

Finance Minister - Hon Keita (c) GPN

Finance Minister Tables 2023 Draft Budget with Deficit Exceeding D3.9 Billion

The Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs, Hon Seedy Keita laid the 2023 Draft Budget at the National Assembly featuring a Budget Deficit of D3.93 billion Dalasis on 14th November 2022. The total Revenues and Grants estimated for 2023 are projected to exceed D31.4 billion while total Expenditure and Net Lending are expected to exceed D35.4 billion.

Budget deficit refers to the amount of funds that the government needs outside Revenue and Grants to fund its Expenditure and Net Lending. Whenever Revenue and Grants exceed Expenditure and Net Lending, then the Gambia will register a Budget Surplus. This is yet to happen in recent times.

2022 and 2023 Budget Deficits

It can be recalled that the Budget Deficit for 2022 was pegged at D2.82 billion, however, this was revised upwards close to D4.47 billion in the Revised budget approved in late July this year. According to the 2022

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The Gambia's GDP to Grow by D15.75 billion in 2023

According to the Approved 2022 Budget and the Approved Revised 2022 Budget, the GDP was projected to exceed D106.89 billion in 2021 and is expected to grow by D9.29 billion in 2022. This comes to a total projection of D115.18 billion in 2022. Similarly, the Draft 2023 Budget uses the same figure for 2022 and projects GDP to grow by D15.75 billion in 2023.

Investopedia describes "Gross domestic product (GDP) [as] the total monetary or market value of all the finished goods and services produced within a country's borders in a specific time period".

The Minister's speech explains that "agriculture is projected to continue on the growth path reaching 6.6 percent in 2023- primarily supported by crop production and fishing and aquaculture". Similarly, "the growth prospects for the industry sector is estimated to increase to 6.9 percent in 2023 up from 6.0 percent in 2022- mainly supported by electricity and mining and quarrying activities".

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Seven Government Institutions Overspend by End of September 2022

An analysis of the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs (MoFEA) September 2022 Expenditure Report shows that seven Government Institutions have overspent while twenty-five underspent. The September 2022 Expenditure Report also highlights that the Government's Local Fund (GLF) Expenditure exceeded D16 Billion Dalasis from January to the end of September 2022. It can be recalled that the Government cut D923 Million from the 2022 Approved Budget back in late July 2022. Parliamentarians approved the Revised 2022 Budget which authorised the Government to spend D22.7 billion instead of D23.7 billion.

It's important to note that the MoFEA's Expenditure Brief only provides GLF figures which do not include Loans and Grants. Seventy-Five per cent (Three Quarters) of the 2022 Revised GLF comes to D17.07 billion, however, the Government has only spent D16.04 billion from January to September 2022.

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Hon Njai Demands for Submission of Electronic Copies of 2023 Draft Budget

Just before the Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs (MoFEA) was to table the 2023 Draft Budget, Hon Fatoumatta Njai of Banjul South raised a motion highlighting that the Finance Minister had not submitted an electronic copy of the 2023 Draft Budget as stipulated in the National Assembly's Standing Order 83 (2).

The Speaker of the House Hon Fabakary Tombong Jatta had to intervene and engage his Clerks and Parliamentarians, as one NAM recommended that the sitting be postponed to ensure compliance with the National Assembly's Standing Orders.

It all started after the Speaker announced his communication on Monday 14th November 2022. Independent Parliamentarian, Hon Njai raised her constituency tag to highlight a point of order. The member who sits on Parliaments Finance and Public Accounts Standing Committee made reference to the *National Assembly's Standing Order 83 (2)* which states that "the Vice President or the Minister shall make an electronic copy and a written copy of this statement available to Members as early as possible and in any event at least one clear day before the day on which the draft budget statement is to be made." Hon Njai noted that Parliamentarians "have received the written copy but we are yet to receive the electronic copy". In reaction, Speaker Jatta sought clarifications with Hon Njai on what exactly was missing to which she reiterated that "the electronic Copy". She opined that since the Standing Orders says "shall" then the provision of an electronic copy is mandatory.

In response, Speaker Jatta asked: "But does that prevent us from going ahead? It [electronic copy] should be provided, it's mandatory for its provision".

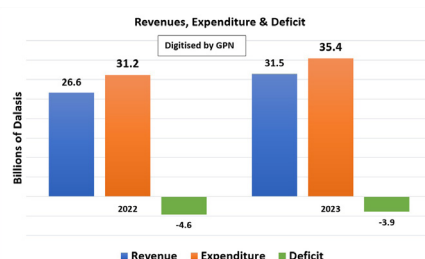
A brief moment of silence ensued as

the Speaker made further enquiries with the Clerk. After a brief consultation, Speaker Jatta announced that "I've just been briefed by the Office of the Clerk that the electronic copies have been provided to the National Assembly --- and the IT Department is trying to distribute it to the Hon members".

