

Policy pointers

Government and development partners should collaborate to carry out integrated and whole-of-country needs-based impact assessments (including filling data gaps) as part of the COVID-19 recovery and investment planning process.

Building a shared vision for the COVID-19 recovery plan — underpinned by core principles that centre on people, sustainability, resilience and leaving no one behind — offers a timely opportunity to place The Gambia's development agenda on a sustainable pathway.

It is important to define priority strategies for the country's COVID-19 recovery based on context-specific opportunities that address economic, social and environmental elements of development in tandem.

Digitalisation, green financing, systems for cross-sectoral coordination, an enhanced knowledge base, a robust policy and regulatory environment and effective international partnerships are critical enablers for effective COVID-19 recovery in The Gambia.

Planning a green and resilient COVID-19 recovery in The Gambia

The impacts of COVID-19 are being felt across The Gambia's socioeconomic landscape, exacerbating existing inequalities and threatening hard-won progress. In response, the government has partnered with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), establishing a secretariat to reprioritise the current national development plan (NDP) to serve as a blueprint for a resilient and green recovery — one with people, nature and climate at its core. There is a strong policy landscape to build on; revised plans must offer continuity for the gains and momentum achieved by the existing NDP and reform agenda. Here, we explore the considerations and requirements that must underpin effective COVID-19 recovery planning in The Gambia, and propose strategic interventions. Much of the thinking will be applicable to the recovery journeys of other Least Developed Countries (LDCs).

COVID-19 hit The Gambia's socioeconomic landscape hard. The pandemic and measures imposed to curb its spread diminished revenues and incomes, increased expenditures on often already pressured social sectors like health and education, and reduced or halted economic activities in many productive sectors.¹

Vulnerable groups bear the greatest burden, particularly women (the dominant economic actors in the informal sector), children, older people, persons with disabilities (PWD) and those with pre-existing health conditions. The probability of being employed is significantly lower since COVID-19 took hold; meanwhile 67% of family-owned businesses report a decline in income, particularly within the services sector.²

The Gambia is not alone. Fallout from COVID-19 has affected the economic performance of fellow

LDCs, threatening to roll back progress on sustainable development, worsen entrenched inequalities and cause long-term damage. From October 2019 to October 2020, LDCs' economic growth forecast was revised sharply downwards from 5% to -0.4% — the group's worst economic outcome in 30 years.³ This significant reversal of the economic and social progress of recent years renders achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) a distant prospect.³

From this macroeconomic perspective, COVID-19 has triggered unprecedented hurdles for The Gambia's 2018–2021 NDP. The diverse scope and multidimensional nature of the disruptions confirms that any COVID-19 response and recovery must go beyond human health to encompass many multisectoral issues.⁴ The Gambia must simultaneously address the double crisis of a pandemic and climate change through

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programmes and investment plans that also strengthen financial resilience, reflecting the characteristics of green and resilient recovery.

Moreover, as The Gambia and other LDCs define robust frameworks for green and resilient

recovery, there are several context-specific strategies (and challenges) that the government should consider.

Where do we start?

Fully assess needs and impacts

The numerous COVID-19-related studies generated in The Gambia over the past year include a

government impact assessment (produced with the support from the UN country team), designed to help inform an actionable and sustainable recovery plan.¹ Partners in the public and private sectors have also published COVID-19 impact assessments focusing on a range of thematic issues.⁵

An integrated needs-based impact assessment ordinarily covers all sectors of the economy (see Table 1). But our review of available COVID-19 impact assessments in The Gambia reveals both thematic and geographical data gaps, meaning some sectors have not been fully explored and others have not been explored across all regions (see Figure 1). An effective national recovery plan must be truly comprehensive; further ‘deep dives’ and additional assessments on pending sectors and geographical areas are needed (see Figure 2). It is imperative that the government and development partners collaborate on an integrated needs-based impact assessment across the whole country as part of the COVID-19 recovery planning process (including filling data gaps); this should identify both vulnerabilities and strategic priorities.

Where do we want to be?

