

# CONFLICT AND DEVELOPMENT ANALYSIS – THE GAMBIA

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## List of Acronyms

ADR- Alternative Dispute Resolution  
APRC- Alliance for Patriotic Reorientation and Construction  
AU- African Union  
CDA- Conflict and Development Analysis  
CDS- Chief of Defense Staff  
CSO- Civil Society Organization  
CRR- Central River Region  
ECOMIG- ECOWAS Mission in The Gambia  
ECOWAS- Economic Community of West African States  
FGD- Focus Group Discussion  
FGM- Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting  
FLAG -Female Lawyers Association of The Gambia  
GAF -Gambia Armed Forces  
GBA- Greater Banjul Area  
GBV- Gender-Based Violence  
GCC-Gambia Christian Council  
GDC- Gambia Democratic Congress  
GDP- Gross Domestic Product  
GID- Gambia Immigration Department  
GMC-Gambia Moral Congress  
GPDP-Gambia Peoples Democratic Party  
GPF-Gambia Police Force  
GRTS-Gambia Radio and Television Services  
IEC- Independent Electoral Commission  
IOM- International Organization for Migration  
IPC- Inter Party Committee  
KII- Key Informant Interview  
KM- Kanifing Municipality  
LGA- Local Government Area  
LRR- Lower River Region  
NAM- National Assembly Member

NBR- North Bank Region  
NCCE-National Council for Civic Education  
NCP-National Convention Party  
NDP-National Development Plan  
NGO-Non-Governmental Organization  
NRP-National Reconciliation Party  
OECD-Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development  
PDOIS-Peoples Democratic Organization for Independence and Socialism  
PPP- Peoples Progressive Party  
SALW-Small Arms and Light Weapons  
SIC-Supreme Islamic Council  
SSR-Security Sector Reform  
TRRC-Truth, Reconciliation and Reparation Commission  
UDP-United Democratic Party  
UN-United Nations  
UNDP- United Nations Development Programme  
UNODC- United Nations Office on Drug Control  
UNOWAS- United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel  
URR- Upper River Region  
VDC- Village Development Committee  
WANEP- West Africa Network for Peacebuilding  
WCR- West Coast Region  
WDC- Ward Development Committee  
YEP- Youth Empowerment Project

## Executive Summary

Since January 2017, following the historic change of government in The Gambia via the ballot, a new democratic dispensation is in place. The “New Gambia” under the leadership of President Adama Barrow and the coalition-led government – with the assistance of a range of development partners, including the United Nations – and with the support of Civil Society and other actors, has made progress toward reforming Gambia’s institutions, with a view to restoring democratic governance and the respect for the rule of law.

Legislative action has advanced a series of national reforms, setting the stage for transitional efforts to pursue changes in the justice and security sectors, as well as toward new practices of governance, development, and economic revitalization, as envisioned within the National Development Plan (2018-2021)<sup>1</sup>. In the context of a new and *democratic* dispensation, the political and social processes that will re-define Gambian state-society relations, also raised significant challenges. As evidenced, new challenges are based on unique demands, placed on both public office holders, and on Gambians at large, putting the country’s diverse ethno-linguistic and inter-religious cohesion to the test, throughout all regions and communities, both rural and urban.

In order to systemically assess the nature of peace and conflict dynamics amidst these transformations shaping The Gambia today, a participatory, inclusive, and nationally-driven Conflict and Development Analysis (CDA) was conducted between April and May of 2018. This report provides a methodological overview and description of analytical findings revealed through the CDA process, illuminating strategic areas of attention and a set of targeted recommendations, which emerge in service of sustaining progress and stability in the country.

As this study suggests, Gambians stress the need for clear actions to signal that a new *political culture and orientation* has taken root, one in which leaders demonstrate a break with the autocratic, patronage-based, winner-takes-all orientation. Instead, Gambians wish to see a re-fashioning the state based instead on equity, deliberation, and consensus. They express an orientation that favors leadership and change that are grounded in more transparent and frequent public communication, and public consultation as evidence that their views are being heard and understood, based on evaluable forms of responsiveness and performance. As the recommendations reflect, such leadership calls upon multiple, strategic, and proactive efforts to engage state and non-state actors, to generate new norms of interaction and consensus, and to pay special attention to the triggering potential evidenced by deepening divisions and tensions along ethno-linguistic and ethno-political lines. Such potential remains a central cause of concern across regions, socio-economic standing, age ethnicity, and tribal or religious affiliations.

### **Conflict and Development Analysis**

The CDA research and analysis process was carried out under the auspices of a Project Management Team, led by the Government of the Gambia through the Ministry of the Interior, together with the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding-The Gambia (WANEP). Support was provided by the United Nations through the Joint UNDP-DPA Programme for Building National Capacities for Conflict Prevention. The methodology of the Project Management Team was informed by the UN Development Group’s Conflict and Development Analysis (CDA) tool.<sup>2</sup> As an agency-neutral approach to analysis, the CDA-inspired methodology served multiple purposes, satisfying three main objectives along the way, including: Nationally reaching fieldwork Research & Systems Analysis; a Current Response Assessment, and; the Identification of Key Recommendations. Together, these components were brought together to more accurately guide and inform Gambian peacebuilding and development strategies, design and programming.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information, see: <https://statehouse.gov.gm/launching-national-development-plan> (Accessed 30 May 2018)

<sup>2</sup> UNDP (2016) “Conducting a Conflict and Development Analysis. UNDP CDA Manual. Accessible online: <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/democratic-governance/conflict-prevention/conducting-a-conflict-and-development-analysis.html>

The findings and recommendations, which can be enhanced through periodic updates, can support evidence-based decision-making for all nationally-driven peacebuilding and development engagements.

The Project Management Team, with the support of a Gambian and International technical consultant, were directly engaged in all activities, beginning with a participatory approach to research design, which included design consultation with national stakeholders, which commenced in late March 2018 and continued into early April. A stakeholder validation exercise was held (17 April 2018) to review the initial scope of the research plan. All activities, from research design, as well as the structure and implementation of research practices and stakeholder events, were carried out using conflict sensitive and ethical approaches. This way, the accuracy of both the findings and recommendations was further encouraged through an accounting of *representative* voices and experiences across the country. Throughout this process, special emphasis was given to the analytical optics of gender and generation. These are reflected through the discussion of conflict dynamics, specific to the way that conflict drivers and peace engines are shaping men's, women's and young people's experiences differently in The Gambia, today.

Subsequent to design stages, fieldwork was carried out covering all regions of Gambia's national territory, with the support of regional research teams reflecting Gambia's ethno-linguistic and age diversity, all with accompaniment and management support provided by the Project Management Team. The fieldwork period, which began officially on 20 April and concluded on 13 May, encompassed 64 key informant interviews (15 female to 53 male) with state and non-state actors and national leaders,<sup>3</sup> as well as 34 focus group discussions, convening an array of participants from all regions, whose constitution were widely representative of Gambia's demographics and ethno-linguistic diversity. In sum, fieldwork activities involved approximately 338 individuals, with a 49/51 per cent focus group ratio breakdown of female to male participants. Data analysis and a current response assessment were conducted over the course of multiple analytical exercises, during working-group sessions and public events, in conjunction with both Gambian and international stakeholders. Finally, a stakeholder validation event on 17 May 2018 was held, during which time Gambians from a wide range of representative sectors reviewed and validated preliminary findings.

### **Conflict Drivers & Peace Engines**

In line with a participatory, inclusive, national-ownership driven approach to research design, data sourcing, analysis, and validation, the process resulted in a deeper understanding of the key driving conflict dynamics and most important engines for peace shaping the context today.<sup>4</sup> In the context of transition, the **key conflict drivers** provide evidence of areas which hold the existing potential, if left unaddressed, to expediently push the country and its people toward conflict, instability and violence. Similarly, the **key engines for peace** represent actors, factors, and dynamics identified as possessing the greatest existing potential to reinforce movement toward increasing stability, social cohesion, and creation of conditions in The Gambia that can enable a more just and peaceful coexistence in transition.

Mitigating conflict, as well as building and sustaining peace in The Gambia entails a process of supporting people, new relations, and institutions transition away from autocracy and toward a unique Gambian experience of democracy. Evidence suggests that building confidence in leaders and institutions, is paramount to this moment. Re-centering relations around the premises of a democratic system must not only transpire

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<sup>3</sup> The gender makeup of these key informant research participants, who identified as being either male or female, was a respective 70/30 male-to-female split. This ratio is significant in terms of women's voices in particular, especially when considering the male-dominated imbalance specific to those who hold 'key' leadership or management positions in spaces such as state institutions or civil society organizations.

<sup>4</sup> *Conflict drivers* is a phrase used to describe dynamic processes that contribute to the ignition or exacerbation of destructive conflict as a result of structural and/or proximate factors. Conflict drivers usually manifest themselves in violence or directly contribute to the emergence of violent conflict. – *Peace engines* are elements and/or processes that exist within a society that mitigate the emergence and proliferation of violent conflict, and strengthen foundations for peace. Peace engines draw upon and reinforce the innate resilience of a society.



between the state and its citizens, but also amongst citizens themselves, who, evidence suggests, struggle with deepening divisions and tensions along ethno-linguistic and ethno-political lines, which have been exacerbated, *inter alia*, by politicized institutional and leadership practices over decades. Governance practices in key areas of justice and security, reflective of promoting equal rights and responsiveness in their performance of service delivery, in addition to a more informed, participatory, and responsible role played by citizens, can work toward ensuring a more legitimate and sustainable state-society contract, mutually serving for lasting stability and peace. The nature of *how* that occurs, together with the type of guidance that social and political leaders give to the newly unfolding forms of expression and interactions, will demonstrate an important measure of transition.

Significant in this process is the attention that Gambians and partners give to mitigating the most salient and pressing drivers of conflict. Notably, evidence points to six primary or leading areas of concern, which include emphasis on the behaviors that foster politicization and instrumentalization of people for political gain. Amongst them are **publically and privately delivered messages that stoke ethnic divisions** and embed themselves in the collective psyche. The **relative absence of national unity-promoting or counter-narrative messaging** by Gambian leaders helps to sustain already heightened anxieties and concerns held by citizens about their neighbors. **Substantial structural and culture-of-dialogue obstacles** also problematize pathways to advancing reforms and treating social tensions. Amongst these, constitutional questions and ethno-political relations come squarely into focus. Together, these create conditions in which violence-triggering potential abounds, particularly involving young people, as most probable authors of such behaviors. Similarly, stability is challenged by the approaches taken to the management of natural resources, and the perceived inequitable distribution of national assets, related to the access and benefits of timber trade and water ways, as made available for production and the stability of livelihoods. Compounding tensions, the existing and functional statutory and customary practices of land management, including data management, transfer and title, and associated dispute management and resolution processes, represent significant destabilizing forces today.

<b><u>Key Drivers of Conflict &amp; Instability</u></b>	
i	<b>Transparent &amp; Accountable Governance: Reforms, Public Confidence &amp; Communication</b>
ii	<b>Social Cohesion, Identity &amp; Citizenship</b>
iii	<b>Natural Resource Management, Land Ownership &amp; Access</b>
iv	<b>Informed Dialogue, Public Participation &amp; Civic Education</b>
v	<b>Citizen Safety, Responsiveness &amp; Coordination of Security Actors</b>
vi	<b>Meaningful Participation, Inclusion, and Ownership of and by Youth</b>

The **suppression or tightening of spaces for public expression and dissent**, perceived through both legal structures and messaging sent by political and elected officials, inhibit progress toward the fostering of political and civic dialogue. **Failure to more actively sensitize the public and enable pathways to democratic citizenship awareness-raising**, likewise prevents the much-needed channeling of *fervent* energies and expectations in a fast-moving time of transition and tension. These expectations must be constructively managed and de-escalated in order to avoid provocations or proliferation of violence. Beyond the anticipated pace of structural reforms in the security sector, evidence suggests that destabilizing potential today will be related to the degree to which short-term improvements are made to levels of public confidence the state's security services, institutions, and agents. Finally, obstacles to accessing opportunities and encouraging Gambian youth to participate actively in meaningful social and political engagements, as well as development pro-social identities in the context of a new political, social, and economic reality, present risks to Gambia's stability. In particular, the significant percentage of youth returning from 'backway' journeys

toward Europe return disillusioned, dispossessed, unemployed, and many times, confused and angry. The social risks posed by unscreened, unemployed, and unsettled, often idle, ‘backway’ returnees, as well as the aggregate economic impacts imposed by this sub-group on society during an already uncertain transitional moment, present significant concerns. Failing to engage this group will expose an already vulnerable, and massive youth demographic, their families, and the country at large to instability generating knock-on effects.

**Key Peace Engines**

Gambians express a desire for peace, based on support to existing structures, mechanisms and behaviors by leadership and citizens alike. In this way, they seek proof of the development of attitudes and mental models of tolerance, as well as orientations to leadership and equity that move Gambia away from legacies of autocracy. Six primary peace engines speak to the channels that Gambians identify as being poised to readily promote peaceful inter-community and inter-religious coexistence, as well as models and orientations to democratic citizenship and governance in the re-defining socio-political context. The strongest promise for sustaining Gambia’s socio-cultural forms of resilience lies in its endogenous structures. Research participants widely identified endogenous elements, networks, and groups as factors underpinning forces for *stability* in The Gambia, even if somewhat weakened or having been eroded by politics, or experienced differentially depending on one’s gender, age, and station. Fortifying the existing formal and informal peace infrastructure identified in the peace engines discussed below, is most likely to unleash myriad catalytic possibilities to counter the concerns and conflicts cited earlier.

<b><u>Key Engines for Peace &amp; Stability</u></b>	
<b>i</b>	<b>Independent Civil Society &amp; Community Organizations</b>
<b>ii</b>	<b>The Role of Women in Politics and Social Mobilization</b>
<b>iii</b>	<b>Youth as Mobilizers &amp; Leaders</b>
<b>iv</b>	<b>Social Institutions and Relationships</b>
<b>v</b>	<b>Local &amp; Regional Governance Structures and Institutions</b>
<b>vi</b>	<b>The Role of Religious Institutions &amp; Leaders</b>

In particular, emphasis is given to the need for strategically reinforcing and making more *inclusive* the forums for dialogue and collaborative processes. Civil Society’s role is key as an actor in the new political dispensation. A more organized and strengthened civil society sector, that has been relegated to engaging in a limited scope of social and political issues over past decades, can become a more viable counterpart and mediative presence in helping to raise and address key issues of national concern, facilitating new forms of interaction and communication amongst political leaders and citizens. In doing so, civil society can help to enable as well as shed light on demands for accountability and transparency. Small gestures and coordinated communication must be undertaken by political and social leaders and institutions alike, in a manner and frequency which can begin to counter-act the collective trauma, abuses of power, and reproduction of violence that has flourished under an autocratic system of

governance, that have come to define social, political, economic and cultural relations. All actors must work to unweave and disentangle decades of central authority grip and control, which has evidenced clear purposeful actions that perpetuate social divisions and ethno-linguistic tensions. A more stable Gambian transition calls upon counter-balancing forces and new forms of dialogue and deliberation involving key social groups such as women and youth, supported by conditions and sustainable processes that social, civic and religious leaders can enable. To this end, evidence suggest that the role of women in national politics and in social mobilization that pursues support for women’s leadership and equity in all sectors, is *critical*. Men *and* women must ensure that Gambian women enjoy equitable conditions and pathways to political candidacy and leadership at all levels of central and local governance. This is critical in National Assembly representation, in which women currently make up less than 10 per cent of the 58-member Assembly, in a country where the female population is slightly higher than males in the overall Gambian demographic.

In similar ways, Gambia's youth must be increasingly consulted, heard, and supported.<sup>5</sup> With an estimated 60 per cent of Gambia's total population of 25 years and *under*,<sup>6</sup> the next generation of political and social leadership calls for clearer channels for guidance, mentorship, and development. At once eager to strike a balance between honoring and respecting social traditions, while modernizing other forms of participation, Gambian youth aim to realize new social, political, and economic possibilities, developing in the visions that they draw from the *virtual* and *experiential* sources to which their generation continues to be rapidly exposed in the digital age. In finding more traction and spaces for meaningful engagement as respected contributors, youth can lead youth to become more involved architects and alchemists for enriching Gambia's future. To this end, young people call upon existing local and regional structures to also de-politicize, care for the new generation, and re-offer them a place at the table. Together with the guidance and accompaniment of religious leaders, who themselves must also work across faith traditions in assuming a more vocal, public, and independent posture for peace, religious institutions can model the type of norms and expectations that encourage a reweaving of social fabric that sustains and more constructively re-connects Gambians of all ages, genders, creeds and beliefs.

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<sup>5</sup> According to Anna Pujol-Mazzini of the Christian Science Monitor, only 15 out of 58 members of the National Assembly elected in April 2017 fall *under* the age of 35. For more information, see: "*After fall of a dictator, young Gambians push into politics*" (12 March 2018). Available online: <https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Africa/2018/0312/After-fall-of-a-dictator-young-Gambians-push-into-politics> (Accessed 30 May 2018)

<sup>6</sup> For more information, see: Gambia Youth Empowerment Project: <https://www.yep.gm/about> (Accessed 30 May 2018)

## Introduction

Since January 2017, following the historic change of government in The Gambia via the ballot, a new democratic dispensation is in place. The “New Gambia” under the leadership of President Adama Barrow and the coalition-led government – with the assistance of a range of development partners, including the United Nations – and with the support of Civil Society and other actors, has made progress toward reforming Gambia’s institutions, with a view to restoring democratic governance and the respect for the rule of law.

Despite advances, the legacy and reach of the former autocratic regime pose a set of peculiar challenges to sustaining a peaceful transition. The manifestation of democratic governance, including a responsive, accountable state and informed responsible citizenry at large, call upon a series of structural, attitudinal, behavioral, and relational challenges to be addressed. At this yet *initial* stage of transition, and after two decades of repressive rule in which executive power reached deeply into institutions, suppressed public expression, and long-embedded a culture of fear across spaces and Gambian homes, lasting marks on mindsets and *modus operandi* continue to shape everyday life, provoking uncertainties and contrasting expectations. The tightening of spaces for political expression, restrictions or deterrence of spaces for dialogue, and inclusive processes in which respectful political debate and constructive conversations can unfold requires many knots to be disentangled. A relatively debilitated civil society sector, and the persistence of patronage-style politics and state-society relations is underscored by what Gambians express as concerns for an eroding sense of social cohesion.<sup>7</sup> This has left corrosive patterns and practices that, if left to fester, are likely to continue threatening stability by reproducing similarly caustic effects, further entrenching general mistrust along ethnic and political lines.

Rising tensions between social groups, significant financial and economic challenges, and new and heightened citizen *expectations* have exacerbated the difficulties of transitional governance facing the Gambia’s new political leaders. In the initial phase of a new political dispensation, citizens expect problems to be managed transparently, and under the premises of the rule of law, enabled by new forms of interaction and channels for engagement, rather hiding, distracting from, or suppressing issues or voices. Complex challenges abound, including the prominent questions about youth, which include high levels of youth un-/under employment, and the deficit of pathways for meaningful participation in society for both young men *and* women, which currently exacerbate the vulnerability that young people face in The Gambia today. This renders young people and their communities increasingly susceptible to the consequences of existing anxiety and growing idle time, leading to increased substance abuse and participation in criminal activities, as well as physical, mental, and psychological health risks, including for some, religious radicalization. In response to these and other pressing issues, ongoing reforms indicate that structures of governance are being re-examined and remodeled, enabling new ways in which practices might also respond to the demands, expectations, and lack of confidence expressed by the public to be held in their state institutions. Nevertheless, the gap between current and anticipated future practices based on new structures, evidences a series of complex and cross-cutting challenges that are inherent to, and imperative for, rebuilding more trustworthy inter-social and state-society relations.

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<sup>7</sup> Social cohesion can be defined as the belief held by citizens of a given state that they belong to and share a moral community, which enables them to trust each other. Some refer to it as the glue that holds a society together. For more information, see: Larsen, C. A. (2013) *The Rise and Fall of Social Cohesion: The Construction and De-construction of Social Trust in the US, UK, Sweden and Denmark*. Oxford University Press.

Both visible and invisible tensions play out in new ways and via new spaces of expression. Divisions linked to ethnic and tribal discontent are fueled by the fast-moving flow of public debate in the media and new social media spaces. Existing tensions and public messaging by authorities carry acute potential, if mismanaged or left unaddressed, to undermine the potential for stability and peace. Of particular concern are the embedded patterns of mistrust and divisions amongst ethno-linguistic groups, which have been fostered and engineered by the state through intentionally unequal access to goods and services, and through the active fomenting of disparities and divisions based on ethnicity, tribal, and political affiliation. Under the legacy of these conditions and orientations, The Gambia's long and enviable record of co-existence amongst communities and families remains exposed and at risk. This concern was expressed by many throughout the country, as Amie Sillah, Executive Director of Women for Democracy and Development, perhaps best summed up when noting that "The desire for revenge undermines social cohesion through discrimination, regionalism, partisan ethnolinguistic profiling, and using executive powers to suppress opponents" (Personal Interview, 6 May 2018).

In an attempt to systemically assess these challenges and understand the dynamics that carry the greatest undermining potential, a Conflict and Development Analysis (CDA) has been carried out in The Gambia. The analysis was carried out by a Project Management Team consisting of the Government of the Gambia through the Ministry of the Interior, and the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding-The Gambia (WANEP). Support also came from the United Nations, under the Joint UNDP-DPA Programme for Building National Capacities for Conflict Prevention. At the time this study was undertaken, no national, participatory peace and conflict analysis had been carried out to date. To the knowledge of the Project Management Team, few assessments, if any, had delivered upon the unique *participatory* and *systems-based* methodological approach prescribed by the CDA process, which would come to inform both design and analysis, engaging Gambians of all walks, at all stages in defining both the research activities and analytical outputs. In attempting to discern the primary drivers of conflict and instability, analysis illuminates **where**, **how**, and **who**, represent or best support and reinforce Gambia's existing peace infrastructure, in what are referred to as the resilience factors and driving forces that sustain peace and stability today. The primary value of this study's methodology, is thus the participatory, inclusive, and Gambian-driven systems analysis for understanding critical issues around how the key conflict dynamics, as well as existing engines for peace<sup>8</sup> operate or manifest, shaping the Gambian context today.

The findings in this report reflect the use of CDA<sup>9</sup> process and analytical tools. This provided guidance for an agency-neutral approach to analysis and can serve the application of findings for multiple purposes, by bringing to bear a clear structure for information gathering and systems oriented understanding of the context, in line with the goal of supporting more *evidence-based* decision-making for any future engagement by the Gambian government and partners. The CDA commenced approximately 15 months after the 2017 political impasse, at a time in which its findings would also inform country eligibility for further UN Peacebuilding support, as well as highlight key areas of attention, as Gambian civil society and government institutions continue to pursue reforms.

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<sup>8</sup> *Conflict drivers* is a phrase used here to describe dynamic processes that contribute to the ignition or exacerbation of destructive conflict as a result of structural and/or proximate factors. Conflict drivers usually manifest themselves in violence or directly contribute to the emergence of violent conflict. – *Peace engines* are elements and/or processes that exist within a society that mitigate the emergence and proliferation of violent conflict, and strengthen foundations for peace. Peace engines draw upon and reinforce the innate resilience of a society.

<sup>9</sup> UNDP (2016) "Conducting a Conflict and Development Analysis". United Nations Development Program: CDA Manual. Accessible online: <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/democratic-governance/conflict-prevention/conducting-a-conflict-and-development-analysis.html>

## Structure & Objectives

The structure of this report mirrors the steps in the CDA-inspired process. First, the **Methodology and Approach** section outlines the orientation to research, discussing the purpose of the study as defined by the urgencies of transition identified by the Government of The Gambia and its partners. This was linked to common goals of ensuring lasting stability and peace during the country's ongoing transition from an autocratic, to a democratic system. In reviewing the research activities undertaken in line with this objective, the report further highlights the unique use of systems-based thinking and tools used by the Project Management Team to support data generation and analysis. Emphasis in this process was given to the intersectionality of gender, age, and conflict. Herein, the optics of gender and generation (i.e. different roles and experiences of both women and men, as well as the experience of young Gambians) informed both the research design, and the structure and implementation of activities. These were designed collaboratively, and carried out using conflict sensitive approaches, while encouraging greater accuracy in their accounting of representative experiences, specific to the way that conflict drivers and peace engines are shaping the experiences of men, women, and young people *differently* in The Gambia today.

Then, the report's **Situational Analysis** provides an overview of the broader context, illuminating conditions and relevant political, social, economic, and security-specific issues that give rise to current conditions in which both conflict and peace are unfolding today. A **Stakeholder Analysis** then reviews primary and secondary actors, as well as some of the key characteristics and associations amongst them, relevant to their roles in transition thus far. The subsequent section presents the main findings of the CDA initiative, laying out the six **Key Conflict Drivers** and six **Key Peace Engines**, along with key structural and proximate factors that emerged through the analytical process. A discussion of dynamics and destabilizing forces weave together conflict factors and actors, to offer insights that were enabled by the systems analysis. These elucidate the interplay amongst the most relevant structural, behavioral and triggering issues, as evidenced during the study. Key examples, empirical and anecdotal<sup>10</sup> are embedded throughout each section, helping to contextualize and evidence the nature of impact or influence. Together, these offer a multi-dimensional understanding of dominant processes shaping the current context. In particular, it also privileges an understanding of the *intersectionality* of conflict and gender, depicting how norms and observed behaviors of key social and/or political actors or sub-group demographics, interact and operate to either drive, and/or mitigate instability or conflict, or support and sustain forces for stability and peace.

Following the **Conclusion** of the report, which offers observations regarding conditions of social cohesion, legitimacy, and change today in The Gambia, a set of **Recommendations** is provided. These recommendations emerged through the broader CDA process of systems analysis and direct stakeholder engagement with the data, together with an assessment of responses currently underway by national and international actors, relevant to mitigating conflict drivers and supporting peace engines evidenced through the study.

## Methodology & Approach

The Conflict and Development Analysis (CDA) was developed with the aim of appropriately guiding and informing peacebuilding and UN intervention planning and programming, offering a presentation based on three main components: Research & analysis, a current response assessment, and the identification of key recommendations.<sup>11</sup> The CDA was particularly useful in terms of integrating ongoing clear insights despite

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<sup>10</sup> Many of these examples raised during the study by key informants and focus groups, have also garnered local, national or international attention, reported on by various media sources in a yet uncertain, fast moving independent space. This has, to some extent coincided with tensions of fake-news claims on social media which also circulate.