This however did not satisfy Hon Njai who reiterated that the provision states that electronic copies should be sent to members of Parliament. The Speaker pushed back highlighting that "I am informed that the Finance Ministry has already given us the electronic copies, it's in our custody and the IT division is working to distribute it. What I'm saying is it's no more Finance but within the Assembly itself". Hon Sulayman Saho of Central Baddibu recommended "adjourn[ing] the session until the copy is available". He argued that the Standing Orders must be complied with as it's the "operational tool in the National Assembly". At this point, some more exchanges ensued between the Speaker, Hon Sulayman Saho and Hon Njai over the decision to call off the sitting or to proceed.

Hon Njai continued to cite *Standing Order 83(2)* which notes that "where this is not been possible, he or she shall state to the Assembly the reason(s)". At this point, she appeared to agree that the sitting can continue, noting that "he has given us reasons so I think then we can proceed". However, she noted the importance of her Standing Order which is that a reason has now been provided which would not have materialised without her intervention.

Electronic copies were also made public on the MoFEA website.



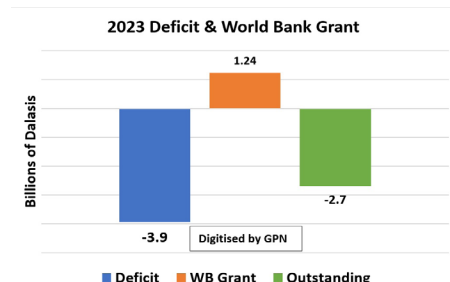
Finance Minister Tables 2023 Draft Budget with Deficit Exceeding D3.9 Billion

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Approved Budget passed towards the end of 2021, the country was expected to generate D29.87 billion in Revenues and Grants, however, the Finance Minister highlights that only D14.4 billion has been raised by the end of September 2022. With nine months gone only 48% of the projected Revenues and Grants have been raised.

The Approved Revised Budget for 2022 decreased the amount of Revenues and Grants down to D26.595. Similarly, the Revised 2022 Budget decreased the Government's projected Expenditure and Net Lending from D32.15 billion to D31.06 billion in late July 2022.

It's noteworthy to highlight that the Minister's speech does not include Government's Actual Expenditure and Net Lending to the end of September 2022. This would have been ideal for Parliamentarians to assess how Actual Revenue and Grants compare to Actual Expenditure and Net Lending.



World Bank Funds D1.24 Billion of 2023 Budget Deficit

World Bank Approves Additional \$20 Million Grant to Help Bridge Unexpected Financing Gap

World Bank issued a press release on 7th December 2022 announcing that it would fund the Gambia's Budget Deficit with a US\$20 Million Grant. Grants are funds allocated to the Gambia on conditions which don't include repayments or interest. US\$20 Million is equivalent to D1.24 Billion at the current rate of D62 per US\$1.

The Gambia's Deficit for the 2023 Budget currently stands at D3.9 Billion. This means that the Government has to find an alternative source of funding to finance the remaining D2.7 Billion needed to fund all its programs and activities next year.

Moj: Over One Billion Dalasis of Former President Jammeh's Assets Sold



Justice Minister - Hon Jallow (c) GPN

The Attorney General and Minister of Justice, Hon Dawda Jallow disclosed to Parliamentarians that over **one billion dalasis** has been recovered after selling about **forty-four assets** belonging to former President Yahya Jammeh. Although the Justice Minister reported that over one billion had been recovered, he did not reveal what has happened to the recovered funds.

The Government of President Adama Barrow who took over from former President Yahya Jammeh in January 2017 launched an inquiry into the financial dealings of "former President Jammeh, his family members and close associates, his financial and business affairs, and the assets accumulated by them during his tenure in office".

Our review of the Government White Paper on the Janneh Commission reveals that the former President had acquired over 200 properties, both inside and outside the country.

Parliamentary Question

Justice Minister Jallow was responding to a written question from the member for Foni Kansala, Hon Almami Gibba who requested for the Ministry of Justice to "provide this August Assembly with details of the sales of former President Yahya AJJ Jammeh's Assets, including total sales, buyers, and price of each asset sold?"

Hon Gibba who wasn't in the country for the question and answer session which took place on Wednesday 30th November 2022, directed that his question be asked by the member for Foni Jarrol, Hon Kebba Toumanning Sanneh.

In response, Justice Minister Jallow revealed that a total of one billion, one hundred and forty-eight million, nine hundred and ninety-seven thousand and nine hundred and eighty-five dalasi (D1,148,997,985) was recovered from the sales of about forty-four assets.

Among Jammeh's assets sold includes

land sales and derelict vehicles.

"Dividends received from the forfeited sales amount to one hundred and two million, seven hundred and sixty-eight thousand dalasi (D102,768, 000)," said Justice Minister Jallow.