Develop a vision for resilient recovery that leaves no one behind

Recovery from COVID-19 is not about returning to ‘normal’ or maintaining the status quo; rather, we must seek transformational change through learning, behaviour change, investments, innovation and creative thinking. Only then can we enable more sustainable pathways for growth. The Gambia has an opportunity to reset its development trajectory by reprioritising its NDP into a COVID-19 recovery plan that is people-centred, resilient, green and leaves no one behind.

The Gambia’s robust climate and environmental policy landscape presents a foundation for transformational change. Commitments to numerous goals and targets provide a basis from which to drive forward a more resilient and green development future; examples exist in the 2015 Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC), 2016 National Climate Change Policy (NCCP), 2017 Strategic Programme for Climate Resilience (SPCR), 2019–2021 National Drought Operations Plan and 2030 Low Emissions Climate Resilient Development Strategy (LECRDS). By emphasising a foundation of resilience, and incorporating social and environmental considerations into recovery interventions, The Gambia can minimise the cost of future disruptions, be they health or climate related.

Moreover, considering how COVID-19 has exacerbated existing inequalities and structural barriers, recovery must also be inclusive and feature the right balance of actions to identify and monitor those left behind. All green and resilient recovery interventions must put marginalised groups first throughout the process, from concept to delivery.⁶

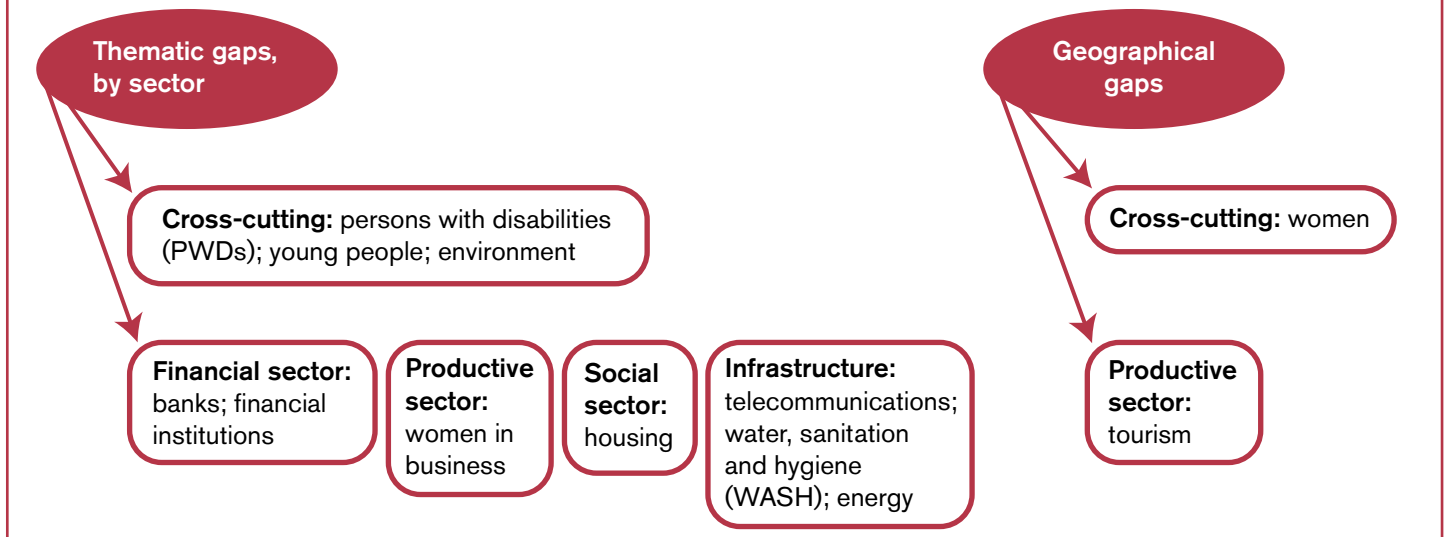
The Gambia is completing formulation of its 2050 Climate Vision,⁷ moving towards climate resilience and net zero carbon emissions by 2050 (serving as the bedrock for the forthcoming Long-Term Strategy [LTS] for Low Greenhouse Gas

Table 1. Sectors typically covered by an integrated needs-based impact assessment