<sup>11</sup> As Gambia transitions from a long-standing autocratic to more democratic system, the CDA is used at a critical moment, offering an appropriate process for illuminating key drivers of instability and conflict, as well as a means by which to assess underlying dynamics relative to the nexus of peace, development and human rights, in order to better understand their intersection, and illuminate priority areas for attention. The flexibility of the CDA approach made it

the fast-moving context of Gambia's transition.<sup>12</sup> Undertaken during a critical moment in Gambia's history, the CDA was set into motion a little over a year after the current coalition government under the Presidency of Adama Barrow assumed formal political power. It also took place amidst April 2018 local, and May 2018 mayoral election cycles, thus providing a strategic space for reflection and insight in which the partnering agencies could deepen their understanding of the current situation about peace and conflict systems currently shaping life in The Gambia.

As noted, the initiative pursued **total geographic coverage of The Gambia's national territory** in terms of data sourcing activities, placing strong emphasis and attention to conflict sensitivity in the design and strategic planning of all research activities and stakeholder consultations, as well as the way that gendered experiences, and the voices of young people and vulnerable groups inform the data. Another defining feature of this methodology was the **systems-approach to data analysis**, which was also carried out in a highly participatory and inclusive manner. Driven at all turns by the principle of **national ownership**, the study provided for spaces in which Gambians were at the center of planning, discussing and exchanging their thinking, as a means by which to reflect upon, express, or critique a variety of key questions and concerns facing the country. The process therefore rendered critical insights from various stakeholder groups and perspectives regarding conflict dynamics, speaking to the *how, where, when, and with whom* these dynamics shape current stage of transition.

Analytical results evidenced bi-directional dynamics, meaning that they illuminated the complex ways in which key actors and issues are involved in moving The Gambia toward stability, as well as identifying how certain actions or inactions pose or impose significant risks for the country's stability in the near future. As discussed in the conflict dynamics section, they further evidence where or how certain actors and factors working together, enable short and medium term possibilities for violence. Together, design and analysis of this research provides a deep and interwoven understanding about the context, offering a more strategic basis upon which to make future policy and programming decisions.

#### *Gender & Generational Lenses*

Using 'gender and generation' as central optics through which to shape the design of all research activities would ensure a more precise understanding about the way that gender and conflict interact in the current system. Intersectionality (that is, how gender intersects with other markers of identity and systems of power such as marital status, class, race, sexuality, ethnicity, age and dis/ability, etc.) was brought to bear on analytical results by using the optics of gender and generation from the beginning, to inform every step of the process.

Research design and activities were thus guided by the objective of tapping into a broad representation of Gambian voices across a wide spectrum of gender and age groups. The intention of this was to illuminate the different roles and experiences that women and men, as well as other gender and sexual minorities, from young to old, have and play in perpetuating both peace and conflict systems. Gender and generation, as well as conflict sensitivity, offered tools and key lenses through which the Project Management Team and research teams went about selecting key informants to interview, and focus group composition, as well as the design and facilitation of all research activities and stakeholder engagements during targeted consultations. Importantly, the Project Management Team's approach to both content *and* process during this study was *gender-centric*, meaning that all aspects of research and discussions aimed to further illuminate the ways that social and cultural norms, as well as Gambian notions of masculinity and femininity, characterize and shape

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possible to integrate data and analysis from two potentially conflict triggering campaign cycles, the April 12 local- and May 12 mayoral- elections, which took place concurrently during the time of this project.

<sup>12</sup> The process identified clear and priority drivers and peace engines, whose unique constellation depicts critical areas for attention in terms of both the transition period, as well as the broader, yet less visible undercurrents of socio-cultural proclivities and patterns that continue to shape social and political actor behaviors.

the dynamics of conflict and peace, as well as substantiate the report's recommendations.

The Project Management Team's own effort and collaborations also reflected the very same principles of participation, inclusivity and national-ownership built into the approach to this project. For instance, initial desk review and refining of identified conflict drivers was immediately put to review by a range of stakeholders, taking into account their critical feedback and inputs to further focus design. With support from the technical consultation team, the team collaboratively trained and prepared all field researchers, who came from across the Gambia, and were convened jointly by both the Ministry of the Interior and WANEP. The participatory design process purposefully engaged numerous stakeholders with the aim of refining the research agenda, and during the data analysis activities. In this way, the project drew predominantly from *Gambian* insights into the major concerns, hopes, preoccupations, and aspirations defining Gambia's transition. Research training, design, and practices were also carried out using an approach and methods that intentionally sought to strengthen all participants' capacity for reflection and expression, emphasizing the linkage between consultation, research, and the building blocks for conflict prevention and peace-building. A commitment to this approach by the Project Management Team ensured that the methodology manifested national ownership, in that Gambian voices, direction, and action were *central*, rather than peripheral to this initiative, at all stages.

#### *Data Sourcing & Analysis*

Beginning with a desk review was conducted, wherein existing assessments were analyzed in line with the CDA instruction, with particular attention given to their methodologies and data sources in those studies undertaken during the transition phase<sup>13</sup>. This step was complemented by additional analytical work performed through systems-based exercises by the Project Management Team, in order to identify a preliminary scope of overarching peace and conflict themes considered to hold the highest level of prominence with regard to instability, or to forms of resilience.

Continuing preparation for fieldwork, a full-day stakeholder engagement workshop was held (17 April 2018), during which approximately 40 sectoral representatives participated in an analytical exercise that would proffer unique perspectives to the initial research scope, in order to more appropriately inform research design. Together with two additional days of refining key themes, including those based on *regional* insights. The insights came through a two-day fieldwork preparation and skill-building event that engaged 24 field researchers, who would eventually form regional mixed groups including diverse gender, age, ethnic, regionally, and linguistically-enabled teams.

***"I was influenced by the way the process was done – you can see the expressions in people, when they could express their opinions [during focus group discussions]. And, if any meaningful developments are to take place in our communities, you need to hear from all sides first."***

– Researcher Reflection (8 May 2018)

Working in teams of four, these groups would be responsible for organizing and conducting a significant portion of research activities in each of their respective regions. For this purpose, the training involved, *inter alia*, content modules and simulation practice to develop and deepen researchers' skills and orientation to conducting conflict sensitive approaches and activities, as well as to enhance the cultural and linguistic appropriateness of research design, in a way that would ensure quality of data. Primarily emphasis was given to appropriate and conflict sensitive ways to organize research activities such as focus group discussions

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<sup>13</sup> For example, see: "Development Finance Assessment-The Gambia by Ousman Gajigo 31 January 2017; USAID/ECOWAS Country Risk and Vulnerability Assessment Report 2018; and WANEP (2017) Migration in Gambia: A Country Profile, Unpublished Report; WANEP (2018) "Mitigating Post Electoral Violence in The Foni: Report of the Fact-Finding Mission, Unpublished Report.



across regions, including who to convene, how, and where, in each area. This would help to ensure a safe and comfortable environment and engage ethically with 'vulnerable'<sup>14</sup> populations, while reinforcing principles of inclusion during facilitated focus group discussions. Researchers would be equipped to move from open-ended conversations, where participants had the opportunity to fill up a 'blank slate' with whatever was on their minds, to a more focused discussion, digging deeper into the specifics of experience and observations about peace and conflict dynamics in their view. Team-facilitation models helped to ensure that modifications could be made, while helping researchers to remain mindful and responsive to contextual research demands in the face of local customs, cultural expectations, power dynamics (including gender-bias), and situational factors, specifically those that brought researchers face-to-face with participants who brought to bear lived-experiences of violence.

Under the leadership and accompaniment by the Project Management Team, members of whom were physically present to accompany the 'regional research teams' in all regions of The Gambia, teams covered seven administrative areas of the country.<sup>15</sup> Based on an open-ended design and accounting for localized power dynamics, the design of interviews and focus group discussions offered participants the opportunity to speak directly from their experiences. Facilitation and interviewing preparation ensured that researchers could ensure that all voices were enabled to express their concerns or perspectives, either during focus-group activities, or in follow-up conversations.

*"The method we used to do research really gave a platform to the people to express what issues were affecting them. And it gave me the platform to learn, and the opportunities to gain the understanding from the people about things that other research [approaches] would not have done. Those [other approaches] just go and ask things like: 'What is your answer to this issue? Please answer either yes, or, no', and limits what [participants] can respond or answer back. [Our approach] was totally different."*

– Researcher Reflection (8 May 2018)

The fieldwork period, which took place between 20 April and 13 May of 2018, included 64 key informant interviews with diverse individuals, including state and non-state actors, and many of whom were in positions of leadership. The gender makeup of research participants (i.e. key interviewees who identified as being either male or female), was a respective 70/30 per cent, male-to-female split. This ratio is significant in terms of women's voices in particular, especially when considering the male-dominated imbalance in 'key' government leadership or management positions, such as state institutions like the National Assembly<sup>16</sup>, or civil society organizations. Research activities also included 34 focus group discussions, convening an array of participants widely representative of Gambia's demographics and ethno-linguistic diversity. Focus group activities intentionally convened mixed, as well as all-female and all-youth groups across the regions, taking into account, too, diverse ethnicity and religious affiliation as part of the targeted demographic composition. In sum, fieldwork activities consulted a total of approximately 338 individuals, with about a 49/51 ratio of women-to-men in focus groups.<sup>17</sup> Regular daily debriefings, data- and process-reflection, as well as feedback

<sup>14</sup> Liamputtong, P. (2006) *Researching the Vulnerable*. Sage Publications.

<sup>15</sup> Greater Banjul Area included Banjul and Kanifing Municipality, combined into one team.

<sup>16</sup> Out of 58 members, the Gambian National Assembly currently has six women. Out of a Cabinet of 20, there are only four women: The Minister of Women's Affairs and overseeing the office of Vice President Fatoumatta Jallow Tambajang; the Minister of Trade, Industry, Regional Integration and Employment, Dr. Isatou Touray; the Minister of Basic and Secondary Education - Claudiana Cole, and; the Minister of Health and Social Welfare - Saffie Lowe Ceesay.

<sup>17</sup> The Gambia's population as of July 2017 estimates, stands at 2,051,363 with the following age structure: **0-14 years:** 37.44% (male 385,646/female 382,328); **15-24 years:** 20.47% (male 207,611/female 212,366); **25-54 years:** 34.4% (male 345,788/female 359,976); **55-64 years:** 4.2 % (male 41,295/ female 44,865) and 65 years and over: 3.48% (male 33,153/female 38,335). Ethnicity representation is as follows: Mandinka/Jahanka 34%, Fulani/Tukulur/Lorobo 22.4%, Wolof 12.6%, Jola/Karoninka 10.7%, Serahuleh 6.6%, Serer 3.2%, Manjago 2.1%, Bambara 1%, Creole/Aku Marabout

sessions were held between the Project Management Team and research teams, to ensure the constant improvements and adherence was manifested in terms of best practices in ethical research, and enhanced data quality.

Data processing and systems analysis were carried out beginning with regional research teams and Project Management Team, who together engaged in a full-day of debriefing activity, during which time they reviewed, synthesized, and analyzed findings from each region. This was complemented by a full-day consultation with targeted state and non-state stakeholders, who aided in focusing the discussion about emerging findings regarding salient issues of gender, youth, and justice. Further review and analysis was performed by members of the Project Management Team with the support of national and international consultants.

*“At first I thought – ‘How can I do this [research] without a strict questionnaire?’ But, the method, and the Project Management Team traveling there were both very helpful. Usually, in other research projects, we just go and report back [to the management]. But, they came with us! These are key points. You even have the Government, a Civil Society Organization, and the UN coming together with one unified goal - and that has never happened before.*

– Researcher Reflection (8 May 2018)

Based on preliminary analytical outputs, a one-day stakeholder validation and feedback workshop was held on 17 May. During this workshop, approximately 60 participants from the Gambian government, civil society, international and Gambian peacebuilding and advocacy communities gathered to learn and consider the findings. Therein, preliminary outputs of the systems analysis were shared, reflected upon and discussed amongst the broad representation of actors, in both small group and plenary formats, receiving positive and resounding validity from the group.

## Contextual Analysis

Since gaining independence in 1965, the political system in The Gambia has been dominated by one ruling party, be it the People’s Progressive Party (PPP) in the First Republic, or the Alliance for Patriotic Reorientation and Construction (APRC) in the most recent Second Republic rule of Yahya Jammeh (1994-2016). By some measure, it can be argued that deep democracy has not truly established itself as *the* defining system in Gambian society, particularly given the one-party domination in national politics, which has failed to bring even one legitimate electoral turnover in half a century<sup>18</sup>. Democracy in The Gambia has also, therefore, presented somewhat of a thin façade, despite relatively competitive elections that have been held systematically every five years. Having never truly been tested, it remains unclear the degree to which the political elite’s commitment to succession via the ballot box is genuine,<sup>19</sup> and whether this will be reflected in political governance practices under the Third Republic.

### Political Dimension

Frowning upon the expression of opposition, dissent, divergent views and disagreement has been a consistent feature of behavior in Gambia’s political history. This has limited, to a significant degree, the expansion of the

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0.7%, other 0.9%, non-Gambian 5.2%, no answer 0.6% (2013 est.). For more information, see: [https://www.indexmundi.com/the\\_gambia/demographics\\_profile.html](https://www.indexmundi.com/the_gambia/demographics_profile.html) (Accessed 30 May 2018).

<sup>18</sup> Diamond L. (1997) “Is the Third Wave of Democratization Over? An Empirical Assessment”. Issue 236 Working Paper (March), Helen Kellogg Institute for International Studies, University of Notre Dame.

<sup>19</sup> Edie, C.J. (2000) “Democracy in The Gambia: Past, Present and Prospects for the Future” *Africa Development*, vol. xxv, nos. 3 & 4.

nation's participatory political culture over decades. Organized opposition, meanwhile, has remained fragmented. Under constant pressure of co-optation,<sup>20</sup> and with a weakened civil society looking on, strong-arm political powers have often faced relatively inconsequential resistance. As a result, the country lacks the type of democratic stability reflected in its political institutions, which have consistently been rendered ineffective, used by those in power to entrench themselves at the nation's helm. The outcome has included the development of a strong political patronage system, which draws upon access to state or public resources. Social opportunism has, in turn, made co-optation lucrative to some politicians in opposition. This phenomenon is widespread in The Gambia, accounting for the absence of a credible opposition that could demonstrate or 'offer alternative policy choices and leadership options to the electorate prior to the formation of Coalition 2016'.<sup>21</sup>

The Gambian system remains characterized today by a troublingly narrow distribution of power and electoral system of representation (i.e. one based on a *winner take-all* principle). The rising tensions and low-level violent incidences witnessed around elections periods, with early 2018 being no exception, come from a win-or-die mentality. Young followers of the top political parties vying for power (UDP and APRC) have clashed in Mankamang Kunda in Upper River Region (URR), Busumbala in West Coast Region and Talinding in the Kanifing Municipality. Similarly, the UDP and GDC have clashed in Jimara, also in the URR. The institutional failures of a stable and true democratic system have been consistently manifested in the absence of fundamental institutional protections of liberal democracy (i.e. exercise of individual political rights and freedoms, and the accountable exercise of state power), constituting another decades-long trend. The inability of the judiciary to guarantee individual rights, a rubber stamp Parliament, the elimination of term limit for the Presidency under Jammeh, and the failure to effectively subordinate the military to civilian control (in addition to a long-standing Peoples Progressive Party (PPP) majority before Jammeh, which, the aftermath of the abortive coup of 1981, became increasingly authoritarian, curbing expression, jailing opponents and scrutinizing the opposition<sup>22</sup>), have all undermined hopes for a stable system to take root.

Following the abortive coup attempt of 1981, the ruling party's (PPP) response to the crisis focused on security and increasing the state's coercive apparatus, as regime survival became an urgent priority. With the expansion of the powers of the state, and the imposition of martial law, hundreds of Gambians were arrested and detained. Following the creation of a standing army, The Gambia National Army became a new power contender in the political system. With legal opposition parties marginalized, the military gained more strength, resulting in the decline in political system's stability from within. Consequently, with the ability to seize power from the one-party-dominant system, the Gambia National Army became a potential threat to the civilian government vis-à-vis the possibility of a *coup d'état*, an event that more frequently occurs in states suffering economic hardship, lack of social cohesion, and a deficit of institutionalized political culture. After two decades of authoritarian rule characterized by a state-centric and personalized neo-patrimonial<sup>23</sup>, militarized style of governance, contested election results by (now former) President Jammeh (who, in overstaying his welcome in the eyes of the electorate and ECOWAS, plunged the country into a crisis), evidences the nature of the military's autonomy and influence in politics, as well as the degree to which impunity and political intimidation have embedded, systematically eroding the quality of whatever democratic pillars might have been.

Since Gambia's independence in 1965, there has nevertheless been peaceful co-existence and progressive integration amongst the members of the diverse Gambian ethnic groups. Social relations between

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<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Emmanuel Joof, Human Rights Lawyer and Activist, *Personal Interview*, 18 April 2018

<sup>22</sup> Saine, A, (2009) *The Paradox of Third-Wave Democratization in Africa: The Gambia under AFPRC-APRC rule, 1994–2008*. Lexington Books.

<sup>23</sup> Wai, Z. (2012) "Neo-patrimonialism and the discourse of state failure in Africa," *Review of African Political Economy*, 39:131 (27-43).

communities, however, have become markedly strained during the Second Republic under Jammeh. This downward trend, which evidence from all regions of the Gambia suggests continues to spiral, can largely be attributed to the politicization of inter-tribal relations by the reach of former president Jammeh and his supporters. His tribal patronage scheme permeated the military and state security forces perhaps more than any other sector. This situation not only contributed to the deterioration of standards of discipline and professionalism in the civil sector, but also resulted in deep-seated tribal mistrust within the military and the security forces, as well as between these institutions and the public at large. Taken together, contextual analysis of the Gambian experience since independence indicates the long-standing tendency to politicize access to, and participation in, the processes of public policy formulation and decision-making, which has a knock-on effect of slowly unweaving the social fabric, and undermining the conflict enduring capacity of Gambian society.

### Socio-Cultural Dimension

Despite the slow politicized erosion, Gambians enjoy relatively strong networks of social relations across ethnic and religious lines. Inter-regional affiliations, supported by traditions such as *joking* relationships and inter-family relationships built on common family names and long standing histories between and among diverse groups irrespective of religious or party affiliation. These have been drawn upon for their social capital to support peace and inter-village ties for generations. Cross-ethnic ties run throughout all ethnic groups in The Gambia, albeit in different permutations, constituting an important social asset and investment for and by all people of The Gambia.

Traditional and historical relationships, as well as leadership roles, including those played by Chiefs, Alkalos, Imams, and elders, are important in mediating relationships between ethnic groups. For generations, these have ensured longevity and balance in reinforcing good and right relationships, while promoting high levels of tolerance that Gambians have relied upon in troubling times. They are often credited for the country's high conflict-enduring capacity or resilience. Sustained within and between communities, and often also within the family unit itself, these relationships and the maintenance and respect for such social institutions represent critical instruments and engines for peace, which have effectively resolved conflicts between members of families, communities, different faiths or tribes throughout the country. Over the course of the Second Republic, however, out of a desire for self-perpetuating rule, national political infiltration by key political figures at the local level has preyed on ethnic, regional and religious sentiments, weakening the social fiber that has thus far enabled The Gambia to avoid falling into major internal conflicts. The ongoing and prevailing political tensions seen today along ethnic, regional and even religious lines, which some described today to be at *toxic levels*, increase the risks of the outbreak of violence, which are likely to more negatively affect the most vulnerable in Gambian society, including ethnic minorities and young women and young men.

For instance, the premises of peaceful religious tolerance were again weakened in 2015 when (former) President Jammeh unilaterally and unconstitutionally declared The Gambia an "Islamic State". Especially during electoral periods since the dawn of the third republic in 2017, The Gambia has experienced eruptions of violence in hotspots like Bajana, Farato, Busumbala, Mankamang Kunda, Jimara, as political parties resort to their supporters to reinforce their positions. Intra- and inter-ethnic relationships in a densely diverse setting have nevertheless staved off the worst, engaging time and again as important social assets brought to bear in difficult moments, to help Gambians avert the experience of violence that has afflicted neighboring countries such as Senegal, Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau, and Ivory Coast, among others. Amongst such assets, the Gambian *Maslaba* was widely cited as a connective social device that has for the most part, despite some potential drawbacks as a pacifying, rather than justice-pursuing effect, allowed generations of Gambians to co-exist in peace and harmony, enabling elders for instance, to mediate and reconcile conflicting parties under the mantra of "*la lie that binds, is better than a truth that divides*".

In the context of the transition, the continued and increasing politicization of nearly every aspect of life in The Gambia threatens to break up this social fiber that has held its people together. Playing out political struggles on the basis of ethnic and religious lines will only further polarize society, weakening the existing

relationships that have preserved the peace. Furthermore, it is becoming evident that instrumentalization and mobilization by political leaders, which rallies youth energies and draws upon the power of women's roles as influencers in particular, continues to take advantage of existing ethno-linguistic divisions and sentiment for political gains.

### Socio-Economic Dimension

Poverty, underdevelopment, and inequality remain endemic to the Gambian context. In 2015, The Gambia was ranked 173<sup>rd</sup> out of 188 countries on the UN Development Programme's Human Development Index.<sup>24</sup> Resentment linked to economic conditions is also associated in many communities to human rights violations carried out with impunity, and long-standing, active neglect in terms of development and basic services withheld under the Jammeh regime.

Across the country, rising inequality is evidenced by the incidence of poverty (the distribution of the poor) lower in Banjul and Kanifing (Greater Banjul Area) which are entirely *urban* settlements, compared to the other Local Government Areas which are, by contrast, rural, and characterized by a large proportion of impoverished conditions. The Integrated Household Survey 2010 indicates widening inequalities between urban (Banjul/West Coast Region Cluster) and the rest of The Gambia in terms of poverty profile.<sup>25</sup>

Although poverty has declined over time by some measure, inequality<sup>26</sup> persists. The lowest quintile (i.e. the poorest 20% of the population) is reported to consume only 5.6 per cent today, compared to 8.8 per cent in 2003, indicating a drop of 3.2 percentage points. Whereas the 5th quintile (i.e. the richest, or top 20%) are consuming 46.5 per cent, compared to 38.0 per cent in 2003, evidencing an *increase* of 8.5 percentage points, demonstrating a widening gap between the richest and the poorest.<sup>27</sup> Gambia also hosts a large immigration population. In 2015, the IOM reported that 9.7% of the Gambian population consists of immigrants.<sup>28</sup> Data from the 2003 and 2010 Household Poverty Surveys shows that 38.7 percent of these immigrants are Senegalese, and 31.9 percent are from Guinea (Conakry).<sup>29</sup> From a social cohesion and national identity perspective, Senegal, Guinea Bissau, Guinea Conakry, Mali, and Sierra Leone, have been countries of origin for many Gambians, while strong cultural and familial ties remain between Gambians and these countries. However, due to unbridled patriotism and narrower expressions of ethno-nationalism, there is often a tendency to attribute negative features of current and emerging problems or issues to "*foreigners*", specific to concerns about crime, drugs, armed robberies, children on the streets, child truancy, and more. Such sentiment is widely felt along border villages where armed robberies and cattle rustling are frequent, even though people in the communities also admit that these crimes are perpetrated with the support or collusion of locals (Gambians).

A high-prevalence of poverty in rural areas, in addition to high levels of youth unemployment, propose a series of compounding challenges for the socio-economic health and future of the country. Upon years of policies supporting inequitable distribution, misdirected investments, mismanagement and changing patterns,

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<sup>24</sup> UN Development Programme (For more information, see: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/composite/HDI>) (Accessed 30 May 2018).

<sup>25</sup> *Integrated Household Survey Income and Expenditure Poverty Assessment 2010*. Available online: <http://www.gbos.gov.gm/uploads/survey/2010%20INTEGRATED%20HOUSEHOLD%20SURVEY.pdf> (Accessed 30 May 2018).

<sup>26</sup> In the area of economic inequality, The Gambia receives a score of 4.98 according to the USAID/ECOWAS 2017 *Country Risk and Vulnerability Assessment* (2017).

<sup>27</sup> *Integrated Household Survey Income and Expenditure Poverty Assessment 2010*. Available online: <http://www.gbos.gov.gm/uploads/survey/2010%20INTEGRATED%20HOUSEHOLD%20SURVEY.pdf> (Accessed 30 May 2018).

<sup>28</sup> For more information, see <https://www.iom.int/countries/gambia> (Accessed 30 May 2018).

<sup>29</sup> Gajigo, O. & Verdier-Chouchane, A. (2015) "Immigrants, skills and wages in The Gambian labour market." *Migration and Development*, 5:1, p.18)

the mainly agricultural livelihoods of Gambians have been negatively affected. With low-resiliency to market trends, the country remains highly dependent on imports for its staple food. Recent spikes in the prices of food imports and petroleum products continue to increase rural household vulnerability. Deepening rural poverty has direct consequences on the increased rate of rural-to-urban migration. For its size territorially, and in terms of density, the urban population accounts for at least 55%<sup>30</sup>. Impoverished conditions elevate the propensity for tension and strain to support greater political instability, as citizens and political actors capitalize on pursuing change, and/or struggle to stay on top of power. Broadly speaking, distribution of resources and selective investments have further and invariably impacted the economy and undermined growth, development, peace and security in The Gambia. This has had direct implications on the propensity, especially amongst youth, to seek economic recourse in areas such as the notable tourism and related service industries. This includes illegal sex trade industry and other criminalized practices, simply as a means for securing a subsistence livelihood. In this way, the rate of youth unemployment, as a measure of assessing the nature of opportunities that can incentivize pro-social behavior and identity development, poses one of the single biggest underlying threats to stability in the Gambia.

Lack of opportunities and disillusionment continue to push thousands of young Gambians from rural areas to centers of urban growth, many of whom move with the ultimate aim of engaging the prevalent patterns of irregular migration seen today. The gloomy economic situation continues to promote mass exodus of young Gambians to Europe via the “backway” routes, permeated by smugglers and human trafficking networks. While on transit on land routes through countries such as Mali, Niger and Libya, where violent extremism is embedded, droves of desperate, risk-prone, intellectually and socially vulnerable young Gambians, in frantic search of a better life, become easy prey for the influence of terrorist recruitment networks. Whereas religious radicalism and propaganda tend to find susceptible targets in those populations living in impoverished conditions of deprivation, Gambia’s politically disaffected and socially vulnerable young people face predispositions to radical charismatic leaders, or the effects of social networks and messaging used by figures or institutions, constituting a viable sub-group for recruitment, which is amenable to manipulation. The significant percentage of youthful population embarking on these routes, disillusioned, dispossessed, unemployed and angry, thus presents a holistic source of networked threats to Gambia’s stability.

