Justification:** After 22 years of highly-centralized authoritarian rule, Gambians are eager to be involved in decision-making processes. To strengthen linkages between the government and the people, and to ensure representative policy-making, the National Assembly and civil society organizations need to be strengthened and empowered to play a more effective role in providing input and oversight.

#### **Mission Objective 1.2: The Government of The Gambia promotes human rights, strengthens its institutions, and promotes accountability to prevent a reoccurrence of the abuses of the past.**

**Justification:** For democracy to take root in The Gambia, and for the nation to recover from the wounds of two decades of brutal dictatorship, the GOTG needs to ensure that the human rights of all citizens are protected, implement transitional justice processes to promote healing and prevent future abuses (e.g., the Truth, Reconciliation, and Reparations Commission; the Constitutional Review Commission; and the Human Rights Commission), and engage with civil society in pursuing these goals. A major risk is the influence of some state and non-state actors in The Gambia who stand to benefit from the status quo.

#### **Mission Goal 2: Promote Inclusive Country-led Development.**

**Description and Linkages:** For democracy to be fully embraced by all Gambians, the living conditions of the people must improve; and for long-term security, employment opportunities must grow, especially for young Gambians. Improvements in the supply of electricity and expansion in the transportation networks are needed to support investment, boost export opportunities, and improve prospects for growth and job creation. **This goal directly contributes to AF/AFR Joint Regional Strategy (JRS) goal of Increase Mutually Beneficial Economic Growth, Trade, and Investment.**

**Mission Objective 2.1: The Government of The Gambia has the capacity and resources to manage the economy to support growth and increase the wellbeing of all citizens.**

**Justification:** Institutional capacity in The Gambia is low and the leadership faces enormous challenges in creating an enabling environment for investment, growth, and job creation. Improving this capacity will strengthen the government's ability to increase the wellbeing of all citizens, improve security and stability, and sustain support for democratic governance.

**Mission Objective 2.2: Economic engagement in The Gambia by the American and Gambian private sectors increases, thus improving economic conditions and increasing employment.**

**Justification:** Providing employment opportunities, especially for young Gambians, is a top priority for The Gambia, to increase citizens' wellbeing and improve stability and support for democratic governance.



## 4. Management Objectives

**Management Objective 1: Mitigate the impact of chronic staffing disruptions and seek innovative solutions to support the Mission's increased diplomatic engagement.**

**Justification:** Staff turnover, staffing gaps, and a sharp increase in USG engagement and TDY visitors have a significant impact on management operations, given Post's small staffing footprint. These staffing shortfalls hinder achievement of Mission objectives.