Sector	Key sub-sectors
Finance	Banks; financial institutions
Human and social development	SDGs; Human Development Index; poverty
Infrastructure	Water, sanitation and hygiene; energy; transport; telecoms
Macroeconomics	GDP; balance of trade (revenues and expenditures)
Productive	Agriculture; fisheries; tourism; trade; industry
Social	Education; housing; health
Cross-cutting	Governance; gender; persons with disabilities; environment

Adapted from: Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery, 2013. Post-Disaster Needs Assessment Guidelines, Volume A. European Commission, The United Nations Development Group and the World Bank

Figure 1. Data gaps in COVID-19 impact assessments completed in The Gambia to date



Emissions and Climate Resilient Development, as called for in the Paris Agreement). The country will also soon embark on articulating its new National Development Vision for 2050. At this significant moment, The Gambia has a unique opportunity to align its upcoming national recovery plan with the LTS and its overarching vision.

**How do we get there?
Strategically address economic, social and environmental elements of development, in tandem**

If a country's recovery pathway is guided by a shared vision, with an understanding of the 'who' and 'why' elements of 'leave no one behind', the conditions are right for it to empower stakeholder voices and achieve meaningful citizen participation, while also delivering strategies that spur real and accountable change. Indeed, the next step is to design interventions and financing options which harness context-specific opportunities for maximum progress towards the SDGs.⁸

For The Gambia, the following strategic interventions could provide the greatest impact and co-benefits, felt across society:

Integrate resilience into domestic budgets. The 2021 budget emphasises infrastructural investments, which should create much-needed jobs as the pandemic continues and offer an opportunity to ensure roads and other infrastructure are climate resilient. Specialised tools providing access to pre-approved funds to help prepare for and respond to natural hazards and other crises would enhance resilience of The Gambia's financial system.⁹

Promote nature-based solutions in productive sectors; integrate strong social

protection measures for vulnerable groups.

Government should consider applying nature-based solutions in critical sectors while pursuing green recovery measures to rebuild the economy. Prime candidates for this pro-poor reorientation are the agriculture, infrastructure, tourism and other service sectors as well as the extractive industry. In the case of natural or green infrastructural development, nature-based solutions can deliver significant benefits; for example, reforestation and mangrove restoration can minimise the number and intensity of flooding events and issues around decreasing ground water levels. Introducing a sustainability focus to the tourism sector — including highlighting 'blue tourism' — could attract visitors as well as other benefits. A key consideration for any action is what benefits might be expected from restoration/regeneration of natural capital and biodiversity conservation.

Grow renewable energy. Expanding access to electricity through bold growth in renewable

Figure 2. Key cross-cutting enablers for a resilient and green recovery from COVID-19



energy is a major opportunity in the context of COVID-19 recovery. Biomass, including fuelwood, accounts for about 80% of the country's energy supply and more than 90% of household energy consumption — reaching up to 97% in some rural areas. Dependence on imported fuel oil has become a burden on the economy, and currently 98% of the power generated and distributed from the main grid comes from fossil fuels.¹⁰ The share of renewable energy, mainly solar, is negligible at 0.03%, despite plentiful sunshine.¹¹ Access to energy remains relatively low in The Gambia's rural areas (at 26.8%), contrasting with urban access (76.4%).¹² Given the enormous potential for energy to drive economic growth and social development, increasing access is a priority in The Gambia's current NDP. This should be maintained in recovery thinking: green and solar energy is an area with huge potential and the government should take policy measures to harness it.

Create green jobs. Unemployment is widespread, especially among young people (41.5%).¹³ It is critical that support for new and growing sectors (such as green technologies, the digital economy) is integrated into economic recovery plans and long-term development strategies. In doing so, reconstruction of the productive system can be an opportunity to accelerate transition towards a green economy. Green jobs are an important indicator of successful transition; rendering analysis of the status of green and decent employment and of the potential for future job creation is a necessary first step on the path to a green economy. Monitoring progress towards prioritising green job opportunities will also help ensure the inclusion of women, young people and informal workers.¹⁴

Enhance sustainable agricultural resilience.

As the second largest sector in the economy, agriculture accounts for about 24% of GDP and provides livelihood opportunities for most of the country's poorest people. The sector's poor performance in recent years has increased rural poverty and volatile GDP growth. Agriculture is among the sectors most vulnerable to climate change and is a significant contributor of greenhouse gas emissions. Restorative

agriculture and integrating climate-smart and nature-based solutions to enhance resilience and productivity should be explored. For example, agroforestry can promote ecological, economic and social benefits, and contributes to several SDGs. It is also an effective tool for supporting women's right to income from the land they cultivate.¹⁵ Investments in agroforestry can be designed to economically empower women and enhance carbon sequestration.