Highly disaffected and at-risk communities are amongst those demonstrating or expressing the highest need for attention for the delivery of public goods and services. Whereas citizens demand roads, bridges, water and sanitation, as well as baseline educational projects, the types of technical and vocational training, skills and technology improvements, wider distribution of electricity, and access to health facilities, schools, and new markets, are often widely mentioned as needed for development and modernization. Such efforts might be considered highly strategic in fostering greater stability for Gambia’s massive youth demographic, which evidence in this study shows, is seeking to realize meaningful identity-based, social and economic aspirations, while avoiding incentives for involvement and participation in criminal activities or violent conflict. Generally, participatory politics and events like elections provide a basis on which Gambians derive both financial and social inclusion as part of a national project. Agreement of popular will, and means for managing the

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<sup>30</sup> The urban population stands at: 60.8% of total population (2017) and rate of urbanization: 3.96% with annual rate of change (2015-20 est.). According to the World Development Indicator; World bank Last update: April 2017; in 2015 most of the population (59.6 per cent or 803,696 people) was concentrated around urban and peri-urban centers. Over 60 per cent of the population is below the age of 25 and the population is expected to double by 2050. The Gambia ranks as one of the world’s least developed countries and experiences high poverty rates, with 48.4 per cent of the population living below the poverty line. The national unemployment rate hovers at 30 per cent, with rates of over 40 per cent affecting youths between the ages of 15 and 24. The pillars of the economy are agriculture, tourism and remittances, which makes the Gambia vulnerable to external shocks, including climate change. The Gambia is a source country for migrants and a transit and destination country for migrants and refugees. Since the 1980s, economic deterioration, drought, and high unemployment, especially among youths, have driven both domestic migration (largely urban) and migration abroad (legal and illegal). For more information, see: [https://www.indexmundi.com/the\\_gambia/demographics\\_profile.html](https://www.indexmundi.com/the_gambia/demographics_profile.html) (Accessed 30 May 2018).

diversity of Gambia's pluralist society, one in which the involvement of today's youth is being increasingly instrumentalized, is a challenge that remains linked to the socio-economic sphere, on a continent in which elections are increasingly sensitive conflict triggers.<sup>31</sup>

## Security Dimension

In the Gambian security context, significant shortcomings are present in the area of law enforcement, both in terms of institutional operations and function, as well as with leadership and public confidence. Security personnel across the country are few in the provinces and largely concentrated in urban settings. They have wide coverage areas, are firmly under-resourced both materially, and in terms of institutional and national infrastructure. Rapid response teams, even when they do exist in advantageous positions, are impeded by the absence of basic things like a lack of street names, while general duty police officers face glaring gaps in their ability to remain in constant communication or resolve basic logistical needs, such as relying on vehicles adequately equipped to patrol or pursue in challenging terrain.

Furthermore, Gambia has no centralized criminal record database, while security actors are widely cited as being reactive and in many instances, corrupt, rather than preventive or trustworthy in the eyes of the public. Poorly paid, ill equipped, insufficiently trained and ultimately demotivated, security forces have not escaped socio-economic realities. This sector's personnel and leaders have also been more fervently subjected to the complex politicization of security apparatus over the years. This has left a legacy of functional tensions and corroded sense of roles and responsibilities, rather than upholding complementarities that could advance a more effective and more democratic enforcement of law and order. In the current dispensation, reform in the police and the military has been taken on as a central premise for building a professional and republican security sector.

With this backdrop, another major threat to Gambia's stability is the potential civil strife and tensions that play out along ethno-linguistic and party affiliation lines. Some administrators, specifically those at the helm of security institutions, are perceived to harbor ethno-linguistic or sectionalist prejudices.<sup>32</sup> The current context is one in which the selective use of narratives and political expediencies have shaped the language and orientation of reforms, including in the Security sector context, as well as other endeavors. As some have critiqued, this may, however, limit a view to Gambia's history to a narrower scope of the Second Republic, which garners heavy international attention, remaining preoccupied with the significant transgressions and excesses of the Jammeh regime. Antagonisms within society, writ-large however, stem from perceptions of exclusion and fears of the unknown that cannot be disconnected from security and justice in both the First and Second Republics. At a time when nationally legislated reforms now turn toward implementation, continuing civic engagement and political debate and deliberation remain hot irons on the fire.

Although the current regime has not demonstrated tendencies of its immediate predecessor to instill fear in the people, many Gambians express that they have yet to re-gained their confidence in them. Along that pathway, transition thus far has shown signs that progressive phases of movement away from autocratic, to a

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<sup>31</sup> Across the African continent, in Kenya for example, and in the very close neighboring country of Ivory Coast, the devastating effects of disputed electoral processes and its impact on the lives of citizens, development and infrastructure, are cases in point.

<sup>32</sup> The ethno-linguistic profiling of Mandinkas on 3 June 2016 by former President Jammeh are cases in point. At his Talinding meeting in the Kanifing Municipality on 3 June 2016, former President Jammeh claimed that it is the Mandinkas who look down on other tribes and want to provoke violence in the country. The remarks very clearly indicated what constitutes ethno-linguistic profiling. Collective indictment of an ethno-linguistic group can lead to collective castigation, collective guilt, collective punishment and stigmatization. Advocating racial, ethnic or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence is against the primary responsibility of states to protect their populations. In 2005, all Heads of State and Government acknowledged the responsibility to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity, as well as their incitement. This behavior clearly goes against the letter and spirit of the Responsibility to Protect by the former president.

more democratic society, will be turbulent, and likely anything but linear, rendering confidence-building an acute challenge to be addressed. The general inexperience of men and women in positions of authority in the security sector, amongst them, those who have been conditioned by decades of a particular type of rule by fear and force, often, too, possess minimal understandings about public policy and strategic communication. This presents significant and mostly implicit or *invisible* challenges to some of the lofty goals inherent to institutional reform.

Coupled with broader economic hardships that have recently been compounded by reduced remittances from the Diaspora (owed in great part to the enhanced economic and social burdens shouldered by repatriation of Gambians returning from US and EU deportation), data in this study suggests that the Security Sector's delivery on preventive and stability reinforcing actionables will be key in mitigating incidences that arise under frustrations stemming from turbulence of social and economic crises, which can spill over into the political arena. The recent incidents at Kanfenda, Farato, Busumbala, Mamkamang Kunda, Talinding are testament to the dynamics and responses by political and social leaders alike in this regard. Left unresolved, or where security actors remain underprepared to draw upon their community-relations capital, incidences of protest or localized disputes can rapidly grow and proliferate to undermine stability and the minimal trust in Gambia's security and democratic institutions, impacting the broader human security landscape.

## Stakeholder Analysis

The terms stakeholders and 'actors' are used to refer to individuals, groups, sub-groups and demographics, or institutions, which may be engaged in primary or secondary roles that have influence on, or may be significantly influenced by, driving forces for conflict, or for stability. In the case of The Gambia's transition, it is important to understand certain the potential of certain actors to influence the course of the country's trajectory, in light of the socio-political culture in which they operate. At a time of transition, such a culture should be considered one in flux and changing, which many aspire to see move away from the embedded legacies and orientations of autocratic state-craft after more than two decades of Jammeh rule. This turns attention to the particularly existing, or changing relationships that relevant stakeholder groups have with each other, as well as the resources, alliances and networks with which they are associated or possess.<sup>33</sup>

The classification of actors into distinct categories, however, is no easy matter in The Gambia, as complex patronage networks reconfigure regularly, with individuals "cross carpeting"<sup>34</sup> (i.e. changing affiliations or institutions). Under the new leadership of the coalition government, and in the process of security sector reform, notable national actors from the previous administration have moved or been moved in and out of different roles, while many individuals from the First Republic have also returned to participate in government. With the state perceived as a source of wealth, power and influence, party leaders, government officials and the legal opposition alike are seen to compete for access to and control of the state, to serve their personal and party interests. While this is seen clearly in the political realm, it also shapes the conditions and networks of civil society and international partners. This report classifies relevant groups or sub-groups by professional or social function as a matter of focusing attention on their respective or relative influence in

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<sup>33</sup> For more information, see: UNDG/ECHA (2004) "Interagency Framework for Conflict Analysis in Transition Situations", UNDG/ECHA Working Group on Transition. Available online: [http://toolkit.incesite.org/toolkit/INEEcms/uploads/1151/Framework\\_for\\_Conflict\\_Analysis\\_in\\_Transition.doc](http://toolkit.incesite.org/toolkit/INEEcms/uploads/1151/Framework_for_Conflict_Analysis_in_Transition.doc) (Accessed 30 may 2018)

<sup>34</sup> Many political actors across the country switched sides following the fall of Jammeh, in order to align themselves with the UDP. This cross-carpeting occurs even though these actors have supported and sustained the Jammeh-led APRC over the last two decades.



transition. Research participants most often cited political actors, security services, and youth, in terms of actor groups.<sup>35</sup>

### Executive Power

As the independent head of the Coalition government, President Adama Barrow presides over the transition, including all top matters related to reforms in the "New Gambia". This includes the 2016 Coalition's stated commitments to comprehensive electoral, institutional, fiscal, constitutional, and public service reforms, along with Truth, Reconciliation and Reparation and Security Sector reforms currently underway. In dealings with the International, Regional and Sub Regional agencies, foreign governments, bilateral and multilateral bodies, President Barrow is the *central* interlocutor.

Other key national political actors include the former majority leader, Fabakary Tombong Jatta (APRC), along with the Hon. Ousainou Darboe of the (UDP), and Mama Kandeh of the GDC. With the country facing political polarization, the behavior of such above named political actors, amongst others, will be decisive for The Gambia's stability in the months to come. As leading politicians attempt to grow their electorate, however, many are reported to continue publicly and privately using derogatory names, hate speech, divisive political tactics, and tacit or open support for associated practices of ethno-linguistic profiling. A number of former APRC faithful, it has been reported, including National Assembly Members, Ex-Ministers, former diplomats, military and security officials, etc., have also migrated across party lines, turning in favor of political survival, access to power, or influence, projecting themselves now as *victims* of Jammeh's regime. Such actors, some of whom have found spaces or been subsumed back into the government from either First or Second Republic posts, may also be more likely to engage in an aggressive style of politics, now representing new parties or platforms.

In reflection of the moral courage Gambians showed on the 2016 ballot, Gambians expect the government to continue to its manifested political commitments to systems change, by ensuring comprehensive reforms are completed. The socio-political climate since, has changed significantly, and the country is making strides toward building the right relationships as a foundation for the development of the country with bilateral and multi-lateral partners. However, the government remains, in the eyes of many and in particular amongst youth, to be acting with rather exclusionary intentions, in terms of new appointments and composition, leaving many Gambians wondering when the systems change they voted for will begin to be realized.

***"For us to progress in this, country we have to change systems"***

- Ibrahim Mbye Youth Activist Niamina CRR (Focus Group Discussion, 29 April 2018)

President Barrow himself, has inherited a complicated mix of issues, including corruption, economic migration, food security issues, and serious levels of domestic and sexual violence against women and girls. He faces further pressures over the tenure of the transitional government and his term, which was initially agreed by the coalition to be three years, despite the constitutional five years stipulated. As a well-known Banjul-area business man, the President's personal economic interest is reported to have significant influence on his political vision and action. A common lament from research participants was that Mr. Barrow and many of his Cabinet members are less visible, and frequently on travel, which has sent signals that officials are busy capitalizing on their political influence to advance party and business interests, rather than dedicated to pursuing reforms.

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<sup>35</sup> In terms of frequency of mention, primary actors refer to main political parties (e.g. APRC, GDC, UDP, etc.), the Coalition 2016 members, Gambian Police and Armed Forces, the Public, the Judiciary, the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC), the National Assembly. Participants cited secondary actors of importance, too, which included religious leaders and institutions Gambia Christian Council/Supreme Islamic Council; national bodies such as the National Council for Civic Education (NCEE), the Media, Civil Society Organizations, Ombudsman, Members of the Diplomatic Community and international actors, such as the UN, UNOWAS, AU, and ECOWAS, etc. *For purposes of peacebuilding, distinctions of frequency in this way do not necessarily render any one group more or less important.*

## Political Parties

The APRC, GDC, GMC, GPDP, NRP, PDOIS, UDP, PPP, and NCP represent The Gambia's major political parties, seven of which, with one independent, were represented in the 2016 Coalition (excluding APRC and GDC). While there are few ideological differences, distinctions and power centers of parties break down by regional and area-strongholds, and by ethnicity. Today, a feature of political life is that of pendulum swings in loyalty by individuals across party line. With the fall of the APRC, evidence from the recent elections in the last 12 months has confirmed that the United Democratic Party (UDP), with Gambia Democratic Congress (GDC) are the leading contenders, while APRC and PDOIS remain strategic players. The UDP has grown to be the largest party as many supporters of the Jammeh and Jawara regimes have rallied around the UDP.

PDOIS has emerged as an organization committed to radical socialism,<sup>36</sup> and remains at the forefront of setting the country's political agenda vis-à-vis an issue-oriented, rather than sentimentally driven approach. GPDP and GMC, meanwhile, have younger leadership with outspoken personalities, although these parties have not yet been able to convert these energies into solidifying a stronger political base of support. Despite the Coalition formation in 2016, and the overall widening of political space in which actors have asserted their presence on the national scene, there remains a clear dominance in the hands of a few. There remains, too, a clear national vs. local distinction of political space as well, in which local political realities see those in power able to use their influence to elbow out new contenders, continuing their dominance. Viewed through the relationships amongst the top political party leaders, such a view also remains valid.

In the eyes of many interviewees in this study, political infighting means that the broader agenda consensus for democracy and development has become caught up and overshadowed by competing narratives, originating predominantly from party leaders, which preoccupies and clouds out space for more effective dialogue and deliberation. Members of the opposition APRC are reported to be constantly in search of anti-opposition political opportunities, drawing attention through public pronouncements to the political-behavioral realm, and the possible consequences of political leaders in power.<sup>37</sup> Although those who have come to power are reported by many Gambians to be discharging some of their duties unfairly, evidence points to the fact that political parties may also be forsaking efforts to contribute in their role of re-building institutions, refining state instruments and apparatus, or calling on political leaders adapt and act using new norms and values to ensure that no backsliding toward autocracy occurs. In addition to inadequate communication and coverage of what is being done to right past wrongs, discussions or exchanges amongst politicians, party activists, and opinion-leaders themselves have come to relay prejudices of regional, religious, and ethno-linguistic nature.

## The National Assembly

The 58-member National Assembly, meanwhile, is playing a significant role in the transition process towards stability, peace and development. With last elections in April 2017, it is the most important on trusted forums for democratic reform endeavors, and an instrument that can, with proper support, continue to foster a balance of power, putting pressure on the new government and the presidency to achieve consensus amongst a now splintered 2016 tactical coalition<sup>38</sup>. The National Assembly is overwhelmingly male, with only 6 female

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<sup>36</sup> The major characteristics of PDOIS's socialist ideology have included: 1) Opposition to neo-liberal economic reforms; Non-aligned positions in international politics, with sympathy to "Third World" socialist states, and; 3) Commitment to a powerful state apparatus controlling economic development.

<sup>37</sup> As former National Assembly Member and APRC party leader Fabakary Tombong Jatta stated during the consultations at his residence in Talinding on Friday, 20 April 2017: "*The transition government should not treat the opposition the same way Jammeh treated them, or else Gambians might not see the difference*".

<sup>38</sup> Despite hopes of coordination among the main political actors (i.e. Coalition 2016) and the establishment of an inclusive and gender-sensitive government, including members of opposition parties, the civil society, Gambian

representatives.<sup>39</sup> Questions have been raised about the overall deliberative capacity of this body, in the face of decades of practices that effectively limited its quality of deliberation, responsibility, decision-making, or action.

### The Inter-Party Committee (IPC)

In theory, the IPC is made up of the main parties (APRC, GDC, GMC, GPDP, NRP, PDOIS, UDP, and NCP). Yet this body lacks a statutory mandate and dedicated funding, while its current function also suffers from tense interpersonal whims, amidst the distressed relationships between major parties such as the APRC, UDP, and GDC. Despite the potential anticipated by some, current member behaviors often amount to missed opportunities, as ill-willed exchanges and personal jabs aim instead to diminish political legitimacy of opponents, in order to see one's own party prevail. As Momodou Baldeh of the GDC observed, "long standing grievances between APRC and UDP is posing challenges to the functioning of IPC. The Julangel incident which was politically motivated is an example where, instead of the IPC being the medium for the resolution of the conflict, the matter was taken to court" (Personal Interview, 21 April 2018). Provided a statutory mandate and the requisite human resources, logistical and material support, the IPC could be a source for instigating and modeling more collaborative and meaningful dialogue, listening, learning or exchange, as an inclusive forum or in promotion of nationally recognized processes that could otherwise offer new perspective.

### Jammeh Loyalties

In the realm of criminal trade and other illegal activities, many politically powerful actors from the political and business communities, as well as security sector who were close to former president Jammeh, are said to have been complicit in narcotics trafficking and conflict-timber trade originating in Casamance. This is in part facilitated by the oft-mentioned Chinese nationals, who have been observed by Gambians to be exploiting local communities for net economic gains that are exported, rather than reinvested in the national territory in public ways. Organized crime is widely perceived by the disaffected to have involved Gambians and foreign-nationals from within the ECOWAS region. Finally, the situation and future role of Jammeh's *Green Boys* and *Junglers* (special/paramilitary forces), remains in question, with little understanding about these groups to light the way.

### Military Leadership and Armed Forces

Rebranding and re-building a professional, republican, non-partisan army for The Gambia continues under the legislated reforms. Evidence suggests that urgent benefits might be had from these efforts, not only in terms of mitigating issues with conflict-triggering potential in the short-term (e.g. behavior of security services), but also in terms of the medium-term building civic awareness and re-establishing trustworthy interactions. Security forces, including the Gambian Armed Forces (GAF), State Intelligence Services, The Police (and by default, the Judiciary) are thus critical, and will be called upon to respond to situations that may be (as examples demonstrate) exacerbated by certain political officials' statements or actions, spurring clashes

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technocrats in the Diaspora, and the younger generation, expectations were dashed when the post-election composition of cabinet and political appointments in the civil and diplomatic services were seen to be largely exclusive. The nature of the new government's commitment to fight corruption and to implement profound administrative and fiscal reforms began to raise public concerns, as the recycling of people from the previous administrations (i.e. both the First and Second Republics) who may have been retired or dismissed from the previous administration, were brought back into positions of power without due process, but by virtue of their ethnicity and purported political affiliation with the UDP. As an example, Chief of Defense Staff Lt. Gen. Ousman Badgie was removed and Lt. Gen. Masaneh Kinteh (who was also a Chief of Defense Chief under Jammeh) took command. About 20 army officers, including those suspected of involvement in a failed 2014 coup against Jammeh, have also been reinstated.

<sup>39</sup> Fatoumata Njai (PPP) Banjul South, Kaddy Camara (APRC) Foni Bondali, and Fatou K. Jawara (UDP) Talinding Kunjang are the only elected female National Assembly Members during the 12 April 2017 National Assembly elections, while Mariam Jack -Denton (UDP), Kumba Jaiteh (UDP), and Ndey Yassin Secka Sallah (UDP) are among the five UDP nominated members by President Barrow.

amongst political supporters,<sup>40</sup> making their demonstration of objectivity and respect for the rule of law, fundamental.

The military, currently under the leadership of Lt. General Masaneh Kinteh,<sup>41</sup> has officially indicated interest in participating in the process towards stability, peace and development in The Gambia. This includes subordination to democratically elected civil authorities, and bringing forward a reform process in the defense sector that dignifies the institutions. Military leadership and paramilitary forces, however are also seen as a primary conflict actor. In the case of the latter, people are ardently attuned to their roles, particularly given a troubled history, including the 10-11 April 2001 crackdown on student demonstrations, and again in the 14-16 April 2016 peaceful march for electoral reforms. Similarly, certain military officials are reportedly seen as primary players in the drug-trafficking business, which can impede or problematize internal security reforms.

As a member of the Jola ethnic group, former Chief of Defense Staff Lt. General Ousman Badgie, and other Service chiefs, including Yankuba Badgie, David Colley, and General Saul Badgie, who have held certain high profile positions within the security apparatus, were suggested by some during the research to be disproportionately positioned, given the size of the population. Nevertheless, ongoing right-sizing and leadership changes posit an important space for ethnic tensions to grow, or be negotiated and mitigated. For instance, some interviewees in the Greater Banjul Area indicate that former Chief of Defense Staff Lt. General Ousman Badgie, who was ousted by President Barrow, was seen on the one hand as an untrustworthy actor given the tone his actions set with the Gambian public during the 2017 impasse. On the other, many observers also felt that a careful look at his actions should be taken, and that he should not be abandoned or dismissed,<sup>42</sup> as his order for his troops to not fight against ECOMIG forces contributed to a peaceful outcome.

### **Civil Government Service**

Participating in the transition process under the frame of their work obligations, civil servants and particularly senior state officials, demonstrate interest in progress through their Ministries and Government bodies. However, as high levels of corruption and in-fighting over posts and privileges to attain much-desired public administration positions, especially on the senior level, the neo-patrimonial system within the civil service sector has been steadily reinforced. Like others, decades of legacy practices and models have shaped the institutional culture of civil service bureaucracy and expectations or behaviors, when it comes to employment and service.

### **Commercial Entrepreneurs**

Private sector actors are in general said to be negatively affected by the climate of instability and uncertainty in The Gambia. Current challenges are linked to decisions under the Jammeh Administration, which delayed or discouraged foreign direct investment, and dissociated The Gambia with bilateral and multi-lateral relationships and treaties, resulting in economic paralysis of much of the country. Smaller businesses are particularly harmed by high import taxes and other rigid financial measures applied with the expansion of the tax base. This increases the probability that these private sector actors could be motivated, or put under pressure, to participate in illegal business activities, as well as to engage in tax evasion and avoidance. As far as

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<sup>40</sup> This was evidenced in the aftermath of an early 2017 clash amongst political supporters in Kanfenda (West Coast Region, and the birth place of Jammeh). By the time the police arrived, one of the parties (apparent UDP supporters returning from the inauguration of President Barrow) had already departed the scene and was not sought in relation to this incident. This was one case in which the judicial system became perceived as being unresponsive to providing redress for 'victims of injustice' in politically motivated types of public conflict.

<sup>41</sup> Major-General Masaneh Kinteh was Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) under Jammeh in October 2009 while Brigadier-General Yankuba Drammeh was his deputy, following the sacking of Lieutenant General Lang Tombong Tamba and four other top officers.

<sup>42</sup> According to a late May 2018 radio interview, Lt. Gen. Badgie has become a UDP supporter, and since been employed in Gambia's Diplomatic Service.

larger entrepreneurs are concerned, a considerable part of them operate and survive based on existing patronage networks, as a way to ensure the sustainability of operations. While many dealings are legal, others can go in search of unlawful profits and personal enrichment, where gaps exist and status-quo permissions or behaviors have long permitted.

In addition, ethnic and regional identity tensions are intimately connected to the business community of both smaller and large merchants. In the fisheries sub-sector, Senegalese as well as Chinese fishermen are perceived as taking advantage of Gambians. Meanwhile, Guinean (Conakry) immigrant business owners were cited by respondents as unfairly raising prices at market. With the continuing low-intensity conflict in *Casamance*, and porous borders, insurgent groups were also cited as being involved in cattle rustling, timber and drug trade. Primary actors in these and related land conflicts include cattle-owners and farmers, cashew orchard owners, and cross-border cattle thieves. Many such grievances present the potential for escalating community-level conflict, and are compounded in relation to the scapegoating by Gambians of foreigners and perceived 'non-Gambians' (e.g. those who may be Gambian in identity without conditions for legal birthright). This is discussed further in the conflict drivers section.

### **Non-Governmental Organizations/Civil Society**

Participating in the transition process in the frame of their specific programs, NGOs are known to widely implement social, environmental and economic projects, enhancing the situation of the most disadvantaged segments of population by covering basic needs. They work closely together with the government and international donors, and have a close relationship with their targeted populations, as well as traditional/informal leadership, grounded knowledge of local conditions and frequent engagement with locals to manage solutions to daily problems. In general, despite broad efforts, civil society organizations suffer from management-capacity deficits and financial constraints, particularly those organizations operating in the rural countryside. Gambia's civil society leadership is typically constituted by urban elite, some of whom may be former state officials. Such backgrounds are important for reinforcing organizations' existing capacities, drawing on networks, and setting work priorities, as well as for discerning or influencing the overall political culture. Patronage/client relations may also dominate such NGOs, namely in terms of the need to ensure absorption of international support, which may subsequently lead to imbalances in the selection of programs and/or target audience, in which projects may overlook giving strategic attention, favoring deliverables defined by exogenous mandates and demands.

### **Gambian Youth**

The younger generation of Gambians,<sup>43</sup> a majority demographic by most measures, bears some of the most difficult burdens of the country's political transition, in myriad ways. Youth, across a gender-spectrum, represent all ethno-linguistic groups, the majority of which feel politically, economically, and socially disadvantaged. Young people feel left out of the benefits of local resources held by any dominant class, including elders. While such issues have pushed many to migrate internally from rural to urban centers, it also compels many of those who remain to self-organize amongst themselves, informally, to avoid conventional and adult-imposed socio-cultural directives. Youth are often unemployed and many are formally uneducated. Nevertheless, they demonstrate motivation to participate more actively in the transition process, in hopes of benefiting for the satisfaction of their or their families' basic needs, including school and employment, health and local development in their communities. Looking for a vision and a future, young men and women nationwide evidence high vulnerability to rapid manipulation by politicians and conflict-instigators. This, along with social stigma carried by 'backway' migrants and returnees, has led to youth becoming involved as the most fervent supporters of protest or campaigning practices, from violent riots, to legal rallies.

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<sup>43</sup> The Gambia's youthful age structure – almost 60% of the population is under the age of 25 – is likely to persist because the country's total fertility rate remains strong at nearly 4 children per woman. For more information, see: [https://www.indexmundi.com/the\\_gambia/demographics\\_profile.html](https://www.indexmundi.com/the_gambia/demographics_profile.html) (Accessed 30 May 2018)

## Gambian Women

In the Gambia, women represent more than half of the country's population (confirmed at 50.5%, according to the 2013 census)<sup>44</sup>, and 58% of all registered Gambian voters. Women play key roles in social mobilization at the village level, celebration and festival organizing, as well as fostering women's groups for purposes of micro-finance, lending, and collective action. Women are also disproportionately affected by gender discrimination in social, economic, political<sup>45</sup> and legal arenas.<sup>46</sup> They suffer acutely, as expressed in the research activities, from insecurity and poverty, in contrast to their male counterparts. Women are *drastically* under-represented in national politics, a trend which can be traced back to all-too frequent experiences of masculine dominance, glass ceilings and harassment within their political parties, which tend to deny or render extremely difficult women's ascension to candidacy nomination. In addition, social norms and pressures, as well as gender-based violence and religious-legal frameworks (e.g. Shari'a inheritance rights and land owning possibilities), affect and lead to diminished levels of economic power and decision-making power that women possess at all, over issues that impact them the most in their home, village, and community life. This situation ultimately skews long-term trajectories for women's education, professionalization and local or national political leadership.