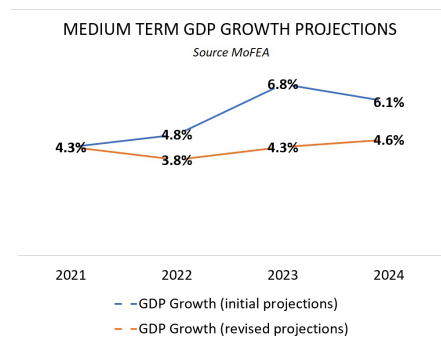
However, our findings reveal that the Janneh Commission highlights that over 280 Jammeh Assets were discovered and over One Billion Dalasis were wasted by the former President during his 22-year rule.

Over 280 Jammeh Assets Discovered by Janneh Commission

Preliminary findings at the start of the investigations revealed that "former President Jammeh, during his tenure in office, had accumulated at least 131 known landed properties registered in his name or in companies and foundations in which he has shares or an interest; and that he operated at least 89 private bank accounts directly or through the aforesaid companies or foundations".

However, at the end of the investigation, the Commission found that the number of assets was more and that "former President Jammeh --- acquired 281 (two hundred and eighty-one) landed properties throughout the country. These include private residential and commercial properties, islands, forest parks, wildlife reserves and wetlands".

Outside the country, the Commission also identified two properties, one in the United States and one in Morocco. The White Paper notes that the Commission was constrained to conduct investigations on properties outside the country and "concluded that the properties reviewed in the Report are by no means exhaustive as more properties were being reported to the Commission even as they were writing their Report, and that investigations into the properties of former President Jammeh should continue".



The chart above shows the GDP Growth of the Gambian Economy which was projected to reach 6.8% in 2023.

Only 56% of Tax Revenue Collected by Third Quarter of 2022

Finance Minister, Hon Seedy Keita informed Parliamentarians that only D8.2 billion has been collected in Tax Revenues in contrast to the projected D12.65 billion estimated at the end of 2021. Minister Keita notes that this represents "56% of the projected outturn for the 2022 fiscal year".

"On Non-Tax Revenue, performance for the first three quarters of 2022 registered D2.2 billion against an end-year projection of D3.9 billion, representing 60% of the projected outturn for the year".

Tax-Revenue refers to all the Government's funds generated from taxes such as Employee Tax, Value Added Tax etc. On the other hand, Non-Tax Revenue refers to funds generated from other sources such as social security contributions, fines, penalties and forfeits.

The Gambia continues to receive less Grants than expected in 2022. The Finance Minister revealed that "only 30% of the projected yearly outturn of D13.6 billion" was collected in 2022. Minister Seedy adds that "the projected disbursement of budget support grants from the European Union of US\$23 million and African Development Bank of US\$7 million did not materialize".

The combined Grants of US\$30 million translate to D1.8 billion at a rate of D60 to a Dollar. This highlights that Government is struggling to collect Grants from International Partners.

In addition to this, Minister Keita explains that "the increase in global oil prices, leading to fuel subsidies to the tune of D1.3 billion as at the end September 2022, also contributed to the low revenue outturn".

The Gambia's GDP Set to Grow by D15.75 billion in 2023

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Speaking to Parliamentarians of the Sixth Legislature, the Minister projected that "recovery in tourism, transport and storage, finance and insurance will enhance growth, with the sector growth projected to reach 4.0 per cent in 2023". This is almost double the growth recorded of "2.4 per cent in 2022".

Growth refers to an increase in size. So, if one had 100 cars in 2021 and it grew by 6 per cent in 2022 then the total number of cars in 2022 has increased to 106.

Seven Government Institutions Overspend by End of September 2022

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This means that the Government is actually underspending by about D1.03 billion which represents 4.5% of the 2022 Revised GLF Funding.

The overspending Institutions include the Ministry of Information (109%), the Office of the President (91%), the Independent Electoral Commission (90%) and the Ministry of Works (90%) to name a few. On the other hand, the underspending Institutions include the Ministry of Communication and Digital Economy (10%), the Ministry of Public Service (14%) and the National Audit Office (45%) to name a few.

January to September 2022 represents 75% of the year and it can be seen that all the overspending Institutions have spent more than this threshold with the Ministry of Communication actually spending more than its entire Appropriation for the year by 9.3%.

