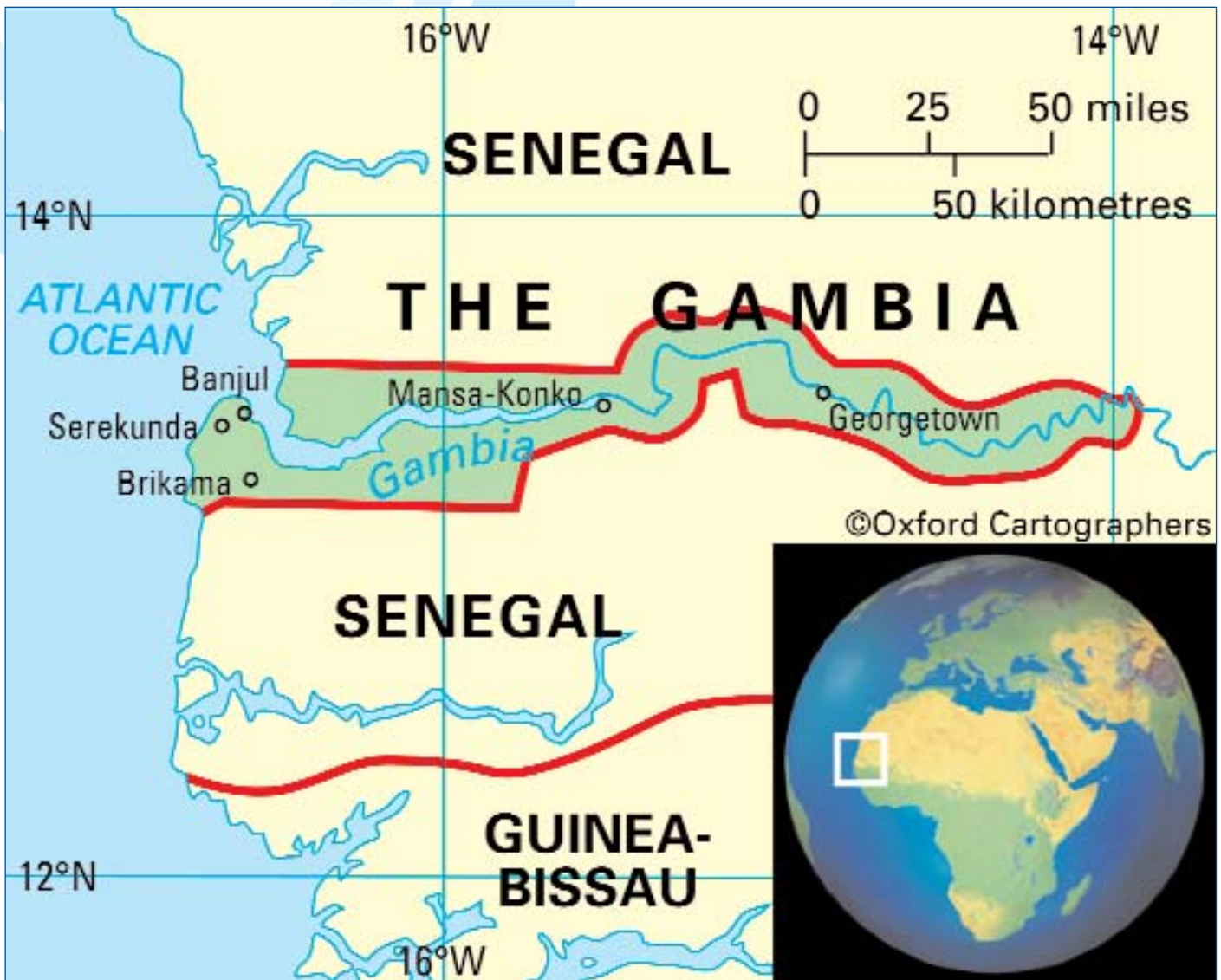


THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT SYSTEM IN

THE GAMBIA



1 INTRODUCTION

The Republic of the Gambia is a unitary state located on the western coast of Africa, surrounded by Senegal. Its population is 1,688,359 and it covers an area of 11,295 sq km.¹ The capital city is Banjul.