Through more active participation in the transition process, women seek to benefit from the satisfaction of basic needs, engage in the promotion of women's rights, and fight against the victimization of women and girls. With effective participation of women in governance and leadership positions supported by a more gender-inclusive and responsive democratic space, change is envisioned by many for new democratic opportunities, under which human rights are upheld as fundamental, advancing gender equality and development. At all levels, female research participants called on the state to facilitate dialogue among political parties to take note of women's issues with regards to their participation in governance and democratic processes.<sup>47</sup>

## Traditional and Community Leaders

Traditional and religious leaders, which includes more formal local councils of elders, women's groups, youth associations and trade unions, etc., have all been critical to sustaining Gambia's record of peaceful coexistence.

Acting in both formal and informal ways, these groups are primarily associated with intervening at different levels of community life to address core grievances of all Gambians. Important to this echelon of leadership are the Supreme Islamic Council and the Christian Council of The Gambia, which enjoy massive platforms for social and political engagement and followership, but whose new roles and orientations to the new political context yet remain uncertain. This question was particularly salient during the research, given that evidence and attributions point to the political role the Supreme Islamic Council might play in the future, in contrast to what many claimed was a largely and publically acquiescent role of backing Jammeh and his pronouncements for many years. Less certain is the Council's approach or platform of political independence

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<sup>44</sup> For more information, see: <http://thepoint.gm/africa/gambia/article/more-women-than-men-in-gambia> (Accessed 30 May 2018)

<sup>45</sup> In 2013, the UN Security Council adopted resolution 2122 on Women, Peace and Security, which, among other things, stresses the importance of "*ensuring women's full and equal participation in all phases of electoral processes, noting that specific attention must be paid to women's safety prior to, and during, elections.*"

<sup>47</sup> Toward that end, interviewees noted that the National Policy on Gender and Women's Empowerment 2010-2020 recognizes that the twelve critical areas of concern defined in the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action are highly relevant to The Gambia in every respect. Through an extensive consultative process, the relevant authorities have critically examined the priority areas and ended up adopting eight of them for the country. The eight priority areas provide the framework for gender mainstreaming and equity interventions over the next 10 years, include: Capacity Building for Gender Mainstreaming; Poverty Reduction, Economic Empowerment and Livelihood Skills Development; Gender and Education; Gender and Health, Adolescent Sexual and Reproductive Health and HIV/AIDS; Gender and Human Rights; Gender and Governance; Gender and the Environment and last but not the least, Women's Empowerment.

as a major socio-political actor in transition. Much like what Imam Baba Leigh observed, saying that "the recognition of the importance of local traditions and values and use of traditional structures such as community, religious and traditional leaders by the transition government is key in sustaining peace and stability" (Personal Interview, 5 May 2018), this particular group will be critical to shaping the direction of Gambia's stability during the transition period.

This is especially true when seen in view of emergent activism and leadership that has mobilized citizens, led or promoted especially by young people, which must also be represented in this category of stakeholders. Emergent movements such as #OccupyWestfield, for example, have organized protests over poor delivery of services (e.g. electricity), and with the aim of creating demand for the state to address failures in public service (e.g. the Bakoteh Dump site). Communities disaffected by either ethno-linguistic tensions, as well as natural resource concessions, have been seen to be mobilized for both peaceful, as well as conflict-instigating protest, depending on the nature of issues, and on the particular revenues and development-benefits that their regions have seen from concessions, linked to return compensation they've received (or not) from investors, or the state, in the form of sovereign wealth. The tension between Gambia's traditional and static institutions and structures, and the dynamic change-processes represented by various traditional and community-level leaders and activists (including their perceptions and the changing political environment), continues to feed sources of tension and conflict in the democratic transition. Some of this can be directly linked to the challenges of a growing population, as state and private institutions and the rate of social services provisions or public-goods delivery remain the same.<sup>48</sup>

### International Community Actors

Following the intervention of ECOWAS in January 2017, and the establishment of the transition government headed by President Adama Barrow, the European Union (EU) and international partners, including the United Kingdom (UK), have re-calibrated their cooperation with the country. The 22 May 2018 international donor conference on The Gambia in Brussels, for instance, assured substantial financial support (\$1.7 billion) for development and peace building programs in The Gambia, much of which will be guided by transition government-formulated National Development Plan for The Gambia (2018-2022). While the country's fragile transition provides considerable windows of opportunity for studying and responding to the root causes of conflict, pursuing peace, human rights and development in a holistic and integrated manner, many interviewees pointed to the notion that transitional government effectiveness can be aided by international observers, who can promote better planning, alignment, harmonization, accountability, and management for intended results.

The new government has already taken some steps toward this direction with a call for international support by President Barrow. In response to this call, the UN has developed and funded a Transitional Justice and Security Sector Reform projects. ECOWAS and the World Bank fully support the Gambian government's new efforts.

#### *"ECOMIG presence in The Gambia is necessary to contribute to peace and stability"*

- Mustapha Njie, Alkalo-Kaur, CRR (Focus Group Discussion, 30 April 2018)

Various members of the international community that were most commonly mentioned by participants during this study, are perceived as being positive actors on the whole. In many cases, they form part of Gambians' primary reasons cited by research participants for their hope in the future. ECOMIG was mentioned often, in general, as playing a major stabilizing role in the country, although misconceptions do

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<sup>48</sup> Transformative conflict in The Gambia is being exacerbated by the tension between demand for change and the resistance of the structures and institutions to the demand for change. Conflict is a consequence of the way Gambian society has been structured and rule over time through autocratic means. While both culture and institutions are slow to change, they face the pace of tensions in line with the rate of demographic, environmental, economic and social change.

exist around its role in policing and mandate.<sup>49</sup> ECOWAS and UNOWAS are also strategically involved in governance support and security sector reform.

Various United Nations agencies, and in particular UNDP, engage on various governance issues from supporting reforms and institutions of justice, to increasing peacebuilding support. UNODC has begun to play a major role in supporting the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), in attempts to build capacity and stem the trafficking of drugs. The European Union (EU), and the United States (US) are, too, central intervening actors in supporting the National Development Plan (2018-2021), as well as on critical governance reforms such as judicial, security, and constitutional issues. The EU and US have also been supporting non-state-actors such as the Gambia Press Union, NGOs, and community-based organizations, to address and engage with new or sustaining issues in governance, poverty alleviation, and human rights.

Senegal continues to play a pivotal role, cited often by research participants. Senegal has focused global attention on The Gambia, particularly when Jammeh's attempt to subvert the will of the Gambian elections during the political impasse of 2017.<sup>50</sup> Many critics nevertheless saw this as just one opportunity to remove Jammeh from the *Casamance* equation. The relationship with Senegal remains uncertain, and somewhat problematized by the dominance of Senegalese in ECOMIG forces.

## Key Conflict Drivers & Dynamics

In line with a participatory, inclusive, national-ownership driven approach to research design, data sourcing, analysis, and validation, the process resulted in a deeper understanding of the key driving conflict dynamics and most important engines for peace shaping the context today.<sup>51</sup> In the context of transition, the **key conflict drivers** provide evidence of areas which hold the existing potential, if left unaddressed, to expediently push the country and its people toward conflict, instability and violence. Similarly, the **key engines for peace**, seen further below, represent actors, factors, and dynamics identified as possessing the greatest existing potential to reinforce movement toward increasing stability, social cohesion, and creation of conditions in The Gambia that can enable a more just and peaceful coexistence.

### I. Transparent and Accountable Governance: Reforms, Public Confidence & Communication

#### Structural and Proximate Conflict Factors

Despite Gambia's oft-cited 'enviable' history of coexistence amongst ethnic and religious communities, levels of discontent and uncertainty in transition are widely felt, linked especially to continuing high levels of inter-ethnic tensions, and state-society relations writ-large, driven by legacy practices of governance. Eroding social cohesion and the lack of a shared sense of national belonging suggest increasingly tenuous conditions for the

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<sup>49</sup> For instance, Harouna Jatta a 52-year old native of Kanilai died of bullet wounds on 3 June 2017 after a protest held on 2 June 2017, also in Kanilai. Jatta was shot with live-bullets in the stomach during a protest by Kanilai residents, leading to a clash between residents and ECOMIG forces, which attempted to stop protesters from moving further to the main junction. In response to questions at the National Assembly in December 2017, the Attorney General and Minister of Justice told Deputies that the Joint Investigation Team of the Gambia Armed Forces and ECOMIG was handling the investigation into the circumstances surrounding the shootings that led to the death of Harouna Jatta.

<sup>50</sup> Jammeh lost the 2016 presidential elections and sought to continue the manipulation of state institutions to hang on to power, plunging the nation into a socio-political crisis. The impact of the impasse included internal displacement, and refugee Gambians who fled into neighboring countries.

<sup>51</sup> *Conflict drivers* is a phrase used to describe dynamic processes that contribute to the ignition or exacerbation of destructive conflict as a result of structural and/or proximate factors. Conflict drivers usually manifest themselves in violence or directly contribute to the emergence of violent conflict. – *Peace engines* are elements and/or processes that exist within a society that mitigate the emergence and proliferation of violent conflict, and strengthen foundations for peace. Peace engines draw upon and reinforce the innate resilience of a society.



country as it looks to weather fast moving changes in transition. Nevertheless, evidence points to specific issues in the area of governance that continue to embed and sustain ethnic tensions.

#### *Accountability & Reforms*

As people look to a new political horizon, their demands beg practices of good governance, spurred by the desire to see leaders act in line with institutional commitments to transparency and accountability, as a means to reconstitute a sense of fairness and equity, rather than a system that operates on bias and discrimination. The lingering sense of uncertainty and fear that many communities and individuals feel (some more acutely than others) in this time of transition, is likely to persist and undermine advancements that may simply be overshadowed, despite Gambian public office holders and state institutions efforts to pursue internal changes and distance themselves and behaviors from the legacies of autocratic rule.

Despite the early commitments and executive and legislative collaboration to make progress in pursuit of Transitional Justice and Security reforms, perceptions abound that the Coalition Government has made limited and slow advances henceforth is particularly acute regarding Constitutional reform. This remains a significant cause for general concern amongst the public, specifically as people doubt the Executive's commitment to the *comprehensiveness* of Constitutional reform. This is because while gains have been made piecemeal by Executive order, and have appeared in the estimation of many respondents to be the result of *politicized* actions or decisions. At the time of this writing, the National Assembly's mandated Constitutional Review Commission had only just been appointed and inaugurated by President Barrow (4 June 2018). Transitional Justice and Security Sector reforms face challenges of their own, for reasons that have been reported as personal and inter-institutional antagonisms that have inhibited advancement over relatively nominal technical decisions.

The general deficit in a political-culture and a culture of collaboration, as well as *transparent* public deliberation practices, poses a significant challenge to governance practices of cooperation or consensus-building, which reinforced negative public perceptions. There are also notably few functional mechanisms or channels that have minimal sustaining conditions or political commitments, that might support or constitute an *enabling environment* in which political actors and public authorities can ensure efforts to build consensus, and develop or demonstrate new approaches or models of democratic leadership. The absence of dedicated, functional and multisector-inclusive mechanism that could promote regular, consistent, high-level interactions and messaging, is also evident. The quality of the interactions under the umbrella of the existing Inter-Party Committee (IPC) was often mentioned as a case in point. Absent such mechanisms, individual political figures such as public office holders, or political party leaders, are perceived by the public to be more consumed with vying for power, than with engendering national unity and pursuing reforms, both of which, according to Gambians, serve to embolden tensions along ethno-political lines.

#### *Public Communications & Confidence*

On the whole in this study, few positive perceptions were voiced regarding governance. Analysis linked this in part to people's consistent claims about what they feel is a clear absence of public communications by authorities. People's frustration with the inability to learn directly about developments or motivations behind actions from government itself, combined with the lack of pro-active leadership messaging that might otherwise address, manage and help to de-escalate tribal tensions, promote national unity or belonging, adds to the public sense of dismay and anxiety shaping current perceptions about governance and progress. Reform efforts in particular suffer from a lack of consistent, coordinated, and strategic public communication, which creates space for rumors and interpretations to circulate and fill the gaps.

The nature of *divisive messaging* is also found to be significant, specific statements by top political leaders, and especially President Barrow. This messaging comes in direct verbal forms, through statements that reinforce ethnic division *and* have been perceived as suppressing civil society participation in this transitional phase. Implicate messages sent to authority's understanding of Civil Society's and the Media's role in society. According to these organizations, such messages relay undesirable and mixed-messages that are both

ethnically-divisive, as well as confidence-eroding given the nature of legacy politics and contextual understanding. By sending out such messages, the ruling coalition that claims to be moving beyond the strong-arm practices of autocracy, undermines its own credibility. If and when positive messages and attempts at public information delivery have been forthcoming, these remain limited, failing to reach their intended or perhaps most critical audiences. For some ethnic minority communities who feel disenfranchised, fearful, or excluded, this messaging is key. Furthermore, the general lack of visibility by top authorities such as President Barrow was a comment repeated by many respondents, who felt diminished confidence in their power or interest to lead during an uncertain transition time.

***“Perception of a [Mandinka] forming majority, being manifested in utterances and behavior, is contributing to tensions.”***

- Fabakary Tombong Jatta, APRC Party Leader (Personal Interview 20 April 2018)

Broadly speaking, the promotion of national unity through public communications suffers, too, from a lack of trusted communications infrastructure, such as state radio and television, and upon the lack of an established and trustworthy state social media presence, which are used more frequently by younger age groups than conventional sources of news to acquire information. Conventionally delivered press briefings present as insufficient, and may actively diminish public trust or confidence, simply because of the lack of trust. Even positive messages or desired information reported or broadcast via untrustworthy mechanisms such as community radio, may be interpreted as politicized and biased. The absence of a strategic approach to using social media, or targeting of specific communities for information sharing, public engagements and consultations, and any messaging, is notable.

#### Dynamics and Destabilizing Forces

The inherent risks of a public that feels uninformed or lacking confidence, is that it hopes and expectations get chipped away, while aspirations of a new horizon flounder. In The Gambia, this has opened the space for misinformed information, rumors, scapegoating, and attaches, which have only further deepened cleavages and tensions, affecting both national, but also clearly community-level interactions along ethnic and political lines. Although socio-cultural appreciation and respect for political authority figures were highly prevalent, Gambian voters also expressed their expectations that those in power demonstrate transparency through their actions, which must be *fair, just, and actively-unifying*, rather than dividing. Actions to the contrary invite little hope in Gambians that things are indeed changing or different from the practices of the previous regime. A commonly cited example of legacy governance issues was also that of patronage practices that many feel continue to define government practices, was the profiling of citizens on the basis of ethno-linguistic and religious considerations for jobs, appointments and opportunities. The lack of quality, high-level political dialogue is linked in part to claims of a fragmented opposition, which faces constant pressure of co-optation.<sup>52</sup> This can have impeding effects on issue negotiation, reform advances and the re-branding of governance *overall* in the eyes of the public, during this transition time.

Many voices expressed uncertainty about the hiring and/or firing decisions of personnel in civil service, which saw frequent dismissals and hiring in 2017, particularly in the Security Sector, that may not have been taken on the basis of competencies and merit. Although some such choices under new authority may have been linked to internally-advised, reform-oriented decisions taken in line with the intention of expelling corrupted Jammeh-era officials, the lack of clarity is a salient issue, about which many institutions, including the Personnel Management Office, have been silent.

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<sup>52</sup> The outcome results in the development of political patronage, using state resources. Social opportunism made co-optation lucrative to many in the opposition, and this phenomenon is still widespread in The Gambia, and accounts for the absence of a credible opposition able to offer alternative policy choices and leadership options to the electorate.

Deficits in political-culture and mechanisms that could otherwise meaningfully promote stabilizing forces and influence public perceptions around national unity, vis-à-vis more authentic and transparent political dialogue and deliberation, remain apparent. The significance of these cannot be overstated, as perceptions about that governance and executive decisions are more focused on sustaining their ethno-politically-based power, favoring the maintenance of patronage-based systems and private economic gain, over behaviors that benefit the broader public good, equitably. Where political party affiliation and patronage systems have come to characterize governance and public service, and where corruption and the use or distribution of resources was intentionally and inequitably carried out along ethnic lines over past decades, much remains to be *actively* deconstructed. And yet while most desire change, few Gambians feel confident that current leaders are keeping that promise. This deficit has helped to reinforce ethno-political tensions like those expressed during 2018 incidences of election violence between the antagonistic party followers from UDP and APRC.

Public messaging by key authorities such as Ministers remains a key triggering issue, undermining the already tense space in which national unity might otherwise begin to build. President Barrow's and other ministers' public statements, including formal speeches or off-the-cuff media comments (e.g. comments made by President Barrow during his visit to Turkey) continue to inflame tensions. Other messages, too, specifically related to 'silence' by those during Jammeh years, despite 'press freedom' announcements<sup>53</sup>, send signals that legacy practices will continue to limit or suppress political engagements by non-state actors such as organized civil society or the media. Messages are also sent by what remains unspoken, such as a lack of national-unity promoting statements, while a highly-attuned Gambian public readily interprets messages from the presence or absence of President Barrow's and other ministers' public appearances. For example, President Barrow's physical visit to the Kotu Power station in late 2017, or his avoidance of particular communities during post-election victory, resonated in positive and negative ways, respectively, with diverse publics.

Similarly, following violent disturbances in Sibanor, and Kanfenda in 2017, where supporters of the UDP and APRC clashed<sup>54</sup>, research participants in WCR noted that public authorities' statements have raised concerns, and opened debate on whether the transition government intends to exclude Foni from the New Gambia. On the one hand, as some respondents recalled that in Sibanor (WCR), former Interior Minister Mai Fatty reportedly shared that: "*Foni - you Jolas, know that you form a minority. Know that if war breaks out, we will send you back to Casamance.*" On the other, the Minister for Local Government & Lands, Lamin Dibba's remarks in Soma, Lower River Region (LRR) were that "*Foni people are hosting rebels*". The antagonistic relationships between the UDP vs. APRC, as well as the GDC vs. UDP, which tend to manifest in tensions between Jola and Mandinka groups, present triggering potential for future violence around election times.

Clashes and hotspots were identified to be most fervent in areas such as Farato, Busumbala, and Kamfenda, in the West Coast Region (WCR), Mangkamang Kunda and Julangel in the Upper River Region (URR), and Talinding in the Kanifing Municipality (Greater Banjul Area). Local political leadership behaviors that actively

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<sup>53</sup> For more information, see: <http://www.dw.com/en/barrow-press-freedom-has-been-restored/a-39856557> (Accessed 30 May 2018)

<sup>54</sup> The Fonis, in the West Coast region, is a hotspot area where the division that President Jammeh sowed between his ethnic group, the Jolas, and the majority Mandinkas – the latter of whom he threatened publicly to bury "nine feet deep". These tensions have often broken out into violence since Jammeh's departure (for more information, see: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/apr/01/gambia-accuses-ex-president-yahya-jammeh-supporters-of-sheltering-rebels>), and continue to be fanned by statements by current authorities. In April 2017, when President barrow visited the region, the Lands Minister, Lamin Dibba, remarked for instance that: "***This meeting should not have been held. We know that there are people entering the country from Casamance being hosted here in Foni and they are here to create trouble. This must stop***". Likening his predecessor to a "big snake" as the latter's loyal chiefs fidgeted under a marquee, Barrow said: "***If you see the tracks of a big snake, you might be scared, but what about the man who was dragging the snake?***". During one focus group (25 April 2017), Isatou Ceesay, a single mother who described how, one night, unidentified men had broken into her house, vandalized her belongings and wrecked part of her roof, remarked that "***every Mandinka in this community was attacked. We fear for our lives here.***"

incite divisions amongst groups *or* fail to visibly counter-act them through public messaging, pose a significant undermining threat to short- and long-term stability leading up to and around such political events. Broadly speaking, trust in the Gambian state by its citizens will also remain compromised or impeded as politicians seen to act in accordance with support to their own constituencies or ethnic group, rather than leading on the basis of a platform to support the broader public good are newly voted into office.

## II. Social Cohesion, Identity & Citizenship

### Structural and Proximate Conflict Factors

Key conflict factors in this area relate to constitutional reform initiatives and the existing policies and legal rights (as well as institutional practices and state-agent behaviors) associated with questions of Gambian-ness, national identity and legal citizenship rights. This begs questions of how individuals experience their sense of belonging and acceptance in a diverse national constellation of groups under one flag, not simply in terms of social inclusion and peaceful ethnic inter-relations, but also national-legal citizenship status. It further implicates the heightened experiences of discrimination and profiling that certain sub-groups feel via the discourse or actions by authorities and political actors, which further erodes social cohesion and adds to violence-triggering potential. Central issues include that of statelessness in a region and country that sees significant diversity, and virtually unchecked flow of persons across nationally porous borders. While the mere crossing of borders does not tend to weigh heavily on most Gambians' list of concerns, the nuances of national identity status and how it relates to key groups, does demand acute attention.

### *Rights to Citizenship*

The effective ban on issuance of national identity cards by the former Minister of the Interior<sup>55</sup> in particular, is associated with risks to public safety, as well as public perception management around state-society relations noted earlier. Although Gambia had made some strides since 2008 in relation to international conventions and ministerial adoption of a national action plan<sup>56</sup> to work on *refugee* issues, it has yet to make advancements in light of the nature of the association between security and national identity in this delicate transition time. Individuals who currently lack or are unable to obtain government issued forms of identification like national ID cards, residence, or work permits, are at greater risk for social and legal complications, not least of which is being properly identified by authorities if approached. Similarly, social discrimination against those who appear to be 'non-Gambian' origin, and the ability to participate in public life via the possession of full citizenship rights, may exclude younger Gambians from a variety of things including public-office holding, as this group may be unable to access legal status due to their place of birth or birth to parents of non-Gambian origin.

Compounding these issues is the proliferation of practices that draw power from, and build support through the use of hate speech and scapegoating focused on non-citizens. This is expressed in both public and private spaces by political party leaders and candidates. This issue, which has featured prominently in transition, also finds little counter-messaging or superordinate republican alternative to Gambian-ness at a time where ethnic divisions remain tense. Discrimination along ethnic lines is facilitated by social and political leaders in both their speeches to constituencies, as well as in remarks cited earlier, by authorities already affiliated with public

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<sup>55</sup> The Former Minister of Interior (until 2017), in particular, and other officials have been cited and criticized for their behavior and approaches towards addressing the emerging issues in Foni. The persistent new policy that raises the perception of discrimination in Foni, and elsewhere, suggests rising levels of grievances. Nevertheless, that policy directive of suspending the issuance of national identity cards remains in place in 2018. In many quarters, this has been seen as directed at those perceived to be non-Gambian, as well as the Jolas ethnic group.

<sup>56</sup> National Development Plan 2018-2021, pg. 231; Manby, B (2016) "Who Belongs? Statelessness and Nationality in West Africa" Migration Informative Service Online Journal of the Migration Policy Institute. 7 April 2016. Available online: <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/who-belongs-statelessness-and-nationality-west-africa> (accessed 30 May 2018).

institutions. Such comments are part of the repertoire of tools employed during electoral campaigns through which individuals build solidarity and gather power by denigrating other parties, based on ethno-centrism.

#### Ethno-Politicization Practices

The question of exclusive rights to citizenship, intertwined with Gambian identity, is associated with legal structures governing citizenship rights. As noted by participants and in report from the 2017 and 2018 elections, national and ethnic identity offers a way to channel *in-group* favor, and privileges, while scapegoating and excluding out-group members. This has sewed social divisions amongst otherwise close-knit communities or neighbors, accomplished through long-standing local governance practices. Further, political party behavior is known to curry-favor with and use young men and women in ways that reinforce ethno-linguistic divisions as central feature to the formation of political culture norms. This is delivered through messages that reinforce young people's support for divisive identity status of 'self' vs. 'other', responding to in-group needs and a search for belonging.

#### Dynamics and Destabilizing Forces

Amidst the slow pace of structural reforms and implementation, Gambians have observed significant frictions when it comes to identity and citizenship, elevating their overall sense of anxiety. Research participants frequently cited these as being associated with the lack of clarity of national borders, interactions with law enforcement, and ethno-political divisions being sewn, which depict discrimination or scapegoating of certain ethnic groups. These issues have broad implications for social cohesion, and link strongly to existing legal structures that enable discrimination or possibilities for violence (i.e. lack of national unity promotion by the state, clarity of legal citizenship rights, or institutional practices like issuing ID cards). Ethnic minority groups in particular expressed concerns and growing anxieties, as they may be subject to the whim and rumors of majority groups who accuse them of being non-Gambians.

#### Perceived Exclusion & Resentment

Without national registry tracking *or* issuance of national ID cards now for over a year, those living in national border regions, such as the Foni north of Casamance in particular, express susceptibility to rumors, confusion, and authority's lack of clarity, which can lead to deleterious or dangerous interactions, specifically with state security services. These citizens, and especially disaffected youth in general, can find themselves easily at odds with state authorities (or at least many hold these perceptions and predictions). The Jola community in particular, which feels disaffected by treatment by state authorities over the course of transition, question their rights to belonging and to state protection as citizens. Here, perceived *exclusion*, linked to ethnic or national identity (as well as caste, or political/professional affiliation) is reinforced by the lack of border security, as rumors of cross-border movement of unidentified individuals<sup>57</sup> claimed to have nefarious purposes, whether or not such rumors are confirmed. This enables a heightened state of tension, putting communities on alert in physical and psychological ways, as well as increasing the potential for security operations on rather nebulously defined borders. Without the benefit of a registry or tracking system, or clarity of pathways to citizenship for persons of both Gambian and non-Gambian origin, porous borders and statelessness in general have thus helped to foster some rather complicated and interlinked circumstances, whereby dynamics that unfold based on less-than-informed perceptions, present the potential to further augment divisions and risks for violence.

Identity-based *exclusion* or even legal disqualifications during transition also implicate push factors for former Jammeh regime loyalists/members, who, like some youth, may find the draw of lucrative and profit generating criminal street-market economies enticing. Exclusion increases the potential for some to opt to become or remain involved in the illegal trade of small arms and light weapons and participation in other

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<sup>57</sup> Examples reference members of the Senegalese *Jola* community, having been tacitly permitted to come from Senegal to Gambia without legal permissions or registering, and thus drawing upon national benefits that were also being denied to other Gambians.

criminal activities for purposes of economic sustainability. Anecdotal reports about and increase in armed robberies conducted by professionals with high grade weapons, were notable. A key target group here is former military personnel from the Jammeh era (whether career or professional military officers, or special forces, e.g. members of the Green Boys or so-called *Junglers*). Specifically, those who faced purging (or replacement or reorganizing) that was undertaken as part of targeted security sector reforms by the incoming government, are at higher risk. While small in number, these now politically excluded individuals may harbor resentments, fostering this group's willingness to apply their training, strategic skills, and networks, to operate in ways that enable them to take advantage of deep knowledge and limitations of the security sector operations, and the current porousness of borders. To this end, coming to terms with clear pathways to national identity and access to Gambian citizenship, as well as formal registration as a civic right and responsibility, features as a national security imperative in the short term.