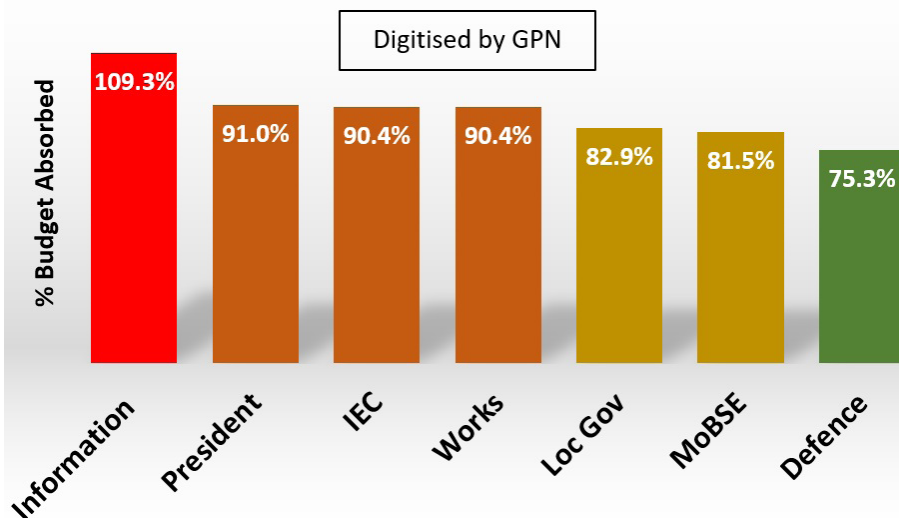
Looking back at the 2022 Approved Budget it can be seen that the Ministry of Communication may have been a victim of circumstances. The Ministry of Information, Communication and Infrastructure (MoICI) was recently split in May-July 2022 into two separate Ministries namely; the Ministry of Information (MoI) and the Ministry of Communication and Digital Economy (MoCDE).

A close look at the 2022 Approved Budget shows that the Ministry of Information, Communication Infrastructure (before it was split) was actually allocated D70.79 million back in late 2021 and this was revised down to D24.3 million in late July 2022. This means that over D46 million was removed from the MoICI Budget which represents over 65% of the total amount approved in late 2021.

By the time the 2022 Revised Budget was tabled and approved the MoFEA's January to end of July 2022 Expenditure Report revealed that the Ministry of Information Communication and Infrastructure (MoICI) had already spent D23.3 million.

At that stage, MoICI had actually spent only 32.9% of its 2022 Approved Budget. In essence slashing the MoICI budget into two, after seven months had already elapsed has made it appear to be overspending. The data below shows that in the first Seven months MoICI spent an average of D3.3 million under former Minister Hon Ebrima Sillah.

7 Overspending Institutions (Jan to Sep 2022)



However, since then the streamlined Ministry of Information spent an average of D1.6 million for two months under newly appointed Minister Hon Lamin Queen Jammeh.

On the other hand, it can be seen that the two newly formed Ministries are currently both underspending. It takes time to hire new staff, secure an Office and begin implementing programs for a new Ministry. Hence, the newly created Ministry of Communication and Digital Economy and the Ministry of Public Service has only spent 10.1% and 14.3% of their 2022 Revised Approved Appropriation since they became fully functional in August 2022. They are the two lowest-spending Institutions.

Nuimi-Hakalang Road Overspent by D30 Million for 2021

Former Minister of Finance Hon Mambury Njie read out the 2021 Budget Speech to members of the Fifth Legislature back in December 2020.

The total Revenue and Grants projected for the 2021 Approved Budget was D25.76 Billion Dalasis while the total Expenditure and Net Lending projected was over D31.7 Billion Dalasis. This meant that the Budget Deficit was in excess of D5.99 Billion. Back then the Minister said in his speech that "the Nuimi Hakalang road project which comprises of two main roads located on either side of the banks of the River Gambia is fully financed by the Gambia Local Fund. Work on this landmark Road has begun".

The 2023 Draft Budget reveals that D296.3 Million was actually spent on the Nuimi Hakalang Road in 2021 while another D240.5 million has allocated to the same Budget Line in the Revised Approved 2022 Budget. More recently, the 2023 Draft Budget has allocated another D260 million to the Nuimi Hakalang Road.

When comparing approved and actual expenditure of the Nuimi-Hakalang Road, our research shows that D265.5 million was actually approved for the Nuimi-Hakalang road in 2021. However, the Government has overspent by D30.8 million bringing it up to D296.3 million.

Education Committee: 'Student Fees Increased Exponentially to D16.7 million'

Hon. Yaya Gassama has reported that the student fees at the Management Development Institute have exponentially increased from D6.9 million in 2017 to D16.7 million in 2018.

Hon. Gassama who is the Member for Kiang East, made this disclosure at the national assembly on Monday 28th November 2022, while laying the consolidated report of the Education Committee of the National Assembly.

The report covers the committee's engagements with the Management Development Institute, the University of the Gambia, the National Accreditation and Quality Assurance Authority, the National Council for Civic Education and the Gambia College.

150,000 Jobs to be Created by 2026

According to the 2023 Budget Speech delivered by the Finance Minister of the Ministry Of Finance and Economic Affairs Gambia - MOFEA, Hon Seedy Keita, the Government plans to create an additional 150,000 jobs in between 2022 and 2026.

Here are some of the most relevant sections with regards to Employment creation from the Finance Minister's marathon 2023 Budget Speech.

"Through the Ministry of Trade, Industry, Regional Integration and Employment (MoTRIE), the Government is strengthening its collaborations with trading partners to support trade, integration and employment. As part of these efforts, MoTRIE signed a new Country-UNIDO Program (2022-2027) to support private sector development in key strategic sectors as part of the post-COVID-19 recovery programs." "On employment promotion, the Ministry has finalized and received cabinet approval on the new National Employment Policy and Action Plan 2022-2026 with a target of creating 150,000 jobs during the life of the policy. The objective of this new policy is to create productive employment in the productive sectors."