Opportunity for transformation

As The Gambia grapples with the impacts of COVID-19, recovery planning is a priority. In choosing green, resilient recovery pathways, the country can use this crisis as an opportunity to pursue wider and more fundamental restructuring of critical sectors and activities. In doing so, it can support a transition to low-emission, climate-resilient and resource-efficient development in socially inclusive ways, as well as enhance economic resilience.

While the pandemic means development planning and implementation must adapt, it is important that The Gambia remains committed to safeguarding the gains of its current NDP and to pursuing a reformist agenda. Reprioritising the 2018–2021 NDP can deliver on all these ambitions, keeping the best results and learnings of previous initiatives while creating a strategy fit to meet the new socioeconomic realities. Designing a recovery plan that is green, resilient and people-centred offers what Mambury Njie, The Gambia's minister of finance and economic affairs, described as an “unprecedented opportunity”: the chance to press the reset button and place The Gambia's development agenda on an even more sustainable pathway.

Samba B Jallow, Isatou F Camara and Gabrielle S A Swaby

Samba B Jallow is the head of the Secretariat for the Re-Prioritized National Development Plan / COVID-19 Socio-Economic and Recovery Secretariat and technical adviser to Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs, UNDP, The Gambia. Isatou F Camara is principal development planner in the Directorate of Development Planning, Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs. Gabrielle S A Swaby is a researcher in IIED's Climate Change Group.



Knowledge Products

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Contact

Gabrielle Swaby
gabrielle.swaby@iied.org

Samba Batch Jallow
samba.batch.jallow@undp.org

Third Floor, 235 High Holborn
London, WC1V 7DN
United Kingdom

Tel: +44 (0)20 3463 7399
www.iied.org

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Notes

¹ UN The Gambia (2020) Socioeconomic Impact of COVID-19 in The Gambia. A Rapid Assessment. <https://tinyurl.com/282cfnf4> / ² The Gambia Bureau of Statistics and The World Bank (2020) COVID-19: Impact on Households Wellbeing Monitoring, The Gambia. High Frequency Survey. From October 28–November 14, 2020. Newsletter No. 2. November 2020. / ³ UNCTAD (2020) The Least Developed Countries Report 2020. Productive capacities for the new decade. <https://tinyurl.com/hje9y83b> / ⁴ OECD (2020) Building Back Better: A Sustainable, Resilient Recovery after COVID-19. <https://tinyurl.com/stmznz4dy> / ⁵ Based on authors' compilation of available assessments. / ⁶ Stuart, E and Samman, E (2017) Defining 'leave no one behind'. ODI, UK. / ⁷ Government of The Gambia (forthcoming) 2050 Climate Vision. Email correspondence with author. / ⁸ UNDP (2018) What Does It Mean To Leave No One Behind? A UNDP Discussion Paper and Framework for Implementation. <https://tinyurl.com/3x5sdbc3> / ⁹ ACP-EU Natural Disaster Risk Reduction Program (2018) Strengthening resilience to climate and disaster risks during a global pandemic. <https://tinyurl.com/a2y4sab7> / ¹⁰ International Trade Administration (2020) Gambia - Country Commercial Guide. <https://tinyurl.com/3zhfhrtp> / ¹¹ SE4ALL (2015) The Gambia SE4ALL Action Agenda. / ¹² The Gambia Bureau of Statistics (2019) The Gambia Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2018. Survey Findings Report. <https://tinyurl.com/uctkdu2> / ¹³ Gambia Bureau of Statistics (2018) The Gambia Labour Force Survey 2018. Analytical Report. <https://tinyurl.com/bh64zcku> / ¹⁴ ILO (2021) COVID-19 – Tackling the jobs crisis in the Least Developed Countries. <https://tinyurl.com/9vzmsnz2> / ¹⁵ Agroforestry Network (2018) Achieving the Global Goals through agroforestry. <https://tinyurl.com/3fxxy6v>