#### *Proliferation of Tensions through Politics*

Identity politics, belonging, and access to legal status or rights offer a window into the more systematic use of these issues by political parties, who are able to do so by using these to build in-group loyalties, and out-group disdain. By the same token, the lived impact of identity and citizenship discrimination or troubles, lends itself to conditions or sentiments by which *youth* are rendered more vulnerable to manipulation and potential radicalization. Many young people across the country already express a sense of feeling isolated, silenced, and excluded. Many of them, too, may not enjoy legal access to citizenship based on their birthplace or rights, but may also at once feel strongly about their Gambian-identity while being unable to legally or socially reaffirm their sense of national belonging. Under these circumstances for social exclusion, young people find themselves more susceptible to other influences that offer alternatives into which they can invest their loyalty, camaraderie, and deference to higher-authority of religious or political nature, which become tangible and reasonable to support and defend. Lacking such pro-social national anchors, those actors who wish to actively undermine, incite division, or promote the use of violence based on identity labels such as minority/majority or legal status, find fertile ground on which to work through disaffected Gambian youth. Given the significant portion of young people constituting the Gambian population, identity, citizenship and sense of national belonging pose imminent risk to safety and security in real and timely ways in this early phase of democratic transition.

Additional dynamics and conflict-triggering risks are related to the frequently and fervently cited ethno-centric divisions that are being actively stoked by political parties for their short-term election gains, a national pattern that also supports the *proliferation* of these tensions. Political-party campaigning practices behind closed doors drive divisions and irrational fears, preying on existing tensions and fissures amongst groups who might express otherwise sustain harmonious tendencies in their regular settings or interactions. The 'behind the scenes' practices of political leaders encouraging or supporting political followers to demonize opponents or their parties along ethno-linguistic lines, are widely used and embedded during electoral campaigns. Young followers who are keen to respect elders and leadership, respond to this messaging and to party figures who use division in function of accumulating political power. These practices socialize discrimination and encourage youth to support and reproduce discriminatory remarks against 'opponents' who may be targeted minorities or vulnerable groups. These messages are widely reproduced and communicated through social media messaging.

#### *Violence Triggering Potential*

Institutions such as Gambian security actors, along with ECOMIG, as well as other officials within the justice system, play key roles in managing and mitigating related tensions. This dynamic is noted in security patrolling and checkpoints, which place such actors on the front lines of dealing with identity related questions. The potential lack of policy, protocol, or preparation to deal with individuals they encounter, who may not be able to present national identification cards, carries potential for misunderstandings or worse to transpire in every day interfaces. A simple yet unsavory interaction between a young person (of legal Gambian status or otherwise), who may be unable to produce a national ID card at the request of a security agent at a police

checkpoint, runs the risk of confrontation, detainment, or violent escalation with grave social implications, not least of which can be fed by a highly-decontextualized proliferation of such interactions via social media.

The implications of individual insecurity in this manner poses a specific cascade effect with regard to the perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors exercised and held by young people. The lack of a clear pathway to confirming one's own identity and legal status vis-à-vis belonging to the national citizenship group, further adds to growing anxieties and pressures faced by young people, who grow susceptible to behaving in anti-social or oppositional ways against the state itself, including security service agents, as was evidenced anecdotally during fieldwork. Identity issues thus have violence triggering relevance, but also the psychological effects of invisible ceilings, and as push factors linked to impeded pathways to gainful employment or political participation such as voting or political candidacy. The knock-on effect identified by these push factors include undue hardship of family division, general disillusionment, and stirring rumors and community tensions and insecurity related to the uncertainties that Gambians express about porous borders. These patterns were evidenced as significant in the LRR and WCR.

### **III. Natural Resource Management, Land Ownership & Access**

#### Structural and Proximate Issues: *Natural Resource Management*

Public perceptions, international trade, and legal provisions related to existing practices of control and enforcement (including state licensing), as well as access and use of Gambia's natural resources by citizens (specific to forests, timber trade, and woodlots, as well as water ways, fishing, and access or use of lands adjacent to water) were evidenced to be strongly associated with significant destabilizing tensions. These issues currently affect everyday relations amongst citizens, and between resource-linked communities, and also medium to long-term implications for broader trust and confidence between citizens and the Gambian state. Research participants frequently cited perceptions of discrimination in terms of existing institutional policies and practices, related to the distribution of benefits related to national natural resources.

The lack of existing legal infrastructure to appropriately regulate and license, fails to offer the public a clear and consistent sense of who has legal entitlement for the use or extraction of natural resources. Central to such structural foundations is the Constitutional provision for a Land Commission, which remains to be mandated by a National Assembly Act since the 1990s; neither have yet come into existence. Policy-wise, profit-seeking extractive industries and international export trade remain unregulated and/or selectively policed by central authorities, about which the public raised questions about government corruption, while lamenting the lack of any return on such extraction to the surrounding communities, while private interests benefit or gain. Relatedly, the 2017 ban on timber-trade, which is associated with the way communities and commercial interests, profits and returns are ultimately distributed, has also added fuel to the fire, given the observed impacts that have befallen economic well-being of communities. To make matters more difficult, legal enforcement of licensing violations in the harvesting and transport of natural resources like timber, have been raised as questionable.

#### Dynamics and Destabilizing Forces: *Natural Resource Management*

Many discussion revealed how the timber trade ban has had deleterious effect on communities, including a rapid shift in local economies for Gambians in LRR and WCR. Once the ban took effect, swift changes in cross-border labor market opportunities and trade from Casamance occurred, representing a series of immediate and unfavorable economic repercussions on local food security in the immediate vicinity of the Fonis, for instance. This has put pressures on families and generated broader insecurity for those living in these regions, who feel their overall conditions and questions about livelihoods, financial, and physical security, which have felt the knock-on economic effects. Private and commercial interests of laborers, merchants and investors were also affected. Many feel they have been financially disenfranchised by the restrictions on timber trade in 2017, claiming financial investment losses, and elevating resentments that facilitate broader perceptions that state authority is discriminating intentionally. This has exacerbated tensions amongst ethnic groups such as the Jola and Mandinka communities in the indicated regions of LRR and

WCR, who struggle to survive as they endure the immediate effects of policy changes, on top of the long-standing impacts and decline in overall production related to climate change.

Voices across these and other regions expressed discontent in observing that public officials and security actors (Gambian *and* ECOMIG) seem to participate openly in, or otherwise selectively tolerate timber trade, or the use of fishing waters for purposes of export market sales (Senegal and China are often mentioned). Seeing truckloads of timber move along national highways, or fishing boats returning empty, which may have sold their stock to larger boats out of view, adds to the public perception that state authorities are enabling private merchants, selling out national resources for profit, and reaping private gains *without* community-benefit or reinvestment. The day-time transport of such resources, which is known to pass through and is received and inspected by Banjul dock authority agents, deepens beliefs of discrimination and corruption held amongst disaffected community members, while further imperiling public confidence in the state's natural resource conservation commitments. This compounds mistrust, reducing the new promise that the Gambian state would act with good faith intentions to provide security to enact policy in accordance with the public benefit, or to make good on its commitments to uphold the rule of law objectively and without discrimination.

### Structural and Proximate Issues: *Land Ownership & Access*

Many of those interviewed cited the repercussions that community members have felt as lands once used for agricultural production for local subsistence have been taken out of production over time for other uses. These have been replaced with new infrastructure such as roads or commercial production facilities that serve non-public interests, though *without* alternative sources of livelihoods having been made available, especially in the most far reaching rural populations.

Privatization and rise in land-related profitability have intensified scarcity and impoverished conditions, and invited new patterns of decision-making by land owners, changing long-standing land-lending and borrowing practices, with implications on local food production, land use, and output. Rising value of lands that were once destined for small and community farming have increasingly been depleted due to environmental erosion, as well. Land's used for private and commercial profit-seeking through real estate sales and commercialization (including sand-mining and related extractive industries), presents a pattern that continues to shape rural life, livelihoods, and community well-being, which determine distribution and returns or community benefits, are thus a key underlying driver of instability evidenced across the country. Privatization and corruption were further cited as being associated with a longer decline in community access to basic state services and facilities (i.e. for health care, security, or social services) in relation to doubts about tax revenue collection and selective state re-investments, in both rural *and* densely populated urban areas.

Broadly speaking, tensions and instability were associated questions of lingering or unresolved disputes over farmland and cattle track trespass, land ownership claims, and related transactions and practices associated with land-lending and land-borrowing. Chieftaincy/Alkaloship roles and practices remain central to catalyzing these tensions. Whereas Gambians rely upon local Alkalo leadership<sup>58</sup> for resolving local disputes (specifically for land), confidence in these authorities has been eroded on multiple levels. In exercising their positions of

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<sup>58</sup> Despite long-standing trust and adherence to local decision making authorities and mediated outcomes, Gambians in dispute over land have experienced unfavorable and biased decision making as a result of the gradual politicization by local authorities that occurred over time under Jammeh's regime. As leaders were compelled, on many occasions, to use their power to demonstrate loyalty to Jammeh and APRC, their corresponding decisions about land and related disputes tended to favor party interests over fair, objective, or equitable resolution, with implications on both perceptions of authenticity of their role, and the distribution of resources. These patterns adversely affected and corroded trust in local systems, mechanisms and dispute mediators/stewards, who on the one hand, were inhibited to, or did not willingly preside in fair or just measure when addressing such issues, or are perceived to be reversing the directionality of discrimination now after the fall of APRC and Jammeh, related to their arbitration or mediation practices.



authority over the management of local disputes and administrative issues, custom indicates that such leaders also hold control over land access and ownership decisions in their areas. This corresponds to a concentration of power and influence over land's distribution and use. Despite the power and authority bestowed customarily upon Alkalos and respected as a general rule, many research participants feel that these stewards have become biased and politicized over time, or expressed doubts about the training and skill-sets they possess to appropriately conduct such management duties effectively. Over years, many Alkalos were also appointed by the Jammeh regime, interrupting traditional practices, and shifting local leadership favor to reflect APRC loyalties. According to people across the country, local decisions regarding land issues have, for years, also been made accordingly. Research participants further noted that in the pendulum effect of political transition, local leadership loyalties have shifted more often than not, to reflect UDP loyalties.

Complicating land access and ownership issues are Gambia's multiple and co-existing operating models and mechanisms for dispute resolution (i.e. customary, religious/Shari'a, and statutory/state). These intersecting and overlapping systems lack channels for sustained communication or cooperation between them, or any type of systematically coordinated interaction amongst their stewards or mediators – the same authorities who Gambians seek out, sometimes one after the other, within their regions to address issues of ownership claims or other disputes involving land, livestock, or borrowing/lending related issues. Different authorities and legal systems also pose a structural gender bias, as these indicate differential treatment and rights that are enjoyed by men and women, or young people, differently, none of which necessarily communicate or work in synchronicity.

#### Dynamics and Destabilizing Forces: *Land Ownership & Access*

The sense of dispossession, specific to land ownership and access, experienced by communities across rural production zones, have entrenched in the collective psyche of interviewees. These are related to structural and policy planning issues, but also the behavioral patterns of local authority, and disheartening delays and confusion that accompany their attempts at establishing ownership claims or resolving disputes.

#### *Changing Conditions & Practices*

For generations, land lending practices brought together and created social bonds within communities (i.e. new settlers and indigenous families) across religious and ethnic lines. These are increasingly replaced by practices reflective of profit- and rent-seeking by land owners, who prefer to sell, or cancel long-standing lending commitments, some of which spanned generations and have been economically critical to working families. Increasingly, for-profit-orientations to land benefits have begun to triumph over traditional and generational lending practices, leading to a variety of problems. As a result, inter-communal, inter-ethnic, and inter-personal disputes emerge, helping to sustain tensions that often remain *unaddressed* and festering. This has both long-term, as well as more immediate impact in terms of drivers of instability between communities. These interwoven structural and behavior challenges currently add to ethnic tensions, vis-à-vis widespread perceptions becoming more entrenched amongst disaffected communities.<sup>59</sup> Beyond LRR and WCR, flashpoints were identified in Taibatu and Madina in the Upper River Region (URR), with tensions persisting despite attempts at resolution, around the Wuli West land dispute, which began 50 years ago.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Some of this is related to the timber trade, and the visible use of timber by government institutions or ECOMIG noted earlier, which sends mixed signals to those who are suffering from economic scarcity, food insecurity, discontent related to changes to previously acquired legal permissions and licensing, and/or resource depletion and/or land dispossession.

<sup>60</sup> The longstanding land dispute between the communities of Kerewan and Naykoi Taibatu in the Wuli West District in the Upper River Region was said to have been resolved in 2012. At the time Lamin Jobarteh, the attorney general and minister of Justice; Ousman Sonko, the minister of the Interior; and Lamin Waa Juwara, the minister of Regional Administration and Traditional Rulers, visited Basse to take part in the reconciliation meeting. The meeting held at the Regional Education conference hall was also attended by representatives of both communities, the governor of the region, Alhaji Omar Khan, as well as chiefs, security chiefs in the region and other stakeholders. It would be recalled that the Tribunal Court headed by its president, Chief Jun Bah, a couple of months earlier delivered a judgment in favour of

Increasing population density and the diminishing availability of public lands with population expansion, coupled with privatization of lands for commercial use and sale has, over time, has reduced or limited the overall land stock, particularly in urbanizing areas. As an instrument or form of compensation that Alkalos have traditionally used to conciliate, mediate, or arbitrate, in some cases, to make disputants whole, a commonly cited practice was that of Alkalos ceding land, albeit to multiple holders, in some cases in attempting to make up for the same error in the context of a different dispute. Alkalos (or their deputies) are known to keep few written records, relying on their own memories, which has itself contributed to further complicating efforts to verify clear territorial ownership claims. Gambian's notably expressed concern with what they feel is a lack of technical capacity in management and/or record-keeping that limits the overall confidence people hold in these customary resolution systems and mediators. As a result, state dispute management systems like ADRS are facing a growing backlog of cases, citing Alkalos as increasingly part of the problem, rather than the solution. In this way, as biased-decisions or poor decision-making on the part of these authorities have created more problems, overall levels of trust and confidence in a local authority's objectivity as an impartial and fair mediator or arbitrator (e.g. Alkalos, deputized Alkalos, elder councils, or state institutions, such as the Department of Land and Planning), have declined.

#### *Social Costs: Loss of Trust in Traditional Actors*

Evidence also suggests that the very *social expectations* that bind citizens to call upon Alkalos or local elders to resolve local disputes (as opposed to using state services as an avenue of first recourse) can itself catalyze further social pressures. Despite the proximity of these authorities as the *closest* viable dispute resolution option for most people, political biases and patriarchal patterns in Alkalo decision-making does create the perception for many that these authorities are unsuitable for resolving disputes appropriately. Nevertheless, the decision to *not* use them, can compound social and inter-personal challenges amongst families or neighbors, adding tensions to existing intra- or inter-community relations, many times again, along ethnic or religious lines.

This decline in trust of these traditional systems has also been enabled by decentralized state institutions and local structures, such as the Department of Land Planning, which may also be responsible for designated official record keeping or registry duties, but has neither the technical capabilities, or has been called out by research participants to act in corrupt or derelict ways. Failing to keep of important records or following certain practices mandated by law, data and fact-based arbitration is rendered less effective in bringing conclusive finality or resolution to a dispute, in some cases allowing tensions between families or communities to fester for years. Coordination across land-planning, justice, and agriculture sectors, as well as security services, in some cases, are also relevant to this problem, as citizens go looking for answers that no single institution seems to have, or be able to finalize for them conclusively. In some examples, the lack of clear national border and cattle-track demarcations, or unclear land ownership/plot demarcation, are reinforced by the aforementioned Alkalo errors, or by *unscrupulous* practices including multiple-sales of land. Perpetual delays and lack of finality of resolution can lead to overly drawn out and inconclusive cycles without 'end-game', as Gambians may rely on the multiple operating, yet non-connected systems of customary, religious, and statutory law systems sequentially, complicating matters. If, for example, one mechanism pursued and used by disputants provides what one feels as an unsatisfactory outcome, this may result in the individual/s pursuing new answers through a different system, whereby any previous 'final' decision may be overridden by another.

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Kerewan Taibatu, in connection to the said land dispute. Recently, in March 2018 a fresh dispute has emerged with Nyakoi Madina Koto claiming ownership over the entire rice field. According to sources, the people of Madina Koto, after having 'Junfara' rice fields under their custody are equally reclaiming 'Andiyerr' rice fields which are under the custody of Taibatou village. This is one flash point that can erupt at any moment as deep seated animosities have festered for nearly two generations now.

Women also expressed discontent with the bearing of Shari'a Law, which determines ownership and land inheritance rights, privileging men in most cases. Many women further express the burdens they bear in terms of discriminatory patriarchal practices that adversely affects women's overall economic power and social status. The inability to own land, or designations of lesser-quality land that gets lent to women for subsistence farming, has deleterious social and financial implications on women in the aggregate, with declining effects on communities at large, into which many women readily reinvest.

Discontent with land-related and inheritance rights aspects of Shari'a, and the politicization of local dispute resolvers exposes declines in the overall level of trust that Gambians place in the guardians of traditional systems. By contrast, many Gambians are increasingly opting to use police and/or using courts to address issues of conflict and/or experiences of violence. This is particularly true for women, who may seek out police and courts, despite social pressures, if their only alternatives to resolution involved what they describe are discrimination and limited opportunities under the orientation of a patriarchal approach to dispute resolution and decision-making, reproduced when women look to customary mediators and arbiters for answers.

The decision not to call upon traditional dispute handling agents such as elders and Alkalos implies a social-cost bearing decision that has not featured into proposed judicial reforms. For those who feel compelled to formerly open any legal case against a family- or community-member, or even against a local authority themselves, the pursuit of justice under the provisions of statutory law can widen social rifts in places that rely on cooperation and cohesion for survival. The double-bind financial and social costs to resolving disputes is something of a vicious cycle that diminishes citizens' confidence in the rights protections vis-à-vis the performance of the state, and an overall decline in the quality of state-society relations. For many communities, these everyday tensions quietly undermine once cohesive social relations and institutions, upon which collective celebrations, intermarriages and inter-religious households grow ever 'cold', hollow, as an empty façade, despite their fixed place as social rituals that everybody attends. For young people in particular, such things only perpetuate as 'push' factors for internal or external migration, beyond the borders of The Gambia.

#### *Triggering Potential & Push Factors*

Beyond customary and religious practices, citizens remain frustrated by the lack of clarity about pathways and mechanisms to pursue redress, or answers to broader community land, insecurity, or crime issues (e.g. cattle rustling or threatening relations). Participants in WCR, for instance, cited that small arms and weapons were on visible display in the hands of ordinary people in the open being carried or cleaned on occasions, and later stored. Interviewees from the Gunjur area believe this has been done intentionally by what they claim were Jola group members from the neighboring Berending community, in order to threaten and scare them into staying clear of their own lands.

Many claim that responsiveness from their elected officials and security services in general have not been forthcoming, or for some forthcoming in selective fashion. Key hotspot areas such as WCR, evidence suggests that Gambian authorities remain reluctant or physically out of touch when it comes to responding to or addressing critical security-related land, and border clarity matters in particular. Despite proactive attempts on behalf of Gambian community members to convene state authorities to discuss the issues, research participants claimed that few if any officials have responded to their urgent 'cries for help' to conduct a proper investigation into the case, and take all necessary step to avert, in their words, a "looming bloodshed". This has left community sentiment particularly soured and insecure, as responses by invited Senegalese counterpart authorities across the border (also invited by community leaders to address issues at certain times) has also contrasted the absence and unresponsiveness of Gambian officials. To many, this demonstrates a lack of concern or attention to land and border security issues, where in WCR, for instance, it is reported that tensions continue to fester.

Interpersonal disputes involving land claims, or family disputes that involve violence (suffered in large part by women in the home, but also with great significance by young men who face physical, emotional, and

psychological domestic abuse by close family members), also dissuade younger Gambians from going to Alkalos or elders for conciliation purposes. Young people may instead also opt to leave home, or, in the case of domestic disputes, men and women may pursue divorce using civil rather than customary or religious mechanisms. Much like those land-claimants who feel dissatisfied or mistrustful of traditional dispute resolvers, many Gambians seek out courts or call upon the police, in some cases, for redressing issues on first instance. In doing so, these individuals also bear significant financial *and* social costs associated with statutory-based processes to which they have legal rights, but which also comes with attached social stigma and pressure by others from shunning *traditional* systems. For many women who do not see their interests being met, using the state apparatus may also invite experiences of double-victimization, as police or officials minimize or blame victims, or, in some cases, even turn women away despite claims of legal rights violations or violence they have suffered.

#### IV. Informed Dialogue, Public Participation & Civic Education

##### Structural and Proximate Conflict Factors

Citizens' expectations, coupled with the fast-moving flow of information, and increasing coverage and access to social media (especially amongst young people), present a series of new challenges to a Gambian citizenry and to the state. Evidence points to the desire by all to establish new roles, responsibilities in the face of new democratic demands. Yet, conditions and expectations for interactions amongst citizens, and between the citizenry and state institutions, remain tied legacy models of autocratic practices. This includes public discourse defined by years of silence, non-articulation, or lack of practice to weigh in openly about political affairs, and the circulation uninformed citizen beliefs about roles and responsibilities under democracy itself. These have for years restricted or ill-prepared Gambians for a transitional time in which the filtering and processing of public information or news becomes critical for the collective to constructively and non-violently managing change, developing a more democratically oriented political culture.

##### *Democratic Structures & Spaces*

The challenges to national capacity and preparedness is equally met by the lack of existing channels in which citizens can participate in informed dialogue, which remain limited or restricted. Structurally speaking, the absence of bodies or sustained forums through which political actors and social actors could interact and deliberate on key issues of national concern, or address national tensions, also lack. Few models exist for supporting sustained and constructive public debate, in ways that are also conducive to demonstrating tolerance for dissenting views and divergent opinions broadly to the public. As many interviewees noted, long standing national laws inhibiting political activities, *and* educational practices have, over the course of decades, helped to *undermine* national institutional and individual capacities for producing objective or unbiased news and information, as well as critical skills for processing information, holding open and respectful political deliberation, and practicing tolerance and restraint.

Amongst the legal restrictions, interviewees pointed to structures, and suppressing practices by authorities that continue to have a strong influence on these spaces, which many feel unfavorably limit newly emerging democratic qualities and provide detrimental to more inclusive participation when it comes to public expression, political dialogue, and debate. Respondents referred to laws on sedition and insult that limit actions by media and civil society actors, as well as some public figures to feel comfortable engaging more openly. Restrictive legal registration policies and practices remain alive and on the books. While citizens and organized civil society groups alike have critical roles to play and responsibilities to exercise in the public space, many hold perceptions that public spaces and opportunities for dissent and expression of divergent views, are now being actively restricted and suppressed by powerful actors in government. Responses by state security forces to public organizing and protests on issues of public concern, on some occasions, provide evidence.

### *Political Culture & Capacities*

A political culture reflective of measure and restraint, as well as counter-messaging and narratives disseminated consistently in public, which reject inflammatory ethnic-discriminatory language, were often cited and ultimately analyzed to be lacking. The presence of authoritarian legacy itself goes publicly undiscussed by leaders, limiting a new sense of national belonging and solidarity to be developed in the short term while additional reforms run their course. As Mariam B Secka (“Aunty Yam”), Deputy Party Leader and Secretary General of the United Democratic Party noted, “the environment has changed; there is freedom of expression, speech and assembly in the country unlike in the past. What we need is to train our children to be tolerant in order to make discrimination, marginalization, persecution and victimization a thing of the past” (Personal Interview, 26 April 2018).

Educational deficits were also noted in the level of civic awareness and education levels, which point to both short and long term associations citizen propensity to apply informed, critical skills to filter discriminatory, suppressive, imbalanced or inflammatory news or messaging disseminated by social and conventional media sources, or public figures. Similarly, relative deficits in the society-wide capacities and arenas in which organized civil society or citizens can appropriately assess and fairly judge any current event or state policy, implicates the relative potential of society to hold public leaders and institutions accountable.

### Dynamics and Destabilizing Forces

The dynamics of democratic development today in The Gambia have been characterized by many interviewees as yet confined or restricted. The organizations and actors that serve as watchdogs and counterparts to state and society, remain under pressure in either real or perceived ways. News media and non-governmental organizations and actors self-censor, or struggle, under the weight of financial or capacity-related pressures, as well as legal risks, limiting the propensity of the broader civil-society sector to evolve or thrive in this transitional moment. While some laws have been changed, others remain on the books. Where individuals or organizations perceive high risks to their actions, evidence suggests that these limitations will continue to shape civil society engagements around some politically sensitive issues. This has implications on public reporting and information dissemination, and, ultimately, reveals a daunting prediction for the way in which Gambians will be able to access public information and interact with more reliable and independent news sources during transition and beyond. A deficit of strong reporting and/or activism coming from these non-state sectors, together with critical skills to filter and process information from any and all news sources, Gambians, especially younger generations, remain susceptible to fake news and manipulation, as well as undue agitation. This can further reinforce divisions, as people come to feel greater affinity with political parties or influential *figures* first, over national belonging and values.

The early stage of transition marks a precarious time when perceptions easily overshadow legitimate efforts by state authorities to comply with their responsibilities and uphold the rule of law. Missteps can be easily confused with the intentional reproduction of selective and discriminatory treatment. Nevertheless, re-branding the overall space and transitioning from the stale political culture of autocracy, to one welcoming of informed expression, features as one of the major challenges that Gambians feel have changed relatively little so far, in the face of dynamics that evidence political and cultural resistance to new expression. State authorities in various areas have perpetuated doubts amongst citizens about the willingness of public office holders to use state security services to uphold freedoms enshrined in national law, or whether they are simply acting with politicized intentions.

An example of the type of incidences that provoke such perceptions was, in the observation of research participants, the lack of clarity in the GDC’s blocked attempt to obtain a protest permit in Brikama, in mid 2017. Similarly, the timing of detentions of a university academic, as well as that of a recently elected GDC Julangel Ward councilor, along with seven others (in Jimara District of Upper River Region) after the 12 April local elections, on the grounds of an assault charge, aid in the perceptions that state authorities in power are making choices along politicized lines, rather than upholding rights to expression. Restrictions on the constitutionally-based rights guarantee to publicly protest was also left in question when the Occupy

Westfield Movement (and other smaller community-based groups inspired by them), was also forced by police to disperse in November 2017, as they sought to protest, convening peacefully at the National Water and Electricity Company (NAWEC), only to be sent away by armed Police Intervention Units (PIU).