"With regards to investment promotion and facilitation, the Ministry, through GIEPA, has been able to attract US\$36.9 million through the Special Investment Certificate and with the potential to create a total of 1,185 jobs. To facilitate access to finance, the Ministry, through GIEPA, has established the Enterprise Development Fund, which will be used to support Micro and Small businesses." "As part of the global She Trades community, the Government continues to support women-owned businesses. This year the HUB has registered an additional 45 women-owned businesses making a total of 138 She Trades companies that the Ministry is working with, providing the relevant skills and support to improve their production capacities."

Government to Establish National Food Testing Laboratory

The Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs (MoFEA) Hon Seedy Keita, has announced that the government is working on establishing a National food testing laboratory in The Gambia.

"The Ministry (of Finance) in col-

laboration with [the] United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) is establishing a National Food Testing Laboratory as well as a second laboratory for light testing under the West Africa Competitiveness Project (WACOMP)," Minister Keita informed lawmakers during his 2023 budget speech.

According to the Minister, the establishment of the food testing laboratory "will provide a more coherent approach to the coordination of laboratory services in The Gambia" and it will serve as "National Reference Testing Lab in The Gambia".

2023 Draft Budget Allocates 1.28% of to Agriculture

The Minister of Agriculture has reiterated the need for Gambians to attach utmost importance to agriculture if the country is to achieve its first goal of halving hunger and poverty as farmers demand a significant increase in groundnut price.

However, the 2023 Draft Budget tabled by the Finance Minister in Parliament yesterday, denotes that the Government has allocated only 1.28% of the 2023 Budget Appropriation for Government Local Funds to Agriculture. Meanwhile, 3% of the 2023 Draft Budget has been allocated to the Office of the President and 19.56% has been allocated to National Debt Service out of a total Appropriation of D22 Billion.

Government Investment in Agricultural Inputs, Equipment and Machinery

Our research has shown that the Gambia Government's investment in Agricultural Inputs, Equipment and Machinery continues to decline every year. According to the 2023 Draft Budget estimate, the Expenditure Budget Overview by Item denotes Government Recurrent and Development Budget for Government Local Funds. This section of the 2023 Draft Budget does not include donor funds and denotes that the Government actually invested D12.7 million into Agricultural Inputs in 2021 which declined to an Approved allocation of D5.2 million in 2022, with the 2023 Draft Budget investing only D4 million into the same Budget Line.

Shifting our attention to Agricultural Equipment and Machinery our research has shown that the Government actually invested over D3.8 million into this Budget Line in 2021, declining sharply down to an ap-

proved figure of D500,000 in 2022. The 2023 Draft Budget indicates that the Government plans to invest zero dalasis in Agricultural Equipment and Machinery in 2023.

All figures in Millions of Gambian Dalasis	2023 Draft (GLF)	
	Estimates	%
Ministry of Agriculture	282.9	1.28
Office of the President	662.4	3.01
National Debt Service	4,307.7	19.56
Total Appropriation	22,026.4	100

Agriculture is Mostly Funded by Loans and Grants

Looking at the 2023 Draft Budget provides the approved funds for Government Local Funds (GLF) allocated to each Ministry and all funds including GLF, Loans and Grants. To ascertain how much funds are coming from Loans and Grants to fund Agriculture our researcher subtracted the number of funds allocated to GLF from all Funds. The results show how much the government is investing in Agriculture compared to how many Loans and Grants it expects to generate from international partners.

For a meaningful comparison, the same exercise was repeated for the President's Office and National Debt Service. It can be seen that the National Assembly approved the 2022 Budget Allocation of D1.4 Billion to the Ministry of Agriculture, however, only D385.8 million of this total amount is coming from Government's Local Fund. The remaining D1.02 Billion (73%) is coming from Loans and Grants with only 27% actually expected from Government sources.

Similarly, the 2023 Draft Budget proposes for a total allocation of D2.39 Billion toward the Ministry of Agriculture, however, only D282.9 million (12%) will be coming from the Government with D2.1 Billion (88%) expected to be generated from Loans and Grants. The danger with this is that it appears as if the government is allocating a lot of funds to Agriculture but the Minister has noted challenges in receiving partner support. Minister Keita has noted that "the projected disbursement of budget support grants from the European Union of US\$23 million and African Development Bank of US\$7 million did not materialize" in 2022. This is a total of US\$30 million and is equivalent to D1.8 billion GMD.

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NAMs Promise to Advocate for Increment of ROOTS Budget



Hon Darboe (c) GPN

At least two Parliamentarians in the persons of Hon Omar Darboe of Upper Nuimi and Hon Lamin J Sanneh of Brikama South have promised to advocate for the increment of the Resilience of Organizations for Transformative Smallholder (ROOTS) Agriculture Project.