Its head of state is the president who is also head of government and is directly elected for a five-year term of office. The cabinet is appointed by the president.

The House of Assembly comprises 48 members elected by the first-past-the-post system and a further five members appointed by the president. Their term of office is five years.

The Gambia has eight sub-divisions,

namely Banjul City, Kanifing Municipality, Western Division, Lower River Division, Upper River Division, North Bank Division and Central River Division.

Local government is divided into districts and local councils.

The contribution of local government to GDP is 1.1%.

2 POLITICAL AND ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE GAMBIA

During the last decade, the Gambian context in terms of governance has varied positively and significantly. The second general and presidential elections since the 1994 coup were held in a peaceful and fair manner. The

democratic process has been supported by development partners. In April 2002, parliament promulgated the Local Government Act and in February 2004 the Local Government Finance and Audit Act. Significant progress has been achieved in the implementation of the poverty reduction strategy programme, called the Strategy for Poverty Alleviation (SPA) II. Poverty alleviation continues to be the main strategic focus of the government and of development partners' technical assistance to the Gambia. Interventions in the governance field have therefore stressed the links between the strengthening of democratic institutions and poverty alleviation.

The National Governance Programme (NGP) is the main framework to improve democratic processes and strengthen representative institutions. The difficulties of reducing the depth and impact of poverty present the major threat to the gains acquired in the ongoing political and institutional reform process. Unemployment, population growth, illiteracy, poverty (especially in the rural areas), gender inequity and a narrow tax base for the state, and the subsequent impossibility of delivering quality educational and health services or improving the Gambia's physical infrastructure, compose the economic scenario within which the governance institutions must operate, with admitted insufficient technical capacity.

To address these issues, the government and its partners consider the following outcomes at the heart of each development policy:

- Citizenry enlightened on civic education and human rights
- Efficient administration and dispensation of justice, both at central and local levels
- Efficient delivery of services to the poor, particularly at local levels
- Support for the process of national dialogue to build consensus on governance issues.

Government contributes to achieving these outcomes and assisting the related beneficiaries. The Constitution of the Second Republic was adopted in 1997 together with institutions that are related to it, eg the ombudsman and the National Civic Education Council.

The NGP and the Poverty Alleviation Programme were established with the conviction that poverty could be reduced only if good governance practices are undertaken. Improving governance in order to alleviate poverty is in keeping with the statement by world leaders at the Millennium Summit to 'spare no effort in promoting democracy and strengthening the rule of law, as well as respect for all internationally recognised human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the right to development'. The UNDP has been supporting the NGP.

The key results of the project include substantive progress in coordinating the major governance institutions with the technical, strategic and administrative support of the Governance Secretariat. Other results were also achieved, eg:

- Provision of electoral assistance
- Supporting the drafting of the Local

Government Act 2002

- Supporting specific civic education programmes
- Supporting the review and revision of judicial processes and procedures.

During the second phase of the NGP (2003/2004), the objective was to consolidate the programme with a view to attaining oriented results and reinforcing impact by refocusing UNDP support in areas identified by the government as priorities for its policy. The main outcomes will be based on assistance to the newly elected councils, the new legislature and judges at local level. Priority will be given to orientation, training and institutional capacity-strengthening, involvement of key and strategic stakeholders in the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper implementation processes, empowerment of communities through targeted civic education programmes aimed at creating greater public awareness of fundamental human rights and responsibilities, access to justice (especially for women and children) and the right to better and affordable quality service delivery at all levels.

The main challenges for the project are to strengthen institutional capacities for the implementation of the programme and to enhance access to goods and services more oriented to the priorities of the citizens, particularly the poor. The project beneficiaries are members of the National Assembly, councillors in the decentralised entities, women, children and the citizenry at large.

The most recent presidential elections were held in September 2006. President Yahya Jammek was re-elected with 67.3% of the vote.