Such incidences help to sustain the public and international perception. These add fuel to the fire of speculation and rumors that the Gambian state's behaviors, however well-intentioned, are in fact *intentionally* engaging in discriminatory and authoritative practices to limit expression, against better judgment of the constitutional right to assemble. For many concerned Gambians, this demonstrates the *continuity of autocratic* approaches by public office holders who actively, or passively, have used their authority in ways favorable to their exercise of power and control, enabling a state security apparatus to impinge upon freedoms of expression. This perception persists as much through *actions* as through *inactions* by leadership, may reflect tacit approval for tactics that reinforce political exclusion, suppression or narrowing of spaces for expression, in some cases, supplanting the rule of law and respect for democratic principles with the exercise of control, limiting future speech expressions.

Mediation or deliberation of any such issues finds little recourse in trusted public forums, channels, or inter-sectoral bodies, which could debate critical events and disseminate clear information. Such bodies were often cited by Gambians in terms of their critical relevance to transition, citing the need to re-set roles and citizen expectations. The Inter-Party Committee, or IPC, and the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC), were frequently mentioned.<sup>61</sup> Evidence suggests that these two bodies have sustained losses in public confidence to date, despite high initial expectations for their function in the face of transition needs.<sup>63</sup> Thus, while they exist to inspire actions under a new political dispensation, they currently fail to provide much needed support to a more informed public interaction with the state around key issues, including elections, political clashes, or engaging on key issues on the national political agenda, such as distribution of public resources. Such bodies, promote broad inclusion of voices, particularly those of women and youth into political and social discussion of concern in transition, lead to a *less*, rather than *more* tolerant public, and are particularly relevant to promoting stability in a time of ongoing tensions and slow-moving structural reforms.

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<sup>61</sup> The opposition has indicated that IEC is not applying sanctions when electoral laws and guidelines are infringed such as UDP candidates using Barrow or Darboe images (e.g. Maimuna Ceesay in Kunkujang Sinch ward using President Barrow's photo), while President Barrow, who is the independent head of a coalition, has gone on tour during the National Assembly and Local Government elections making the timing seem publically suspect. The IPC is said to have been compromised and undermined by the UDP led government taking GDC supporters to court on an issue that is political. This could, theoretically, be resolved politically at the IPC, and not the courts.

<sup>62</sup> The IEC in particular suffers from the need for more public and strategic communications, data processing human resource capacities, as well as counterpart watchdogs or service which can also add another layer of validity to their pronouncements, as these have become subject to mistrust due to the 2016 elections and political impasse, as well as on further grounds where incorrect results were communicated, during subsequent elections.

<sup>63</sup> Fabakary Tombong-Jatta, the leader of the opposition Alliance for Patriotic Reorientation and Construction (APRC) has called on the chairman of the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) Alieu Momar Njai, to honorably resign, while describing him as anti APRC. He recalled that in the past Local Government Election of councilors, the IEC announced two results. The chairman announced 18 seats for the APRC but later announced 16 seats instead, he said. Let him resign and go and join any political party he wants, Mr. Jatta added. "Elections mostly around the world can create lots of instability in a country where there is no credibility." The former Serekunda East lawmaker added that the IEC chairman was interviewed on The Gambia Radio and Television Services (GRTS) and said that he was happy that APRC is gone. "The chairman should be independent and those remarks should not have come from him." (The Point Newspaper Tuesday 15 May 2018) Similarly in its editorial dated Tuesday 17 April 2017, The Point Newspaper indicated that "This is the second time the IEC is making such a correction to its final declaration of poll results since December 2016 Presidential election. The last one nearly cost us our peace and stability; the nation was sent into panic as it gave Jammeh grounds to reject the whole results put together. ECOWAS was compelled to intervene and civilian population displaced. That was a costly mistake."

Similarly, as mentioned earlier, messaging by the President, Ministers and/or public authorities that subtly demonize ethnic groups, criticize free speech, or suggest attempts to suppress it, shape public communication in ways that actively *deter* or mute civic participation, and the development of tolerance toward dissenting views and opinions, defining Gambia's movement away from autocracy, despite claims and commitments to democratic principles. This critical clause in a trustworthy state-society contract is further undermined by slow or poorly publicized efforts by state authorities and public opinion-shapers to proactively foster and champion respect for free speech, civic awareness, spaces for the diversity of thought, and a *republican*, rather than *partisan*, orientation to belonging in the new Gambia.

## V. Citizen Safety, Responsiveness & Coordination of Security Actors

### Structural and Proximate Conflict Factors

As the Security Sector endeavors to reform and rebrand institutions, promoting accountability, republicanism and professionalism within Gambian security actors, a critical gap is evidenced in two areas that present significant drivers of instability: (1) The lack of frameworks and practices for enhancing inter-agency collaboration, including their public visibility, and; (2) The absence of proactive external community relations to promote sensitivity and civic awareness *on the part of all* security institutions. These issues propose gaps in institutions, alongside ongoing internal reform processes.

While state security institutions attempt to build new relationships of trust and accountability with Gambians, research participants observed that physical and relational proximity of security institutions and actors remain limited at this time, especially in rural areas. Without many sources of information to rely upon regarding security sector reforms, and or dedicated outreach and public relations campaigns to enhance relations between citizens and security actors, public sensitivity and awareness overall across the nation remain underdeveloped. Citizen judgment in a time of transition rely more on social media videos, messaging, and rumor to assess both national and international security forces in the new Gambia. The *physical* distance between villages and their nearest police outposts can also pose a problem, especially in rural areas where levels of confusion and mistrust are high, but also where reporting of crimes and violence has generated more awareness of crimes and feelings of vulnerability.<sup>64</sup> By contrast, in areas where a clear presence of security actors exists (including ECOMIG bases), citizens remain uncertain about which institutions they can or should access, and *when*, depending on the nature of their issue or concern (e.g. for emergency or to seek a PIU officer rather than other services).<sup>65</sup>

### Dynamics and Destabilizing Forces

Citizens feel somewhat left on their own to sort out opinions about security actors during a confusion and uncertain time of transition and reforms. At a moment when communities feel increasingly vulnerable in the face of a crime visibility, including armed robberies that appear to be more frequent and dangerous due to the use of automatic/military grade weapons reportedly used by perpetrators,<sup>66</sup> familiarity with security providers

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<sup>64</sup> Interviewees in Changai, in Sami, in the Central River Region, lamented that there are 71 villages in Sami, but only one police station in Karantaba to serve all of Sami.

<sup>65</sup> The mandate of ECOMIG is to provide security for the President, provide security for government institutions, facilitate establishment of confidence between defense forces, keep Foni (Kanilai) under surveillance, and participate in Security Sector Reform.

<sup>66</sup> Armed robberies around Gambia's border towns with Senegal are frequent. Mostly, shops are attacked in which people are left seriously wounded. On 7 August 2017 no less than six robbers entered a drug store in Essau, North Bank Region, where the watchman, Modou Bah was beaten to unconsciousness. The men were armed with machine guns, according to villagers and newspaper reports. In October 2017-armed robbers broke into the office of the Reliance Financial Services, Yonna Forex Bureau and convenience store in Kuntaur and Wassu. In the Central River Region at least \$10,130 (D466,000 dalasis) have been taken from the vault at Reliance Financial, \$1,600 (74,000 dalasis) taken from the store belonging to a Mauritanian citizen, Saloum Hydera. Armed robbers were reported to have come in a van and broken the shop of one Muhammed Lamin Bah, a Guinean national residing in Abuko in the Kanifing Municipality. The

and awareness of security resources that citizens can access, were expressed as critical demands by a concerned citizenry.

Levels of trust and confidence also render security service personnel and reforming institutions vulnerable to the trust and actions of a public whose confidence levels in the shadow of autocratic legacy, are waning at best. At once, the demands, expectations, fears and concerns are also on the rise. Trends in the data evidence that citizens are simply *confused* when it comes to knowing how or from whom to rely on for security. In many areas of the country, people feel let down by the nature of interactions and responses by security forces to what they feel are serious crimes or emergencies, when they call upon security personnel to act. If certain personnel choose not to respond to certain issues (e.g. an unarmed police officer choosing not to respond to a reported armed robbery with perpetrators carrying automatic weapons), this can be confusing, due to a lack of understanding about why certain other security services are not present to help, or why these seem uncoordinated or linked.

Similarly, security services that lack of appropriate equipment, or those which simply follow their institutional mandate, respecting the jurisdiction of counterpart agencies, nevertheless create misperceptions amongst citizens. In some cases, where personnel lack resources, citizens have been asked to pay for security services out of their own pocket in order to facilitate things like transportation or investigatory services, further positing doubt in the reliability of these institutions and agents. Adding to this confusion, ECOMIG, while working within its mandate, is sometimes seen by Gambians as *unresponsive* to local needs, even though by mandate, ECOMIG does not interfere in local, sovereign issues. Yet, the public is also unaware and sometimes confused by this fact, as they also see ECOMIG practices which *do* build familiarity and relationships in terms of community support that some ECOMIG medical staff deliver, such as health care in villages, or on base.

Evidence suggests that perceptions citizens carry today in this early transition stage about the security institutions designed to protect them, are likely to be a drawback to their longer-term viability. In the short term, the current relationship between citizens and security services may continue to impede the development of trust, and even the tactical ability of some providers to collaborate with communities to address and respond appropriately to emerging and reported issues. Since transition began, the frustrations and/or absence of security in some zones, particular around national borders, has left Gambians feeling relatively insecure, building resentments that have led in some cases observed, to micro confrontations, building in a wave of voices that express ever elevated demands, anger and frustration. This has national implications for the relationship between citizens and security forces, particularly where perceived ethnic discrimination is felt to be high,<sup>67</sup> presenting a possible triggering issue in terms of everyday interactions. Internally speaking, the

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robbers stole valuable items and some cash of D120, 000. The incident is alleged to have occurred in the wee hours of Wednesday between 3:40 and 4:00 a.m. The Point Newspaper 31 January 2018. A gang of armed robbers attacked a forex bureau in Kololi, a suburb fewer than 11 miles outside The Gambia's capital, assaulting a woman and making away with thousands (16 February 2018). Armed robbers attacked the Gambia National Petroleum Company (GNPC) petrol station in Farafenni North Bank Region and reportedly did away with large sums of money, according to The Standard Newspaper of 25 April 2018. Ecobank Farafenni was also attacked and the Gambia Teachers.

<sup>67</sup> Foni – West Coast: This region reports a high degree of tribal tensions, with proximity to Casamance and stronghold of the former president Jammeh. Those with perceptions that the present government has been unfair to them, predominantly in the strong hold of some opposition candidates, has raised tensions in recent months. Prior to Jammeh's defeat, zones such as the five districts of Foni in the West Coast Region were considered "no go areas" for the opposition and where they (opposition) were received with hostility. These are Foni Bintang, Foni Bondali, Foni Berefet, Foni Kansala, and Foni Jarrol. With the current dynamics, it should not be taken for granted that change will easily be accepted. Brikama – West Coast: tribal politics has instigated confrontations, central boiling point for people. Bakau – Kanifing: high population density, coexistence of different party supporters; rallying point for incumbent administration. Talinding – Kanifing: incidences of violence during and after elections; high rate of crime related to political tensions. The Baddibous (Lower Badibu) – North Bank Region: fights during nominations of candidates for national assembly



clarity, reinforcement, and respect for interdependent institutional roles and responsibilities remains a significant challenge to be overcome within the security sector. Despite their acting within the scope of their mandate, legitimacy and trust in the eyes of the Gambian public in ECOMIG, in large part due to lack of awareness, remains problematic.

The lack of overall platforms, channels for communication and coordination *between* these security institutions, as a matter of ensuring public trust in the overall dependability and reliability of security in the Gambia, was also voiced during the research. The drawbacks inherent to a lack of inter-agency collaboration, coordination and information-sharing, reveals itself as an instability driver. This is specific to effective re-branding efforts in the eyes of the public, which goes hand in hand with responsiveness. Endeavors undertaken by institutions to proactively reassure public trust through building external/community relations has in some cases been compromised, too, by the lack of attention to the development and application of ‘softer’ skills and relational- and communication-competencies. Anecdotal evidence from around the country suggests that professionalization and practices of respect, restraint and poise by security services have been critical in sustaining peaceful interactions and good community relations, inviting public confidence and belief that security institutions will respect their rights and the rule of law vis-à-vis everyday interactions.

## VI. Meaningful Participation, Inclusion, and Ownership of and by Youth

### Structural and Proximate Conflict Factors

Evidence suggests that the top most pressing drivers of conflict and instability are associated with the quality of meaningful participation and sense of belonging felt by Gambian youth.<sup>68</sup> Together with opportunities to promote positive, Gambian-anchored identities, the gendered experiences and needs of young people evidence critical deficits that can evolve into complex instability generators in this transition. The perceptions that youth hold about their inability to access or locate meaningful sources and experiences of inclusion in Gambian society are widely shared. These tend to be associated with an overall lack of employment opportunities that could help satisfy some aspirations that young people have about making meaningful contributions as Gambian citizens, which mark defining patterns in youth discourse. Such issues are likely to weigh heavily on the nature of stability in both the short and long term, throughout Gambia’s transition, as today’s youth become tomorrow’s adults in a very short time frame.

Youth speak adamantly about Gambia’s educational curriculum, and vocational training opportunities, which they point to as inadequate or misaligned with existing employment/market opportunities, ill-preparing them to succeed, or failing to respond to youth interests and sectoral skill-building they find more relevant to entrepreneurial aspirations. Few of these, it’s claimed, currently reflect young people’s (gendered) needs and emerging interests in the digital era, particularly as youth recognize a new range of possibilities opening to them in the context of their country’s new political dispensation and external markets (possibilities and images that are made increasingly available to them through social media, internet information flow, and social-networking). Along with opportunities they desire, social and environmental/climate-related changes also posit obstacles to their futures, which many express feeling nearly impossible to overcome. Domestic violence and emotional or psychological abuse by close family members, reported to be suffered widely by *both* young males *and* young females, are also prevalent in young people’s experiences across the gender spectrum.

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until police intervention. Wuli a potential flashpoint in Upper River region due to land related disputes finding expression in the political arena.

<sup>68</sup> According to the National Development Plan (2018-2021), The Gambia’s youth population between the official bracket of 15-35 stands at 38.5 per cent, with a more significant demographic overall representation for those expected to come of age during the early phases of this transition. As stated, *“the 2013 Census results suggested that 42.6 per cent and 64.1 per cent of the population are below the ages of 15 and 25 years respectively, with young people aged 15-24 years representing 21.4 per cent of the population. This reveals a high dependency factor in society and has serious implications for development programming including social protection”* (pg. 233).

With reference to political participation, state-based decentralization policies have, by law, provided for measures by which young Gambians can get involved in meaningful ways. The Local Government Act (LGA) offers means by which youth can and should be able to actively and meaningfully participate with the purpose of playing a visible role in directing and managing local resources *for* youth, as well as take part in other decision-making about issues that affect them and their communities. The role of Youth Representative, when or where enabled in the local council, is part of a decentralized structural aspect of Gambian governance. This position intends to offer young people a formal role in which to find voice and engage in peer leadership, amidst broadly respected socio-cultural norms and practices that otherwise privilege adult authority figures or wiser elders.

Perhaps the single most significant of challenges posed to the nation today in terms of youth, is the question of ‘backway’ returnees whose out-flow and return implicate different types of social and economic pressures on the stability of The Gambia’s transition. With noted exceptions, youth and families recognize that state institutions are currently underprepared in terms of their engagements, suffering deficits in human, material and strategic resources, to craft appropriate responses to the significant and diverse demands of returnee youth, and for opportunity and meaningful participation for Gambian youth writ-large.

### Dynamics and Destabilizing Forces

Amongst many challenges faced, youth across the country express a deficit of place, and of safe spaces, in which they can find, and feel meaningfully included as duly respected members of society. In this, jobs and employment provide some sense of reassurance and support for solutions; but jobs alone are likely to fail to address the more priority issues and needs that young voices evidenced during this study. Young people, for example, express significant discontent and frustration with their horizon of the future, citing not just a job, but a decline or absence of meaningful involvement, mentorship, including the ability to learn about or even locate pathways for acquiring a respected place in national and community life. As one young research participant rhetorically remarked: ***“how do we even know what we have to do, to act as an elder? Must we just wait around until we get old?”***

### *Felt Sense of Exclusion*

Behind these issues, however, youth also say that while some answers may not come easy, others are not easily explained, as some adults during the study have claimed. Suggestions of ‘Western influence’ in education and norms, or decline in practice of religion, fail to paint a full picture. Many youth struggle internally with the dissonance inherent to their desire to respect traditions, while navigating and adapting to new and pressing conditions in a modern and digital era. Such claims, widely heard during research activities, are indicative of a systemic absence of communication between youth and adults such as parents, guardians, and elders, to actively consult, invite, and listen to young people’s needs. This alone is a reality that contributes over time to youth decision-making and pathways that can ultimately feed into broader potential for conflict and instability, as youth feel rudder-less and uninvited into social or political processes to which they desire to contribute.

Nevertheless, formal spaces do exist within the scope of decentralized governance policies, including designated roles and resources that are provided by the LGA for youth representation. However, as many youth report, these resources and roles (i.e. Youth Representative) are often usurped taken over by adults, contributing to a loss of involvement and meaningful participation. Leadership in Ward- and Village Development Committees (VDCs/WDCs), as well as in youth wings of political parties, have been systematically denied to young people, based on politicized local arrangements amongst adults, which have blocked young people from accessing these leadership ladders or opportunities, and have knock-on effects for youth who see others making decisions with them in mind. Whether in local communities or in terms of national party political participation, this has had limiting and deterrent effects on youth *formation* and *identity development*, distancing young people from participation in political life, and pushing many to isolate or seek opportunity elsewhere.

The frustration and resentment felt by young people, many of whom are hesitant to openly contest these situations out of socio-cultural respect for customary norms, feel negatively affected by these situations. Together with others, this perceived lack of space in a social context drives disillusionment and compulsion to physically migrate away from their communities. On a more micro scale, this can have deleterious impacts on family relations, while adding to important youth-capital deficits in rural places, in the aggregate. Young people, particularly young women, noted that they experience gendered discrimination under the framework and expectations of Shari'a law, too. In addition to identity-based and financial inequities such as land ownership and inheritance rights, young women mention economic and dependence-inducing constraints, inherent to Shari'a customs, as things they are beginning to actively resist or navigate delicately away from such constraints. Many young men and young women as couples have, together, begun to opt for civil, rather than religious marriages, as a way to avoid what they feel are either discriminatory or simply restrictive expectations their hybrid value systems cannot accommodate. Other experiences with discrimination widely cited in the study include the claims of patronage-based hiring systems, which may subject individuals applying to jobs to ethnic or gender-bias, leading to demotivation.

### *Mobilization Potential*

At a time where youth are feeling compelled by social pressures and drawn into aspirations of a 'new' political freedom, expectations are high. Youth, like many Gambians, are fiercely attentive to national issues, and stay connected through social media today in ways previously unseen in the country, which asks them to process and filter significant amounts of information from various news sources, whether or not these are fact-based or fake. Young people are highly influenced and carry significant potential for mobilization of many forms. In this way, the features of national identity politics and divisive public messaging by leaders bear significance on youth socialization into national political life that is defined by an ever-fractured ethno-political experience. For young men in particular, who are in search of positive male role models and expressions of masculinity, opportunities to demonstrate loyalty and pursue economic benefit may coincide dangerously with nefarious mobilization by political leaders whose behaviors stoke divisions along the aforementioned ethno-linguistic lines.

In both villages and urban centers, observable patterns of political instrumentalization show youth as the primary authors of violent clashes between political parties (especially in the elections of early 2018). This is particularly evident around campaigning practices, suggesting that youth are increasingly lured by, and prepared to take risks based on promises by political party loyalties in exchange for certain (and often temporary) financial rewards and social incentives. As a flashpoint event, participation in campaigns, elections and physical street clashes are also times at which Gambia's ethnic tensions are significantly visible and reinforced by media coverage. Driven in the public eye by young people, stigmas and social burdens are placed readily on the shoulders of all young people for the behavior of some. While young 'militant' political supporters are vulnerable as mobilizers of violent incidences, it is important to note that once campaigning has passed, youth are offered little permanence or real power by political leaders. More often than not, the majority are left aside by politicians and committees after elections and campaigning have concluded. This has deleterious psychological effects on young people and their expectations in the wake of these high-energy and solidarity-generating events. With few other in-between opportunities to channel this energy between election or campaign cycles, this creates conflicting or diminished hopes and expectations, defying genuine attachments, connections, or beliefs in the wisdom or care of elders and leaders.

### *Returnee Reintegration Challenges*

Under the weight of these experiences and trends, young people isolate in their own ways, mentally and financially biding their time and resources to make decisions about what they see as an uncertain future. Many do so by preparing for the sole objective of leaving the Gambia, whether for a first, second, or even on third or fourth trips, despite the known risks and consequences they may suffer. While some return voluntarily or after hardship experiences *en route*, others will experience forced repatriation after deportation from other countries. Aside from those who perish, become trapped, or find sustainable work, youth that have embarked on the 'backway' to Europe will return disillusioned, dispossessed, unemployed, and many times, angry. The

social risks posed by unscreened, unemployed, and unsettled, often idle, ‘backway’ returnees, as well as the aggregate economic impacts imposed by this sub-group on society during an already uncertain transitional moment, present significant destabilizing potential. Those who backway returnees who repatriate for any period of time (many of whom find no productive social roles) face derogatory and stigma-generating messages communicated openly by society in everyday parlance.

Returnees left to linger without opportunities or meaningful connections, or means for participation, find themselves in a vicious cycle, left idle, hanging around on the street and/or increasingly inclined to participate in other more nefarious activities. Anti-social behaviors and confrontations are also part of this reality, including observations during research that youth have been notably, openly *resistant* or *oppositional* in their behavior during interactions with armed security forces, from both Gambian and ECOMIG forces. Until early 2018, under new efforts by the Government of The Gambia with support from the UN Migration Agency (IOM), backway returnees could count on little to no formal and state organized reintegration reception, screening, or support.<sup>69</sup>

## Key Peace Engines

### I. Independent Civil Society & Community Organizations

The premises of peace and stability call upon Gambians to enable a more independent, actively engaged and networked civil society sector in the short term. This sector’s contributions, including both peace-oriented networks such as WANEP-The Gambia, and broader coalitions such as TANGO, offer existing mediums through which to bring up, improve upon, and foster dialogue about key areas and critical levels of public awareness and civic education, harnessing and channeling public energy for democratic dialogue and participatory engagement. The Gambian media also plays a critical role, not only to channel public demands and posit or deliberate upon national agenda items, but also in terms of the inclusion of civil society organizations and media figures appropriately in ongoing high level political dialogue, as a means of affirming transparency and re-establishing accountability.

Journalists who are familiar with multiple spaces, known to cycle in and out of professional positions in state and civil society arenas, are particularly relevant to both state communications in transition in terms of strategic orientation, promotion, and confidence-building groundwork. Journalists can advise and foster messages through channels and spaces, which can be strategically tailored to promote and facilitate delivery and receiving of messages by the public, and improve upon consultation opportunities that reach targeted audiences, depending on identified needs (e.g. disenfranchised communities, in violence hot-spots, youth groups, gender- and civic-sensitization campaigns with security forces, etc.).

As central hubs with nationally reaching spokes, organizations like TANGO, WANEP, and the Gambia Press Union (GPU), amongst others such as the government sponsored and NGOs focused on youth advancement, such as the National Youth Council and Gambia’s Youth Empowerment Project (YEP), can benefit from both internal organizational development support, and enhancing capabilities to engage their members more actively in peacebuilding roles, independently or in network, as well as to strategically advance and participate in evidenced-based facts dissemination and transition-sensitization, and platforms for expression and exchange in the public arena. Such roles can provide needed inputs and partnership

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<sup>69</sup> In early 2018, the UN Migration Agency (IOM) together with the Government of The Gambia facilitated the return of 144 migrants from Libya, providing a process of registration, questionnaire profiling, and health screening, including basic care, temporary shelter and funds to cover transportation costs to their home communities. IOM will continue to assess these and other returnees’ situation on a case-by-case basis to help them find alternatives to irregular migration and ensure their sustainable reintegration in their community of origin. For more information, see: <https://www.iom.int/news/iom-assists-144-gambian-migrants-return-home-libya> (Accessed 30 may 2018)

opportunities with reforms in the justice and security sector, the former of which in conjunction with the Gambia Center for Victims of Human Rights Violations, which advocates for victims, reforms, and human rights norms, can draw upon synergies in terms of appropriately reaching out to, and engaging in culturally appropriate and conflict-sensitive ways with communities as they pursue their national efforts.

They can readily support and manage civic expression spaces, including a strategic social media and civic awareness-raising presence, while promoting counter-narrative proliferation to politicization, extremism and incendiary- messaging such as around ethnicity or suppression, that continues to problematize identity and citizenship for purposes of private or political-party, rather than public-good gains. Having sustained through non-political and selective social engagements over time, the civil society sector must be better mapped and broadly understood, with a view to strategically strengthening its leadership potential and convening abilities. Civil society has remained active, albeit limited to non-political and non-socially delicate issues under the past administration. Nevertheless, as a whole, it offers existing and deep community linkages and networks, as well as a strongly prepared, and well-known female leadership class, which together has the power to interject new models and constructively mobilize in early stages of Gambia's democratic development. Civil society and community organizations must be supported to play a more active role in national conversations, specific to their power to call attention to national agenda issues, so as to constructively and timely convene, and tactfully draw public attention and encourage young people's participation in such discussions. Whether these unfold around returnee issues, or economic development decisions, civil society can offer *contrast* and provide counter-examples for meaningful participation by citizens in transition, to the enticements of pay-for-play and instrumentalizing behaviors often used by political parties.

As an oversight and watchdog presence, CSOs must take on a more active and strategic role, asserting themselves as peer trustees in re-brandishing state-society relations. Their participation as visible counterparts in political and social-media supported forums for dialogue and deliberation can inform and enhance the quality of state-society dialogue, relations, and demands for accountability. In this transition moment, the focus on feed-in agenda issues to complement ongoing reforms, such as in Justice and Security, can better ensure that attention is given to the less tangible, less visible, or even issues that have been overlooked by the state and partners, but are no less important. The more-subtle attitudinal and behavioral changes to break with autocratic orientations to governance, which can be easily overlooked in the statebuilding-heavy orientation to 'transforming' and capacitating institutions, are key in this regard. Bringing attention for example to ongoing, if under-the-radar practices of patronage or discrimination, or bypassing of legal provisions by local state actors, which have been deeply corrupted, or structured to inequitably distribute resources and services at local levels, is key.