The ROOTS Project was launched in 2021 by President Barrow to increase agricultural productivity and access to markets for enhanced food security, nutrition, and resilience of family farms and farmer organisations. However, it has been revealed that there is a US\$20.6 Million funding gap affecting the project.

Hon Omar Darboe who doubles as the Chairperson of the Select Committee on Agriculture has informed GPN during an exclusive interview that the select committee will advocate for the increment of the ROOTS Budget in the 2023 Budget set to be tabled in Parliament before the end of the year.

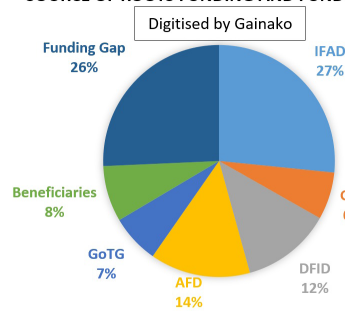
"We would make sure that the budget line increases because by looking at it it's important and is necessary for that line to be increased and there is no doubt. I think the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Agriculture will take heed of our advice as a select committee because that's our responsibility to advise and direct them and which we will do... we would make sure that budget line increases definitely" says Hon Darboe.

US\$20 Million ROOTS Funding Gap

During an engagement organised by the Gambia Chamber of Commerce and Industry (GCCCI) between Representatives of the ROOTS Project and some stakeholders from the Agriculture Sector, it was revealed that the project required US\$80 Million for its complete implementation. However, the project currently suffers from a funding gap of US\$20 Million.

The presentation delivered by the ROOTS Representative revealed that the Gambia Government has invest-

SOURCE OF ROOTS FUNDING AND FUNDING GAP



ed US\$5.4 Million worth of services, not to be confused with cash payments towards the ROOTS Project.

The biggest source of funding for the ROOTS Project is from the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) which has provided a total of US\$21.25 Million of which US\$4.25 million is a loan to be repaid while the remaining US\$17 million is a grant.

In follow-up engagement meetings, Representatives of the ROOTS Project engaged Parliamentarians on the funding gap their project is faced with, in anticipation that they would reverse this in the 2023 Budget.

NAMs Pledge to Address Funding Gap

Speaking to Hon Omar Darboe after the engagement he recalled that when the Fifth Legislature was informed of the US\$80 million ROOTS project, "the whole National Assembly were somehow very happy especially when we were informed that it's going to intervene in 39 districts of the country". Committee Chairperson Hon Darboe noted that his committee can play a vital role as they can lobby and "influence National Assembly to increase more [ROOTS Budget] which we will do".

Meanwhile, the member for Brikama South, Hon Lamin J Sanneh, who is also an active member of the Select Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development reiterated his Chair's statement that they will advocate for an increment of the ROOTS Project Budget.

"The [2023] budget is coming. We can also see how we can extend the Agricultural budget and make sure ROOTS is adequately catered for. So, as a committee, we can do that advocacy during the bilateral and we can bring the two ministries together put them to task, [and] come out with a framework [on] how are we going to improve in the area [of] disbursement, how are we going to look for funds particular the funding gap, how are [we] going to bring those things," said Hon Sanneh.

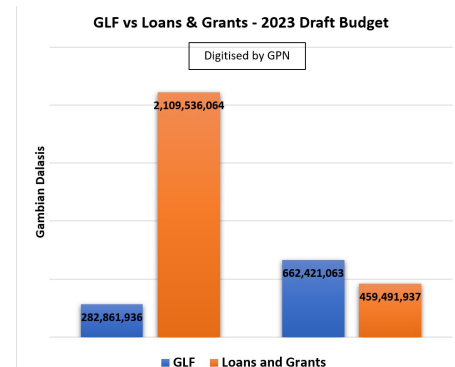
Agriculture is Mostly Funded by Loans and Grants

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This highlights that there is less reliability in accessing funds from International Partners as compared to Government Local Funding.

When compared to the Office of the President this trend is very different. Out of the entire D1.2 Billion allocated to the Office of the President in 2022, only D458.7 million (38%) was expected from Loans and Grants with over D755 million (62%) coming from Government Local Funds.

Similarly, in the 2023 Draft Budget, the Minister proposed a total allocation of D1.1 Billion towards the President's Office. Out of this amount, only D459 million (41%) is expected to be funded from Loans and Grants with the majority of the President's Office funding being D662 million (59%) coming from the Government's Local Fund.



NAMs Approve US\$20 million BA-DEA & US\$7 million IsDB Loans

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The second loan agreement document for the Islamic Development Bank amounts to a total of US\$7 million for the project which is estimated to be executed over a period of 18 months from the date of the first disbursement. The project description notes that three Departments will be built in Faraba Banta in addition to other services that will be financed by the fund.

The repayment terms indicate that the loan shall be paid within 25 years including a seven (7) years grace period. The agreement notes that a service fee of ID 104,993.21 shall be paid from the date of the agreement. However, article 4.4 of the loan agreement notes that the Service Fee shall not exceed 1.18% of the approved amount when calculated on annual basis.

D75 Million Allocated to TRRC Victims in 2023 Draft Budget

Gambian National Assembly members questioned Finance Minister Hon Seedy Keita on the provision of reparations for victims of the Truth Reconciliation and Reparations Commission (TRRC) and the implementation of the TRRC's Recommendations.

To progress the recommendations, member for Banjul South, Hon Fatoumata Njai instructed the Finance Minister to allocate funds towards the implementation of the TRRC's Recommendations during the debate on the 2023 Executive Budget Estimates which took place on Thursday 24th November 2022. The following day Hon Sulayman Saho of Central Badibu questioned the Government's readiness to pay reparations to the Victims.

Hon Njai noted that she had "looked at the Ministry of Justice's Budget," however, she noticed that D46 million was allocated to the TRRC in 2021 and zero was allocated for 2022 and 2023.

She instructed the Minister of Finance Hon Keita to "take note of that please. We did not suffer for 22 years in vain. I personally lost my dad under a dictatorship of the previous regime. Am not saying do whatever but am saying let's work on the recommendations. Let us act on them, put money on it so that we will at least have hope that there will be recommendations," said the Hon member for Banjul South.

The following day Friday 25th November 2022 during the continuation of the debate on the 2023 Draft Budget and Estimates Hon Sulayman Saho of Central Badibu raised a poignant question on Victim's Reparations. Hon Saho asked, "as far as reparations is concerned" is the Government "fully ready to make sure people are reparated? Like the victims because they have been crying for so long."

In response, Finance Minister Hon Seedy Keita revealed that D75 million has been allocated to the Ministry of Justice for Reparations in 2023. Hon Keita explained that "our job is to make funds available. The legal or the other logistics is housed in the Ministry of Justice but we provided D75 million for that". More details are available online.

Banjul South and Lower Fulladu West NAMs Disagree on Salary Increment

Hon Fatoumata Njai the National Assembly Member for Banjul South expressed her dissatisfaction with the 2023 Executive Budget proposing Salary and Allowance increments for Parliamentarians and more Presidential Advisors. Much to the disapproval of Hon Gibbi Mballow of Lower Fulladu West.

According to the Parliamentarian who won her second term under an independent ticket, "the government does not love this country, they do not have the feeling to nurture our children in this country, Honourable speaker, D6 Billion dalasi in salaries alone not including the administrative costs that is not reasonable".

Our research has revealed that the Gambia Government has spent a total of D4.1 billion on Personnel Emoluments from January to September 2022 out of the total of D5.75 billion approved in the 2022 Revised Budget. This means that the Government has spent 71% of the allocated amount on Personnel Emoluments. Personnel Emoluments include Basic Salaries, Allowances and other Staff Payments. It can be recalled that the current Finance Minister, Hon Seedy Keita tabled the Revised Budget for 2022 on 29th July 2022 which Parliamentarians Approved. The 2022 Revised Budget provided for a 30% increase in all Civil Servants' salaries. The Minister's Statement noted that the salary increment amounted to D575 million.

The 30% Salary Increase for all Civil Servants did not apply to Parliamentarians since they had Autonomy from the Government to decide their own Salaries. According to a leaked document, all Parliamentarians are proposed to receive a 30% salary increase with the Speaker to receive a 136.9% salary increase.

Speaking on the duplication of roles Hon Njai highlighted that she has observed "new units, ICT, being established at the Office of the President. Why would he need another ICT?"

Shifting her attention to the number of Advisors which has consistently grown by the year Hon Njai questions: "why would His Excellency want six advisors? How many Ministers does he have in addition to the new Ministries? If the President is telling us that the Ministers are not good enough? I told this August Assembly here last year [that] if he is implying that his Ministers are not good let him sack them and appoint advisors".

Referencing the Constitution Hon Njai highlighted that "according to the Constitution, Ministers should be competent enough to advise [the President] on any policy under their Ministry and if they are not good enough and if that is what he is implying that they are not good enough let him sack them and appoint advisors in that place. But as a poor country, we cannot be paying Ministers and be paying Advisors and be paying Deputy Advisors".

"Once you are appointed as a Minister, before two months, you marry a second wife, you start buying homes abroad at the expense of the poor Gambians," she said.

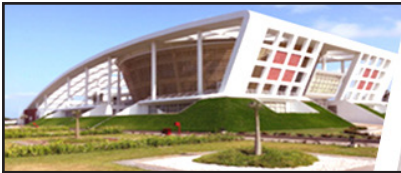
A look at the 2022 Budget Expenditure Report prepared by the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs (MOFEA) highlights that from January to September 2022, D1.91 Billion has been spent on Basic Salaries with a further D1.95 Billion being spent on Allowances in the first 9 months.