Transformational potential for the long run begins with continuing education of CSO leaders, and staff, who may also move in and out between professional roles and stations between CSO, and state institutions. Much as journalists have done since transition, with the need to acquire skilled and talented professionals within state institutions, this should be seen as a strategic way to promote new ideals from within a changing state, in favor of cross-sector dialogue from within both spheres. Not to be taken for granted, civil society organizations, too, and their leaders, have not escaped the influence and patterning of autocratic rule and fear or caution amidst decades of ever-tightening spaces. They, too, must invite and engage consistently in inter-sectoral dialogue amongst their own, to refine their agendas and complementarities, expand understandings of each other's' interests and motives, discern linkages between local patterns and national development, and advocate for each other as rights-advocates, in solidarity with public concerns for state accountability and transparency during transition, in accordance with the rule of law, pushing toward superordinate motivations in support of national unity.

## **II. The Role of Women in Politics and Social Mobilization**

Gambian women's roles and participation are evidenced as key to moving the country forward and navigating difficulties in the transition ahead. This emphasizes a variety of people and groups, issues, and possibilities that require enabling, support, and strengthening. Pathways toward a new Gambian democratic experience vis-à-vis a more just and equitable distribution of Gambia's resources, and responsiveness to the broader

public good (rather than a patronage-model of governance and leadership), calls attention to many of the types of models and methods Gambian women already provide. Meaningful inclusion and participation by, and for women, bring new and creative voices and ideas into echelons of social and political power, promoting gender equity in principle, while enriching the quality of discussion through unique gendered experiences, in practice. Doing so in transitioning realms of social and political leadership can promote accountability, and more quickly raise civic awareness and tolerance-supporting behaviors amongst an ever restless and anxiously awaiting public.

At the community level, women's social clubs have been a strong engine of peace, evidenced through their social interactions and application of localized mediation and conflict management systems, such as the "Teeka" and "Ndey Deekay" concepts.<sup>70</sup> In these, at random selection, women swap head ties. The person whose head gear another picks up, takes on the role of one's sister and friend, as a way of fostering good neighborliness and peace within and across communities and ethnic or other divides. Similarly, the Ashobi worn (a cloth/fabric identified with mutual consent used for political, religious, social ceremonies) identifies groups, communities, or parties, as one. In Ngayan Sanjal (the Sabach Sanjal District) the biannual district meal sharing (supported by Allah's Charity) for men and women, is also a peace engine promoting local social cohesion. During the 2017 impasse, as national level voices such as Halifa Sallah were working to organize, as well as reassure the population, women's groups, including from the Gender Action Team under the African Center for Democracy and Human Rights Studies (ACDHRS - headed by Mrs. Hannah Forster), and the Women for Democracy and Development (WODD - headed by Mrs. Amie Sillah), the Methodist Mission (under leadership of Bishop Hannah Fall Heims), the Female Lawyers Association - Gambia (FLAG), The Women Journalists Association of the Gambia (WOJAG) were all mobilized in support for peace.<sup>71</sup> In spite of the tense atmosphere and uncertainty, Gambia saw no breakdown of law and order, no looting, and the preservation of peace in a tense time, reminding the country of women's power to mobilize for peace.

As Gambia's legal architecture and orientations to governance continue to enable reforms, women's meaningful role and participation in national and local politics, as well as in social mobilizing for causes of justice, equitability, accountability, and new models of co-existence, are critical. Evidence points to key contributions for instance, that women are already beginning to have on the direction of protecting the rights of children in transitional justice efforts, as well as in fostering visibility for new leadership models and fresh ideas, as well as positive influence on young people throughout echelons of politics, and state and social institutions. Evidence also points to the critical task that male leaders and counterparts in all sectors have, in championing and reinforcing such meaningful engagements in ways that publicly reinforce the contributions of women as both strategic and valuable for ensuring stability in the country. Close-to-home West African examples of both high-level political leadership, as well as popular mobilization and protest led by women's networks and groups, have evidenced powerful no-holds-barred forces for peaceful pressure and change in many neighboring countries under similar transitional moments.

Thus, it is not only the mobilization of women, but also the meaningful initiatives taken, too, by men (and actively pursued by individuals of all gender and generation) to support and enable appropriate conditions for

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<sup>70</sup> Social traditions of any kind should not be taken for granted as peace-mobilizing. Rather, local practices must also be understood as inherently influenced by broader social patterns, roles, and behaviors within any given community or setting. In this way, any such traditional practices or rituals amongst people must be recognized as having potential conflict- or tension-reproducing effects, alongside other more equitable and justice-promoting benefits.

<sup>71</sup> A statement released on 16 December 2016 by the The Female Lawyers Association – Gambia (FLAG) called on *"the women of the Gambia in all works of life to stand up peacefully for the Gambia our homeland that we may all live in peace and unity in line with the Constitution, and all national and international Women's and Children's right Instrument."* This message was released in support the statement of the Gambia Bar Association, which itself was released on 12<sup>th</sup> December, 2016 condemning the announcement of former President Yahya Jammeh (9<sup>th</sup> December 2016) wherein he sought to annul the results of the 1<sup>st</sup> December 2016, Presidential elections.

such efforts to manifest into meaningful contributions. This is critical for the unique and visible role that Gambian women can play in fostering sensitization to new political and social values through civic awareness and leadership modeling in the new Gambia, to enhance both the political and social development of a citizenry also in transition. Affirmative expectations in government regarding gender equality and qualitative equity, in social, economic, and political arenas and formal roles or positions, must be materialized in Gambia's state institutions. This can be accomplished in many ways, including through social institutions in which women have played key roles at the forefront of leadership in their communities, but which may also have been systematically disempowered or instrumentalized for gains 'not of the common good' in past years.

Such roles must be transposed onto national level politics, as a more equitable representation in political parties plays a key role in terms of governance needs fostering stability and reconciliation. Enabling women's continuing agency, voices included in key debates in the public sphere, and political party pathways to nomination for candidacy –which is plagued with internal discrimination, obstacles, harassment, and even threat- converge with the need to see dedicated resources made available in order for new female leaders to engage and emerge effectively as viable political contenders and office holders at both national and local levels. Evidence widely suggests that the knock-on effect of more active leadership roles for women as trusted peacebuilders, mediators, conciliators, negotiators, message bearers, and strategic communicators, can be critical during transitional moments of crisis or tumult. Inclusivity of diverse voices into decision-making spaces, and planning writ-large, particularly in the face of reforms and anticipated political dialogue within Executive and Legislative bodies, relevant to women's differential roles and impacts on both rural and urban community life and development, can further serve to counter and transform patterns and norms that allow for the persistence of domestic- and gender-based violence through everyday interactions. This is a categorical imperative for addressing many of the push factors that drive the "backway" youth exodus.

### **III. Youth as Mobilizers & Leaders**

Youth are the single most important demographic in the Gambia today in terms of their numbers, and ability to author and influence the transition in stabilizing or destabilizing ways. Fostering and enabling conditions upon which young people's platforms, networking abilities, technical and organizational capacities are enabled to harness and channel existing energies, and thrive, must be supported and promoted. Whereas employment and alignment between education and market access is also key for the health of young Gambians in terms of the 'demographic dividend', evidence suggests that maximum potential for youth as stabilizing and conflict-mitigating forces, points to the need to fundamentally revisit youth's role as leaders and mobilizers in existing social and political institutions. Fostering youth's potential pathways for youth leadership development and participation includes righting the scales of local ownership to involve their formal representation in community planning and decision-making, a role and place which has, in many local councils, been bypassed or fundamentally denied by patronage politics.

Opening these legally and already existing doors is likely to lead to actionable possibilities, enabling youth to continue, formalize, and build upon what evidence suggests that many already do informally – organizing and mobilizing in informal clubs and around sports such as football and wrestling, discussing and debating openly amongst themselves when they find no space with their elders, and self-regulating in their speech, while mediating and negotiating amidst impassioned discussions, citing respect for all across tribal and ethnic lines. Realizing gender-equity and representation in political leadership at the local level, beginning with youth roles, also has the potential to reinforce young people's waning interest in local creative political engagement, and in support of young people's involvement in planning and development decisions. It can also reinforce and reinvigorate traditional institutions that Gambians know, and are known for, which can help to reinforce ethnic and religious coexistence by involving youth to re-claim, re-invigorate, and re-fashion important social practices. These include widely shared and generational practices of Gambian joking relationships, *Kajfo*

organizing and women's groups or collective action such as *Osusu*,<sup>72</sup> or related relational or micro-finance access activities, all of which are organically linked to, and can significantly leverage community reinvestment, local development, increased interdependence and solidarity leading to improved dispute resolution and even rights-protections.

Youth as stewards or agents who promote constructive dispute resolution and relationships, social cohesion, and community relations, must be continually supported and politically included, so as to sustain social expectations, but also find creative ways to support dialogue and resolve tensions that arise amidst Gambia's changing social, environmental, and political landscape. Youth is a fleeting time, and today's youth bulge will soon rise to adulthood. Youth can foster a more amenable and less antagonistic or detached/disconnected relationship overall between young people and defining the new Gambian democratic experience. As energetic and creative planners, organizers, promoters and supporters of youth-to-youth communications and activities that promote state-society dialogue, they are also the most mindful/aware, and proximate in terms of their peacebuilding potential for creating connection and civic awareness, and must be driving forces in the deployment of counter-narratives and counter-tactics to combat push and pull factors that foster exclusion and religious extremism, as well as reject political instrumentalization. Involving youth in the design of methods for any form of consultation between the state and citizens, is also key, and will foster generational-aware, gender-centric considerations that can be built into reforms or added to the public agenda.

#### IV. Social Institutions & Relationships

Analysis in this study pointed clearly in the direction of current needs to enable and support conditions, institutions, traditions, celebrations, rituals, and behaviors that reinforce and promote the social benefits linked to existing *cousinage* relationships, or kinship networks. Many of these, research participants noted, have been either diminished or de-valued, despite the importance as practices that they hold in community life across the country. At best, such institutions can serve to promote healing and repairing intra- or inter-community relations, where politicization and ethnic divisions have embedded over time and continue to fester. This can occur through the spaces they create, which can deliver on critical awareness raising and civic education, effective dispute management, and reconciliatory practices. Local leaders and organic groups such as women's social-support and micro-finance groups (e.g. *Osusu*), present organic pathways and environments in which to develop and practice new norms, contemplate public-oriented decision-making, strategic planning or attention to changing times, and a collective space to enhance a community's orientation to local administration management and good governance practices.

Similarly, evidence points to the proclivity of Gambians to attend community ceremonies such as yearly *Gamos* and other annual festivals or sports competitions that bring communities together. Despite the indication that some of these ceremonial gatherings and spaces have turned hollow and 'cold', with gatherers merely showing up and going through the expected motions, physically present, but psychologically disconnected, or even uneasy around others. These localized social institutions yet bring people together, however, and carry the potential in many eyes to be reinvigorated as instruments for rebuilding the premises and re-capturing the essence of a once celebrated coexistence. Similarly, new possibilities for national celebrations in service of national unity were cited often as a missing element to this repertoire, which could be invited anew in function of such goals.

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<sup>72</sup> *Osusu* is a women's weekly/monthly revolving micro-finance practice in communities. Women report using these funds as a way to positively influence and support other women to engage in standing-up small vendor businesses through which they can generate income for themselves, thereby relying less significantly on their husbands for support. Vegetable gardening, too, was also cited in WCR as another income generating venture for women. Another way in which *Osusu* helps women and minimizes marital conflicts is in the way of buying and sharing household needs (mainly food stuffs) for its members. *Osusu* members contribute a prescribed amount of money over a period of time, and the funds are then used to buy staples in bulk such as bags of rice, sugar, gallons of oil, laundry soap, etc. which can then be shared equally among members for use in their homes.



Inter-ethnic and interreligious differences can be mediated by more meaningful and skilled-interventions by national and local social and religious leaders. This follows socio-cultural expectations Gambians hold in their leadership, which can offer top-down guidance, so long as such intervention also do so with attention to their use of discriminatory or inflammatory pronouncements. These traditional spaces and interactions hold potential for educating new and coming-of-age citizens (i.e. young Gambians) to also take up the cause of promoting new manifestations of constructive co-existence. Such re-invigorated participation in social institutions can also more constructively channel young people's energetic forms of expression to positively shape emerging Gambian models of democratic citizenship as new messages can be sent and internalized.

Evidence points to the use of existing social platforms to do so, constructively re-connecting inter-ethnic or interreligious audiences who nevertheless await or participate in performances and practices. According to evidence from the Central River Region, for instance, the re-invigoration of a male circumcision festival, which boasted widespread participation, brought people from far beyond localized community boundaries. Reflections amongst community members indicated that despite changes to 'old-fashioned' practices that had been made to the ritual itself, such gatherings offered a significantly constructive benefit to the area population and social relationships, through the nature of the event's convening, which in this case, helped to reconnect people across distances and reinforce the positive benefits of rural social relations. Infusing new ideas, democratic norms and expectations, as well as sensitization to new practices, agreements and arrangements, were also cited as possible through such arrangements and gatherings. Such events can be understood as stages upon which to demonstrate practices that promote dignity and equality, as well as to reinforce new political, social, and religious behaviors and leadership models, while also targeting de-escalation of inter-ethnic or inter-community tensions, to transcend relations beyond partisanship or existing divisions, which have long been fomented along ethnic lines.

#### **V. Local & Regional Governance Structures and Institutions**

As mentioned above, the effective and faithful implementation of law and corresponding practices according to the Local Government Act (LGA) is key to fostering peace and stability throughout The Gambia, and particularly across generational lines. Decentralization of power and governance, enabling local accountability, and supporting real manifestations of inclusive governance practices, reflects a demand that was evidenced in not only state and legal, but also in terms of customary ideals and expectations. Gambians recognize the benefits inherent to their existing systems, and have grown disillusioned with their mismanagement, politicization, and exclusionary control.

As a matter of public awareness raising through state-sponsored campaigning and the promotion of unity, the proactive fostering of de-politicization within local governance bodies, as well as public services can ensure greater accountability and increase confidence in their use. The promotion and reward for equitable performance by civil servants, as well as local leadership such as Alkalos and councils, can ensure that local and regional structures and institutions become responsive to the demands of citizens, and specifically youth and women, who have been left out of local decision-making in meaningful ways, thus skewing the orientation to community development needs, as well as issues of safety or security impacting their lives.

Local and regional spaces are home to some of Gambia's most pressing challenges, including land disputes, sense of insecurity, and building tension in small communities which are home to departure points and points of return for those who migrate both internally and externally. To this end, while some governance structures may benefit from women in some top-level leadership positions, intelligent decentralization practices can only come from increased presence of women in middle echelon leadership roles, as well as intentional focus placed on gender-specific needs of communities with regard to security and social connection.

#### **VI. The Role of Religious Institutions & Leaders**

The esteemed authority and leadership potential of religious figures and institutions cannot be overlooked in terms of what Gambians see as their constructive potential. The unique and enabling role and power that leaders and institutions have for opening and fostering civic consultation spaces, as well as in managing and preventing conflict (at both national levels and as well in terms of local conflicts), especially in terms of the

potential for mutual exchange and mentoring with youth, can add significant stabilizing value to transition, which can underpin the promotion of just and peaceful social relations and dignity amongst all Gambians.

Religious figures can foster national unifying sentiments, playing active roles to encourage government accountability, and to convene and communicate to their followers in ways that inform, influence, and mobilize communities to de-escalate broad social and ethnic tensions. Internal awareness raising amongst followership of any sect, or religion, as well as intrareligious dialogue opportunities, are critical to support, too. They can serve as a basis on which to increase connection between religious leaders and civil society actors, who together, can foster a more strategic role for religious leaders through networking and dialogue activities that might include greater visibility around key social issues. Shifting from a historical role of blanket support for Gambia's political leaders, evidence points to the desire and potential Gambians see in their religious leaders and institutions to more visibly and constructively inform public discourse and agenda. This includes input into the development of frameworks in terms of reform efforts, and helping to establish grounds for norms and expectations in terms of new social and political interactions, vis-à-vis religious leadership modeling. This includes weighing in through a new role as critical observers, beyond religious teaching, who can build awareness and call upon national reflection through moral and ethical questions, which can likewise serve as a system of checks and balances to hold political leaders to account.

Similarly, religious institutions, particularly (but not limited to) the Gambian Islamic community and Supreme Islamic Council, have an important role to play in the convening and consultation side of peacebuilding and stability, as they can utilize the strength of their networks and followership. Such efforts in conjunction with civil society groups have already been undertaken in some communities in WCR, through the help of the Peace Ambassadors, whereby Imams have used their Friday sermon platforms to preach messages of ethnic tolerance. This can be scaled, but also enhanced, to deliver messaging or activities that inform tolerance, increase civic awareness, and promote national unity, in houses of workshop and related organizing efforts. Organizing from *within* religious communities also evidences great stabilizing and preventive potential. Organizing and opening sustained dialogue with the broader goals of enhancing the quality of information in the state's and civil society's efforts to conduct public-consultation and survey efforts, is a significant added value, when done appropriately. This is particularly useful in working with returnees and the design and delivery of state-reintegration efforts, as well as for mitigating the social-acceptability and proliferation of ideas that support radicalization in young people. Intra-religious dialogue, too, cannot be overlooked, and must be supported, and go hand in hand as a mechanism to underpin any political advocacy effort by religious leaders such as the Supreme Islamic Council.

## Conclusion

***“A capable state, if it is only a state with a capacity to deliver things to people, that’s not good enough. It has to be a state that is grounded in the people . . . And the challenge for peacebuilding is how you work along with society and how you convince those who hold power to reconstruct a state that is rooted in society.”***

- Amos Sawyer, former president of Liberia<sup>73</sup>.

As the new guardians of Gambia’s democracy pathway, the Gambian state stands at a metaphorical crossroad in the eyes of its citizens. Meanwhile, Gambians patiently wait for aspirations to be realized, in what many express as a confusing, tenuous, and fast moving transitional period. Myriad are the changes, and challenges that Gambians of all gender, age, ethnicity and religious background must now inherit as they weather the throes of this democratic transition. While such trials may be *inherent* to such a transition, the escalation and spill-over of existing political and social tensions into experiences of violence, however, is *not*. A series of low-violence incidences following a sequence of 2018 electoral events have communicated the people’s willingness to proceed with peaceful democratic aspirations. Yet evidence from this study indicates that tensions and possible crisis or further violence of *ethno-political* nature, is not far from the realm of very real possibility.

Twenty-two years of autocratic rule, as this report has evidenced, does not automatically signal widespread, nor willing, participation in politics, nor the readiness of institutions or leadership proclivities to sustain democratic forms of deliberation and decision-making. Whereas transitions to democracy in general are prone to political hijacking, and backsliding, society now takes on the broader project to re-negotiate and re-articulate their goals and expectations, repudiating the legacy practices of the past. These issues will continue to characterize Gambia’s undemocratically-functional institutions as they continue to reform, while the expression of civil liberties, and the protection of human rights in this nascent transitional phase, must thus be observed with the passing of time, knowing that additional trials await transitional adolescence.<sup>74</sup> For many Gambians, these conditions foster reluctance and quiet frustrations, as people bide their time to see what both leaders and their neighbors have to say. Meanwhile, political participation and loyalties remain in flux and problematic, as well as once thriving intercommunity social interactions have become hollow, while political affiliations flow without rudder, rendered these cold, or perverse, in the words of some. Many social and political endeavors today are, for those of all ages and backgrounds, fraught with risks for lasting consequence.

Internal reports and assessments from Gambian ministries and international partners have identified similar challenges on the road to peace and development ahead. This includes the need for rebuilding institutions, political and security sector reform, addressing key development challenges and economic risks that lie at the heart of movement toward greater stability and realized expectations. Taking a whole-systems approach to analysis, however, this initiative provided a view to something categorically distinct from other assessments. At once verifying that many of the same issues generate apprehension amongst Gambians of all backgrounds and ages, the findings in this study further remind us that the mechanisms that manifest *resilience* amongst diverse communities have been systematically interrupted – at times co-opted or otherwise perverted in the minds and perceptions of so many. This is a national reflection expressed by almost all Gambian research

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<sup>73</sup> “Post-Conflict Transitions: National Experience and International Reform: Meeting Summary” (28-29 March 2005), International Peace Academy and the Center on International Cooperation. Available online: [https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/publications/post\\_conflict\\_transitions\\_c.pdf](https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/publications/post_conflict_transitions_c.pdf) (Accessed 30 May 2018)

<sup>74</sup> Siegle, J. (2012) “Overcoming Dilemmas of Democratization: Protecting Civil Liberties and the Right to Democracy” *Nordic Journal of International Law*, no.81 p. 505.

participants, signaling their cause for serious concern. Left to operate without redress and reform, the underlying socio-cultural systems as they stand today, and without repair undertaken through efforts to listen and comprehend existing fissures, are likely to undermine progress that any good faith political or economic efforts may otherwise aim to achieve.

Legislated efforts, as they have done thus far, will continue to push structural reform over time. In the short term, however, political and social leaders must also play critical and proactive roles, behaving and performing in accordance with widely expressed wishes for transparency and public accountability, demanded by citizens across the country. Attention must be given to reforming the very leadership modelling that authorities can use to promote national, as well as their own party platforms, in order to re-set the expectations inherent to a new state-society relationship and socio-cultural propensity for respecting top-authority, under the order maintained by Gambia's social traditions and institutions. This is particularly relevant to questions of gender-equity and pathways for youth, as youth consider how to navigate hybrid demands of tradition and modernity. As promised by the 2016 Coalition, the series of reforms are a key area in focus for this shift in leadership behavior, as indicators and public messaging suggest that business may simply transpire as usual. The efforts of political leaders, particularly in the executive, can go a long way to provide a national compass, calling for unity and ensuring that their commitments are carried out in kind. To that end, the recommendations herein emphasize the imperative peacebuilding premise of re-enabling a quality of trustworthy state-society interactions through inclusive spaces, which invite new relationships to form. This can begin to *interrupt* the more vicious of cycles that Gambians say *politicization* poses to the existing characteristics of a delicate coexistence.

Where repair and re-building norms of trust, alongside legal reforms, demand time, Gambians especially of a new generation are pining for the opportunity to see any changes in their social and economic status. Citizens within the state, as well as civic observers, seek a new type of inclusion and participation in their country. The creation and management of existing channels, forums, and the spaces or *new* mechanisms, heavily suppressed or politicized until now, are the mediums through which a new quality of interaction can be generated. But, much like the international partners including agencies and organizations supporting civil society and state institutions, Gambians today are relatively *new* to the formulations and machinations of democracy, which they are visiting again after 22 years of autocratic rule. There is rust to be removed and instruments to be re-polished, as national capacities have long *atrophied* under the autocratic paradigm.

Gambians are nevertheless prepared to be patient and, until now, to exercise restraint. This can and should be strategically and further encouraged, with national unity and belonging becoming a leading message expressed by leaders who can draw tactfully upon tradition, including the polemic *Maslaba* syndrome. Recognizing the dangers of *pacification* over *transformation* of conflict that *Maslaba* can pose, it can also afford, at a minimum, the basis of socio-cultural premise on which to transition and transform social orientations, sustaining civility, cordiality, and listening as fundamental to delivering justice long term. Although various elections have offered Gambian leaders a source of stability and *process*-based legitimacy, conclusions from this report shed light on evidence that suggests that the *formation* of a democratic Gambian state, including reforming structures, and the behaviors, actions, and communications of institutions, proposes the need for wider and more active public consultation, negotiation and assessment by everyday Gambians for legitimacy to settle more deeply. It is through the state's *performance-based* legitimacy<sup>75</sup> and responsiveness to its people, attending in key ways to issues that have been shown in the dynamics above, that the premises of *stability* will ultimately thrive. *Statebuilding*<sup>76</sup> and *peacebuilding*, while significantly congruent<sup>77</sup>, must not be mistaken for being

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<sup>75</sup> For more information see: Ramsbotham, A., and Wennmann, A., (eds). (2014) "Legitimacy and Peace Processes: From Coercion to Consent". Accord: An International Review of Peace Initiatives, Conciliation Resources, Issue 25.

<sup>76</sup> "Statebuilding is an endogenous process to enhance capacity, institutions and legitimacy of the state driven by state-society relations. (...) Positive state-building processes involve reciprocal relations between a state that delivers services for its people and social and political groups who constructively engage with their state. This necessarily requires the

identical. Rather, these must instead be understood as distinct, yet complementary in their purposes,<sup>78</sup>as Gambians seek to form a new political culture and institutional framework. Whereas statebuilding efforts propose remains an endogenous process to enhance the capacity of institutions involving the promotion of reciprocal relations,<sup>79</sup> *peacebuilding*, meanwhile, calls upon the use of particular methods and forms of engagement that are inclusive and widespread, which can mark the quality and frequency with which Gambians can feel more welcome and safe to vent frustrations, raise demands, deliberate, dialogue, negotiate, and be part of implementing the changes they voted to see. Key dynamics evidence the *imperative* need for attention to supporting conditions that improve, enable, and render more inclusive, state institutional efforts to facilitate movement (and avoid backsliding perceptions) toward democratic horizons, in all ways during transition.

In light of this, the recommendations below speak predominantly to such *peacebuilding* premises, which require the satisfaction of demands that weave together political and social concerns, in which political actors and institutions must develop strategically, manifesting a state formed and rooted in its society<sup>80</sup>. To that end, the data (and subsequent recommendations) posit and underscore the need to support a confidence-building orientation to new Gambia's democratic state formation. This becomes a conceptually useful optic for understanding where and how to mitigate conflict and instability in The Gambia's democratic transition, along with generating legitimacy. Gambians evidence both as being highly desirable. However, trust or confidence in current leadership's willingness to realize either, is far from manifest. Sustaining peaceful state formation will demand, in all sectors, gestures and actions (particularly communications) that are consistent and coherent, with the benefit of also being relatively financially low-cost. However, these demand the proactive preparation, participation, and coordinated, strategic guidance for leaders and institutions. Observers in civil society and other social institutional actors, including religious leaders, can incentivize, support, participate in, and reward or celebrate the state's efforts for realizing consensus-oriented efforts involving key stakeholders, in all significant policy related changes. Constitutional reform is a critical one that many wish to see more fully targeted through the national legislative body.

Manifesting inclusive and genuinely participatory processes should then lead to proposals that are generated as a result of *collaborative* efforts, which speak to the need to constitute and institute consultative, integrative endeavors as part of the status quo political culture. This is particularly relevant for re-engaging *youth* in particular, under sustainable conditions, across a gendered spectrum, through opportunities to continually enhance the listening and deliberation project that all state institutions can and should accommodate as a

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existence of inclusive political processes to negotiate state- society relations. (...) State building is intimately connected to the political processes through which social/political relations and power relationships between holders of state power and organized groups in society are negotiated and managed. This process is often violent, but it can provide the basis for developing state capacity and legitimacy, if the parties involved can identify common interests and negotiate arrangements to pursue them. (...) Legitimacy aids the process of state building, and is reinforced as state building delivers benefits for people. The state's ability to manage state-society expectations and state-building processes is influenced by the degree of legitimacy it has in the eyes of its population. As such, legitimacy is both a means and an end for successful state building. For more information, see: OECD/DAC (2008) "State Building in Situations of Fragility". Initial findings. Paris. Accessible online <http://gsdrc.org/document-library/state-building-in-situations-of-fragility-initial-findings/> (Accessed 30 May 2018).

<sup>77</sup> Grävingsholt, J., Gänzle, S. and Ziaja, S. (eds.) "Policy Brief – Concepts of Peacebuilding and State-Building: How Compatible are They?" German Development Institute. Available online: [https://www.gdi.de/uploads/media/Peacebuilding\\_and\\_Statebuilding\\_Draft\\_11-03-09\\_01.pdf](https://www.gdi.de/uploads/media/Peacebuilding_and_Statebuilding_Draft_11-03-09_01.pdf) (Accessed 30 May 2018)

<sup>78</sup> Van Brabant, K. (2010) "What Is Peacebuilding?: Statebuilding and Peacebuilding" Available online <http://navigation360.org/s/What-statebuilding-and-peacebuilding.pdf> (Accessed 30 May 2018).

<sup>79</sup> OECD/DAC (2008) "State Building in Situations of Fragility". Initial findings. Paris. Accessible online <http://gsdrc.org/document-library/state-building-in-situations-of-fragility-initial-findings/> (Accessed 30 May 2018)

<sup>80</sup> "Post-Conflict Transitions: National Experience and International Reform: Meeting Summary" (28-29 March 2005), International Peace Academy and the Center on International Cooperation. Available online: [https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/publications/post\\_conflict\\_transitions\\_c.pdf](https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/publications/post_conflict_transitions_c.pdf) (Accessed 30 May 2018)

*priority* issue within their regular practices of policy development, implementation, and reflective learning. As the recommendations posit, a variety of actors must come together to discuss and ensure such things unfold. Such convening must first be enabled by conditions that incentivize and allow them to thrive, lest such expectations lead to interrupted or dead-end outcomes, furthering demotivation and detachment from the nation. The interaction and premise of convening social actors such as youth together with governing authorities in regional or national forums, is also key. Similar things were called for by Gambians with regard to interactions amongst political party actors and civil society leaders, through a body such as the IPC, which must also be conceived of as *linking* micro spaces to macro impacts and communications to educate and sensitize Gambians at large.

In bearing witness, citizens and residents can become better partners and consumers of democracy, through conditions *and* institutional gestures that seek to enhance proximity and familiarity with each other, in ways that induce awareness, sensitivity, and education around civic expectations and responsibilities. This will ensure, too, that those who endeavor to lead politically may be assessed and evaluated fairly, in accordance to the nature of multiple and overlapping legal frameworks of statutory, customary, and religious frameworks. These require dialogical treatment, rather than subordination or simplification to political proclivities, in order to define for citizens when, how, and where they might be used differently under the scope of new reforms.

Tolerance and respect for dissenting opinions and divergent views, to be channeled through non-violence interactions (including mechanisms such as the ballot, which Gambia has already proven itself in subsequent cycles to do without major interruption or violence), must also be given permission to emerge. To that end, recommendations also point to ways that can, alongside the 'harder' state infrastructure and policy reconfigurations, strengthen the premises and conditions for a particularly *Gambian*-type democratic culture and socio-culturally appropriate legitimacy, to thrive. Given the premise of the youth bulge, much of this will feature in negotiation *amongst* various generations, for which consensus-oriented collaborative practices can generate new demands and corresponding state practices on the basis of state *performance*. Re-visiting the premises of what democracy means for all Gambians is key in the face of critiques that few positive 'vertical' dynamics and connections exist between the governing and the governed at large.

These processes, which Gambians feel most prominently in their *absence*, requires something *more* than simple capacity-building. It calls attention instead to re-establishing conditions and expectations through new spaces of interaction, which must underpin actor or institutional capacity, and which can be supported within the purview of more coordinated and integrated statebuilding and peacebuilding efforts. Developing the *capabilities* to move The Gambia forward, thus requires a strategic peacebuilding orientation delivered by institutions through policy, as well as those identified as the most critical and endogenous engines for peace.

## Recommendations

### Transparent & Accountable Governance: Reforms, Public Confidence & Communication

- a. In parallel to the reform efforts already underway, a strategic and public **communication plan should be developed and implemented**, to provide regular **high-level authority messaging** to inform the public about reforms and progress. Ideally, this should be done in a coordinated way amongst institutions, so as to **avoid mixed messaging**, and in ways that demonstrates **coherency and representative voices from relevant institutions**, who can weigh in on specific steps and timelines of reforms. All such communications should be delivered through carefully considered channels or sources, which must be **informed by evidence through consultation processes** to identify citizen's media consumption behaviors (especially social media), as well as **translated into various languages**, so as to reach across regions, ages, and ethno-linguistic backgrounds.
- b. President Barrow himself, or a known, appointed representative, can do much to move beyond press conferences to **more accessible forms of interaction and information dissemination** for the public, and to create **enhanced public leadership visibility**, as a means to help restore public trust in the office of the Executive. This can foster more accessible and widely disseminated public messaging (using diverse mediums and in prominent national-languages), which can be done by **sending regular, coherent, supportive, and unifying communications** to: (1) **Promote national and ethnic unity and belonging** from a top public authority, ideally in conjunction or collaboration with pan-religious allies and trusted public opinion shapers, and; (2) **Raise civic awareness amongst Gambians about the progress of reforms**, and executive decisions taken in this regard, following the aforementioned target audience communication premises.
- c. In support of this, leaders and institutions can encourage and support conditions by which public councils/committees, comprised of ethnically diverse and regionally diverse elected leaders, work together to **formulate common agendas for, and hold regularly scheduled, consultative public processes, ongoing processes and content of all major reforms**, thereby helping to manage and channel citizen demands regarding all ongoing, as well as future/desired reforms (e.g. SSR, local government act, land reform, constitutional reforms, etc.);
- d. In terms of SSR and Transitional Justice reform: (a) Political leaders should be more vocal and visible in their support, encouragement, and demonstration of willingness to **systematize inter-agency collaboration and coordination**, with emphasis on; (b) Proactive efforts to ensure improved and **supportive inter-agency relationships**, as well as institutional practices that **improve upon perception management and delivery of security as a public good**. Critical amongst these are information sharing, and conducting, where possible, joint exercises such as in operations and internal training initiatives, supporting civil affairs to **enhance community relations**, modernizing and professionalizing, as well as **requiring 'soft-skills' training in problem-solving, communication, and mediation** to accompany the delivery of 'rebranding' of the security sector. This must be accompanied by **opportunities and community-outreach events that actively improve a reformed public image and perception**, lifting up the role of women and young people to lead creative and delivery efforts that contribute to general civic-awareness/education raising. **Specific emphasis must be given to improving relationships between security personnel and youth**, as well as any disaffected communities in **hot-spot areas identified**.
- e. All social and political leaders in all institutions, particularly Gambian men, must encourage and **support conditions for appropriate and proactive advancement to the existing gender representation, promoting increased and meaningful women's inclusion in public representative institutions and political leadership structures/roles** (specific to affirmative quota representation in the National Assembly, removing obstacles to political party candidacy,

- increased executive roles and cabinet representation, IPC membership, etc.). New structures emergent during transition, as well as existing reform processes, should each receive **gender-audits and commitments by existing members to proactively supporting any identified deficits**.
- f. In line with related recommendations, enable the **material and budgetary conditions** (e.g. basic financial wherewithal), and **capacities for a high-level political platform** in which state and civil society actors can build and **sustain regular and inclusive dialogue**. This can encourage leadership accountability, as well as reduce tendencies and perceptions around misappropriated tribal control or decision-making power. Currently, a body such as the IPC, which is a possible contender for improvement, remains an ad-hoc body, convened only during a crisis moment, has no clear statutory mandate, strategic trajectory, or dedicated budget. Despite the clear need for public/participatory deliberation, information sharing, and national agenda-related discussions on which it theoretically stands, the **IPC suggests clear capacity-deficits necessary for it to become a meaningful dialogue** forum in which participating actors can function effectively and in good faith to pursue such ends. Beyond requisite dialogical process preparation for members, this includes emphasis on **non-partisan management and secretariat functions**.
  - g. Create appropriate **oversight mechanisms led by both state and civil society actors**, as well as an incentive structure, to encourage **legal adherence in the application the Local Government Act (LGA)**. This should **emphasize devolution and decentralization** of authority and decision-making processes affecting the public good, particularly in line with **ensuring that youth are afforded their due localized leadership and resource support structures**. Emphasis on existing legal provisions and resources (e.g. VDC/WDC representation, space, and funding), must be a baseline starting place, though efforts to further develop youth participation in these governance structures must not remain limited to this.
  - h. Carry out, as much as possible, **citizen-forums for consultation, not just on reforms, but also on broader national vision questions including citizenship and identity issues** that can be committed to policy formulation and guidance on implementation. These can at once improve civic awareness and confidence in the state, **especially amongst youth and women, while fostering enhanced vertical relations that build trust with the state through active participation in deliberating with leaders**, while holding government accountable to citizen expectations and existing laws.

### Social Cohesion, Identity & Citizenship

- a. Incentivize and support leaders and institutions in the security sector (e.g. rank and file, too, in Police and the GAF, and in general security services, including critically, to support *prison* reform and enhanced effectiveness of the justice system), as well as broader political leadership to professionalize through **orientations to republican ideals, norms and practices**, together with the aforementioned soft-skills (i.e. communication, mediation, and problem-solving, etc.) as a fundamental basis on which to govern and implement policies of Gambian institutions, fulfill democratic leadership roles and responsibilities in public office and institutional management.
- b. Redress and publicize the processes of **standard/criteria setting in terms of security sector and civil service staff recruitment**, broadcasting and **sensitizing the public** to specific pathways for institutional leadership advancement, under the similar pretext of democratic and responsive citizenship ideals that characterize citizen expectations in the new political dispensation.
- c. Enable capacities and conditions, networking platforms, strategies and tactics to **rewrite civil society-driven public education and awareness raising efforts** (in conjunction with public-opinion leaders). This should include **non-partisan support of media awareness campaigns** to sensitize the public on all reforms of news and information sources, which can be done thematically, for instance, to **capitalize on current and anticipated reform processes** (e.g. Constitutional, SSR, Transitional Justice, etc.).
- d. Enable capacities and conditions, networking platforms, strategies and tactics for civil society-driven (and in conjunction with Religious leaders) public education and media campaigns to **sensitize the**



**Gambian public on applicable concepts and practices of reconciliation**, healing, and dealing with grievances in informal and community settings. This must include training and orientations to the realities of negative consequences related to poor or uncoordinated efforts amongst civil society and the state, as institutions and organizations work toward efforts in reforming systems and dealing with the past. Capacity-building in terms of enabling conflict-sensitive, gender-aware, as well as culturally- and linguistically-appropriate process-design orientations must be considered as strategic, specific to supporting the existing concerns and endeavors evidenced in relation/parallel to all Transitional Justice initiatives, and the TRRC, as well as for **addressing sub-group concerns beyond the existing boundaries of Transitional Justice reform efforts.**

- e. In light of addressing the sub-regional focus around citizenship and statelessness, which have specific relevance to young people, their exercise of their individual rights, and the need for more meaningful participation in politics, as well as for improving social relationships across ethnic and related group lines, **enable conditions for promoting high-level political discussion, dialogue, and action toward clarity around national identity and citizenship.** This must be done directly and broadly through public forums that are inclusive and gender-balanced. **This can be encouraged through a shared convening initiative driven by bodies including ECOWAS** and other appropriate international actors, so as to ensure that concerns are recognized and placed on the agenda as needing urgent attention, **openly addressing and taking care to avoid privileging of specific domestic or international interests that may politicize or inhibit the spirit of this cause** in this transitional environment. This should also be complemented by dedicated efforts and broad sectoral commitments to consult with youth, specific to addressing identity-related questions.
- f. Enable capacities and conditions, networking platforms, strategies and tactics for civil society driven (and in conjunction other public opinion shapers) public education and **media campaigns/awareness raising regarding Gambian constitutional rights and legal processes around existing citizenship and residency acquisition**, which should also become a critical component for high-level political discussion in the immediate timeframe.
- g. Support, where possible, **national capacities in public administration and public relations**, with a view to **increasing the practices of conflict sensitivity by members of the Executive**, in line with the National Development Plan programming and implementation, **promoting and enhancing the visibility and proximity of public office holders to disaffected communities.** As noted earlier, this includes **activities and messaging in conjunction with any future or new/regular consultation forums** that convene and enable more frequent citizen participation in terms of rebranding the state-society relationship.
- h. Capacitate and support civil society and religious leaders through dedicated training and awareness campaigns, as well as involvement in key deliberative forums with political leaders, so as to support and **promote citizen orientation to secularism and republicanism in public service** (vs. tribal-centric and patronage politics) as the basis on which citizens can hold public/elected officials accountable, while **respecting religious freedoms of expression and deliberation on key national issues.**

### **Natural Resource Management, Land Ownership & Access**

- a. Engage actors from state and local government, as well as religious, and civil society actors in a sustained process by which to **study, debate, and introduce the need for clarity around local dispute resolution systems.** This should be done in function of **facilitating and promoting the National Assembly to mandate the Act based on the Constitutional provision calling for a Land Commission**, which remains unrealized, but which could serve to arbitrate or clarify final ownership rights and physical planning directives for clear mapping out of property ownership countrywide. Attention must be given in this exercise to issues around farmland management, claims over rice fields, wetlands, joint and community owned land, community woodlots, and Government reserve areas.

- b. **Infuse process-oriented, gender- and conflict-sensitive conflict management capacities into the dispute resolution repertoire of Chiefs and Alkalos and other (i.e. religious) leaders**, to include gender-concept awareness and generation-specific cultural issues. This should be complemented by improving **access and reducing backlogs** weighing down or causing undue pressure to local governance conditions or enabling structures to resolve disputes (e.g. trusted dispute forums like ADRS), as well as **sensitization and media campaigns**, to locally disseminate information and enable citizen-proactivity to **competently utilize existing mechanisms in appropriate sequence**, according to the nature of the dispute or level of complexity;
- c. **The Department of Physical Planning**, represented at the community level by surveyors and their work facilities to facilitate land mapping in rural areas, **must benefit from skill-building and improved digital technologies and human resource supports**, to include data collecting, management systems and related technique-training, specifically tied to the imperative of enabling and orienting these civil services to better ensure that proper documentation and record keeping is conducted regarding lands, plots and all regular (especially rural) surveying activities. Any **initiatives in this regard should be linked to the way that citizens are made aware of such services and institutional functions in public sensitization projects** stated earlier, in line with instructional orientation to where and how they can be used, both by citizens, and by other state agencies/entities along a chain;
- d. **Create an autonomous, gender-balanced, multi-stakeholder body** in composition (e.g., NGOs, government, business community, youth and women leadership, etc.) **charged with inspecting and monitoring natural resource concessions** (mining, logging, fishing, etc.) in collaboration with relevant government authorities (Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Agriculture, the Police, Navy, Ministry of Fisheries and Water Resources, Local Government and Lands). Such a body may call for, or **investigate and enforce, as well as receive complaints** about related issues by citizens, and conduct gender-sensitive forums for listening, in order to **monitor and ensure that concessions granted are both legal and sustainable** for particular sub-group benefit, and that appropriate dispute resolution mechanisms and mediators are deployed and effective, where appropriate. **The body should be fiscally autonomous** (a fixed budget for the agency plus some portion of license revenues and fines for infractions) and **administratively autonomous**. (e.g., The Board of Directors cannot simply be hired and fired at will by any sitting Minister). There must be **clear criteria for membership** and acquisition of position established by a representative body, with **public contest for the candidates**, who must be confirmed via public process, preferably by a committee of the National Assembly, together with a **gender-balanced citizen review for ensuring gender-centric design purposes**. The body must have annual **external audits** with the results available to the public;
- e. Capacitate and enable central government institutions (and the abovementioned multi-stakeholder body), in conjunction with civil society actors, in ways that **enable viable systems for the licensing, oversight, production line monitoring and transit of natural resource use and extraction** for timber, fishing/water use, and sand-mining, in conjunction with civil society actor oversight. Attention must be given to the design or review of existing mechanisms for updates, specific to following regulations or **practices that practically encourage and support, as well as legally protect redress by citizens or state institutions** (i.e. protection for whistleblowers);
- f. Promote and enable conditions to **sustain community-engagement that includes consultative practices and feedback sessions about land and resource management** as key national agenda issues, in order to further refine the policy orientation, strategies and implementation tactics in terms of local development and law enforcement, which includes ensuring that public decision-making is driven by the identified needs and priorities evidenced by data and community input. This involves, specifically, **proactively inviting and engaging the voices of youth and women in forums appropriate to clearly discern their input, as drivers for defining discussions in the identification of priorities and/or agendas**;
- g. Promote the awareness of citizen/consumers and commercial actors around Corporate Social Responsibility, **facilitating consultation, proximity and incentives for enhanced public/private**

**partnership**, supported by priorities and concerns discerned through dialogue amongst citizens and regional/local government entities and leaders;

### **Informed Dialogue, Public Participation & Civic Education**

- a. In support of the Constitutional Reform Process, **enable the National Civic Education Council with sufficient resources to carry forward its mandate**. Interdependently, kick-start citizen and national-assembly awareness campaigns, refining these culturally, linguistically, and by region, for appropriate delivery and effectiveness, in conjunction with civil society and local advisors who are also nationally networked with each other. **Emphasis is given to promoting participatory dialogue and debate around any and all laws that have been identified by the public as inhibiting or suppressing freedom of expression and information**, of and by the public, in visible or invisible (i.e. structural) ways. Examples mentioned in this report are priority, including rebranding, and trust- and confidence-building related to laws on sedition, registry of organizations, and the tax regulatory framework (related to registration and operation of civil society organizations, as well as news sources, e.g. print and online media, printing materials, and telecommunications, national television as a public vs. state broadcaster, for instance);
- b. Encourage confidence building amongst, **support to, and involvement of all generations of Gambian artists and musicians**, especially those who have felt persecuted under the past regimes, enabling them to **participate more willingly and actively in the national project of unity, tension-reduction, tolerance building, civic awareness**, and belonging-oriented projects associated with central and local government-sponsored events and processes. The delivery of unity- and civic-awareness oriented messaging by musicians and artists can be done through existing frameworks of popular social gatherings and festivals, at the community level, though must be promoted more fervently **at the national level, as a means of connecting all regions, which celebrate and ascribe meaning to different holidays or national events**, differently. These should be specifically tailored to those celebrations and events commemorating superordinate meanings, i.e. days/periods that promote national unity itself, focused around Gambian-democratic ideals and discussions. **Emphasis must be placed on mutually reinforcing messages, which include building and embedding narratives for supporting tolerance for *divergent political ideas and opinions*, as well as non-violent public expression and restraint, which encourages peaceful civic exchange**. Counter narratives that dissuade civic intolerance, and the use of inflammatory language, hate speech, proliferation of ethnic prejudices, and/or any other forms of speech, interaction, or arrangements that encourage division and incitement, must be strengthened and proliferate widely.
- c. Foster capacity-building opportunities and **ensure for conditions conducive to sustaining inter-religious dialogue amongst religious leaders, between leaders and communities, and across religious and legal systems in terms of dispute resolution**. Emphasis should be given to objectives that include, but are not limited to: (1) **De-escalating** tensions of inter-ethnic and intra-religious sort; (2) **Enhancing formal mechanisms of communication** across echelons of local and national leadership between religious and secular leaders, and; (3) **Encouraging clarity and harmonization or integration of overlapping justice systems** (e.g. religious, customary, and statutory).

### **Citizen Safety, Responsiveness & Coordination of Security Actors**

- a. Encourage the **increased visibility and regularity of Gambian security force patrols** to increase national visibility, specifically around national **borders deemed “hot spot” areas** where sense of community insecurity related to cross-border issues like cattle rustling, weapons possession, or criminal trespass is cited as high (URR, LRR, WCR). This should occur irrespective of the presence of ECOMIG bases, but also in joint patrols with ECOMIG where possible, **so as to increase the confidence of Gambians in their security forces, and increasingly promote a sense of security** through identifiable border demarcation.

- b. In line with the abovementioned, Gambian security forces and civil society/media should **conduct joint awareness-raising and public outreach campaigns and events**, highlighting the roles and responsibility of the Gambian military and police, as well as sensitivity and information about rights and civic responsibilities, and expectations for behaviors when citizens interact with these institutions. This should include public awareness regarding the activities or trajectory of the ongoing SSR processes. Such efforts can work toward **counteracting rumors and deleterious perceptions promoted by those who believe that any reform process in the security sector will be carried out along discriminatory/ethnic lines**.
- c. **Disseminate widely and build awareness around the mandate of ECOMIG** and distinctions in relation to public safety in association with other security agencies, educating the public about the diverse institutional roles and responsibilities. This is critical for **enhancing constructive community relations with ECOMIG**, and for reducing confusion, uncertainty, and skepticism about the dominance of Senegalese forces stationed in The Gambia under ECOMIG during transition.
- d. Develop an **exchange program between The Gambia and partner countries that have successfully advised upon, and implemented SSR programs that have demonstrated enviable sustainable results based on hard evidence**, and fruition of original objectives and/or outgrowths, specific to model countries (e.g. the UK or Ghana), and those that have experienced low-intensity internal conflict and transitions from autocratic to democratic rule (e.g. from Latin American or African contexts, where ethnic or racial tensions were particularly salient).

### Meaningful Participation, Inclusion, and Ownership of and by Youth

- a. **Stand-up structures and responsive governance policies for the coordinated institutional management of returnee reintegration**. This must rely upon dedicated long-term funding that commits government and civil society together to study, develop strategies for, equip and capacitate institutions, as well as oversee (through civilian monitoring by appropriate government bodies and entities, e.g. the Ministry of Interior and Youth/Sports, Ministry of Health, Defense Ministry, Labor, etc.), holistic reintegration processes. **This must begin immediately, and include first and foremost practices of consultative dialogue that convenes and facilitates targeted discussions with returnees and other youth, in support of institutional decision-making and learning** or contextualizing of ideas, leading to a more attentive, culturally appropriate, and resource-leveraging possibilities. Such forums **should be designed in a participatory manner collaboratively with youth in leadership roles, as well as publicized and preserved through reporting**, in the spirit of inter-generational confidence building and appropriateness of any and all programming efforts.
- b. At the level of Central Government institutions, **implement immediate and gender-disaggregated data collection protocols and management systems**, with a focus on developing a systems-oriented ‘multi-door’ approach to individual screening for physical and psychological health of returnees, coordinated by a representative group of collaborating Immigration Officials, Youth and Sports Ministry, Health Officials, and Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and others. Civil society leaders who can, too, help to coordinate with decentralized structures for support and monitoring of at-risk individuals or regional sub-populations of returnees, especially in **concentration or hot spots, must be supported, with means to account for prevention around the risks of political instrumentalization and radicalization**.
- c. Create a task force, balanced in gender and generational composition, as well as religious, ethnic, and political affiliation, to begin the process of **standing up a national risk assessment protocol for returnees on the basis of a Structured Professional Judgment (SPJ) approach**<sup>81</sup> related to screening and orientation to all reintegration practices in line with assessing the risk of radicalization

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<sup>81</sup> For more information, see: <https://www.apa.org/pubs/journals/releases/amp-amp0000121.pdf> (Accessed 30 May 2018)

- and violence. Such a body should draw from effective and ethical experiences in neighboring/regional and exemplary partner countries (e.g. UK, Denmark, or EU-funded SAFIRE, USIP, etc.), which can also provide recommendations around the strategic imperative of information-gathering efforts. Such efforts should reflect sound strategic and complementary or strategic peacebuilding premises during implementation, **vis-à-vis aforementioned peace engines.**
- d. Support religious leader and civil society efforts (existing or new) to enhance public awareness raising and **leader-driven initiatives to defuse and de-escalate gender-specific social, and psychological pressures and violence, faced by youth and young people.** Adult leaders or ‘accessible’ opinion-shapers, aside from youth leadership itself, should also be **capacitated, enabled, and incentivized to engage in early warning and prevention.** This includes first contact use of mediation and de-escalation skills to facilitate pro-social relationships, as well as addressing high levels of domestic violence. Such **adult leaders must be encouraged to improve upon their active mentorship with youth, which can support more meaningful participation,** individual and collective resiliency-building, and successful reintegration of returnees.
  - e. In line with inter- and intra-religious dialogue mentioned above, **support Gambian and international civil society, as well as religious counterparts to build a targeted awareness campaign for adults, parents and families, on the complexities of Gambian youth culture and conflict-driving vulnerabilities.** This should work toward genuinely and appropriately **limiting or eliminating of push-factors related to ‘backway exodus’ decision-making,** as well as reintegration challenges such as the social stigma and culturally-normative labels of young Gambians as ‘failures’. In the transitional environment, this must be **linked to efforts to promote inter-ethnic social cohesion through pro-social youth interactions such as sports or other type of social clubs,** as well as draw upon processes that ensure gender-specific inclusion and participation into the design and delivery of such activities.
  - f. With a focus on enabling greater continuity of education-trajectories, and training-to-employment alignment offered by the public system, **studies and evidence-based action should be undertaken to create better alignment between youth interests and existing or new market opportunities.** This must be supported by proactive consultation forums with, and led by, youth and existing institutional partners, in order to illuminate, **track and respond to gendered aspirations and interests.**
  - g. Enable provisions, capacity-building, planning, and mobilizing resources, through localized governance structures and private/public partnerships as well as existing social structures and institutions, to **develop gender-responsive youth leadership and employment opportunities, made accessible within communities in all regions, appropriately, and based on evidence.** This should include core skills-development and conceptual education in peacebuilding and conflict resolution skills and processes, as well as sensitivity/awareness training on youth rights and preventing violence extremism, which can be supported through local adult leaders and mentors from state, civil society, and religious actors. **Community-orientated projects that enable local economic reinvestment, and of investments in proactive local peace work and mobilization, must be carried out in the spirit of supporting and building new models of leadership from within local environments on a decentralized scale,** drawing upon existing social institutions and the energy and strength offered by Gambia’s young demographic, to help communities move away from politicized and autocratic paradigms of perceptions, thinking, and action.