In contrast, in 2021 salaries came up to D1.57 Billion with Allowances coming up to D1.51 Billion. The report notes that "basic Salary registered a growth rate of 22 per cent whilst allowances increased by 29 per cent; from D1.51 billion to D1.95 billion" in 2022. However, Hon Gibi Mballow the National Assembly Member for Lower Fulladu West disagrees with Hon Njai's statements and responded to say: "Mr Speaker we are going to marry a second wife because that is an obligation, let us not fake our Gambian people we don't come here and profess that we are the best when underneath we have sentimental and grievances among ourselves".

Hon Mballow opined that salary increment is necessary and that salaries have to increase across the board because the world is growing, livelihood is getting very expensive and every civil servant in this country is asking for a salary increment, therefore it will be increased.

Hon Fatoumata Njai insisted that "increasing our salary is deliberately enriching ourselves. I think as a National Assembly we should not accept any salary increment I gave myself for service I did not give myself for the poor people to feed me and my family" she said.

The statement was made at a National Assembly Sitting on the 2023 Executive Budget which took place in Banjul on Thursday 24th November 2020.



Gambia Participates Hosts Budget Analysis Retreat for NAMs



Group Photo (c) GPN

On Monday 14th November 2022, National Assembly members of the Gambia's Sixth Legislature converged at Ocean Bay Hotel in Cape Point for a three-day workshop retreat on the 2023 Draft Budget. The retreat took place soon after the Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs (MoFEA) tabled the 2023 Draft Budget in Parliament. The three-day retreat organised by Civil Society Organisation, Gambia Participates, aims to improve the understanding of National Assembly Members (NAMs) on the budget, budget policies and other budgetary analysis.

In attendance at the opening was Ambassador Cromer of the United State to the Gambia, who highlighted that "one of the fundamental tenants of healthy democracies [is] ensuring a balance of power by holding co-equal branches of government accountable". She told Parliamentarians at the retreat that "as representatives of the Gambian people, bear that weighty responsibility – holding government accountable". She reminded NAMs that they carry the voices of the people in their districts to the National Assembly's chambers "and in many cases voices which have been ignored or silenced for far too long".

Mr Momodou Sise, the Clerk of the National Assembly noted the importance of the National Assembly's role in scrutinizing the Budget. Clerk Sise noted that "the role of honourable members on the budget is very crucial, it is fundamental since one of our core mandate is to ensure that the govern-

ment fulfils its need and aspiration of the people you represent, honourable members must be sufficiently informed in order to effectively scrutinize the budget, giving due consideration on social sectors, such as education, health and agriculture".

He elaborated on the benefits of the retreat which he believes is "one of the instruments utilized by National Assembly and development partners to ensure that NAMs acquire the requisite knowledge, skills and expertise to deal with the national budget".

In total out of the 53 elected Parliamentarians, 33 have been elected for the first time, meaning that most of the Parliamentarians of the fifth legislature have no knowledge of scrutinising the Draft Budget in a Parliamentary role. Coupled with the fact that Gambia's budgetary process allows Parliamentarians a maximum of 14 days to consider and approve the draft budget, time is of the essence. The 14 days period is provided for in Section 152 (1A) of the 1997 Constitution.

Marr Nyang the founder and Executive Director of Gambia Participates urged NAMs to take advantage of the retreat in order to take the required steps in approving the 2023 budget which will guide the Government's Expenditure and Revenue collection from 1st January to 31st December 2023. "Honorable members when reviewing and approving the budget please know that there are 2.3 million people that will be impacted by the decision that you are going to make," Mr Nyang told lawmakers.

It is anticipated that if Parliamentarians improve the Budget through rigorous Parliamentary Scrutiny, the 2023 Approved Budget will improve the livelihood of more Gambians and residents alike and enhance the Government's implementation of its National Development Plan. At the end of the retreat, NAMs are expected to be better prepared to interrogate the draft estimate budget for the year 2023 and ensure that the needs and aspirations of citizens are well reflected.

NAMs Approve US\$20 million BA-DEA & US\$7 million IsDB Loans

Two loan agreements were ratified by the Gambia's National Assembly in late July 2022 from the Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development for the widening of the Bertil-Harding Road Project and the Islamic Development Bank Loan for the development of the University of the Gambia Phase 2 Project.

According to the loan agreement document the Kuwait Fund Loan amounts to a total of Six million Kuwaiti Dinars equivalent to US\$20 million and is referred to as the "BA-DEA Loan". The loan agreement also references another loan agreement referred to as the "Islamic Bank" totalling US\$14 Million.

A number of interest payments are included in the loan agreement. If the loan is paid in time two interest payments apply. The first interest payment is 1% per annum on the principal amount of the Loan withdrawn and another ½ % per annum on the amounts withdrawn from the loan for administrative expenses and expenses of implementing the agreement. This means a total of 1.5% is included in the loan charges.

With regards to repayment terms a grace period of 3 years is included and that "the amount of principal withdrawn from the loan shall be repaid in 50 (50) semi-annual instalments". The fifty (50) repayments are detailed in a schedule in the loan agreement.

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