Table 1. Types and nos. of local authorities

Level	Number
Councils	8
Wards	114
Village development committees	1,500

Table 2. Distribution of population

Local government areas	Population	% of total
Banjul	34,828	2.55
Kanifing	322,410	23.63
Brikama	392,987	28.80
Mansakonko	72,546	5.32
Kerewan	172,806	12.66
Kuntaur	79,098	5.80
Janjangbureh	106,799	7.83
Basse	183,033	13.41
Total	1,364,507	100

The most recent National Assembly elections were held on the 25 January 2007. The Alliance for Patriotic Reorientation and Construction won 42 seats, the United Democratic Party 4 seats, the National Alliance for Democracy and Development 1 seat, and one independent candidate was elected.

The role of the Secretary of State for Local Government is to report to the president and cabinet on local government matters. He transmits government policy on local government to the populations through the Department of State for Local Government and Lands. Through the Department of State he regulates the implementation of local government law and other related matters.

There has been only one instance of central government suspending elected councillors.

The functions of the division leaders include overseeing central government interests in the division, convening the technical advisory committee of the division which coordinates government policy and acting as the representative of the president in the divisions.

The division leaders are appointed by the president for a term of two years.

3 LEGAL BASIS FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT

3.1 Constitutional provisions

Local government is enshrined in the constitution. Chapter XV, section 192(1) states that 'Local government administration in the Gambia shall be based on a system of democratically elected councils with a high degree of local autonomy'.

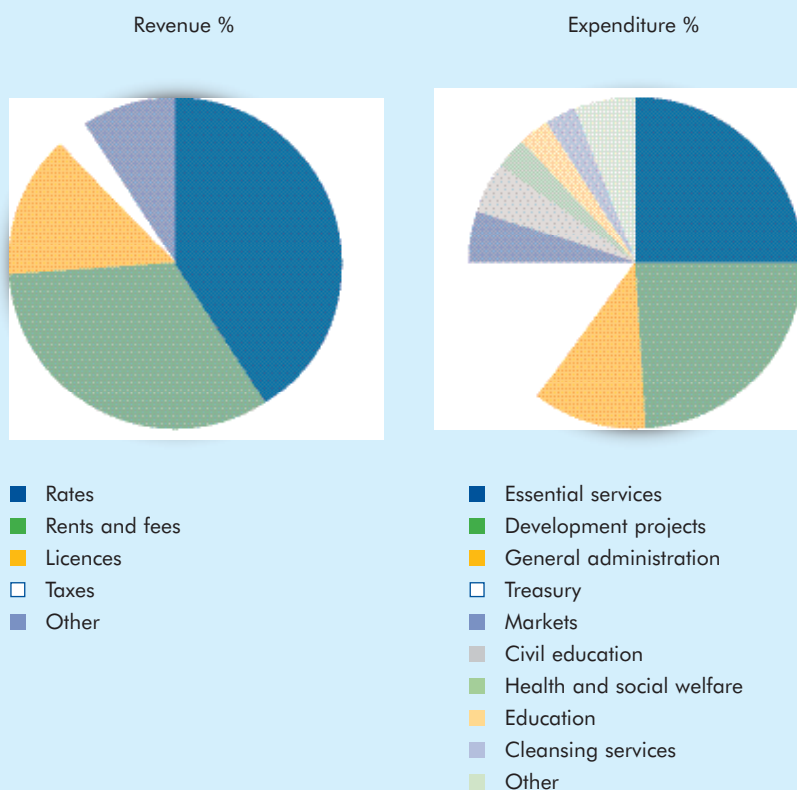
3.2 Main legislative texts

The main pieces of legislation governing local government are:

- Local Government Act 2002
- Finance and Audit Act 2004.

The Department of State for Local Government is responsible for the administration of these Acts.

Figure 1. The financial structure of local government in the Gambia



4 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

4.1 Main divisions

The main division in local government is between rural and urban local government.

There are three tiers of local government, namely village development committee, ward and council. Each level has committees responsible for decision-making, coordination and implementation of specified functions.

There are 1,500 village development committees, 114 wards and 8 councils.

The inter-relationship between the different levels of local government is that village development committees (VDCs) comprise all adult villagers; ward committees comprise representatives chosen by the villages; and each ward elects by universal suffrage its representative on the local council.

All are part of the national local government system. The village development committee directs the preparation of the village plan in consultation with village stakeholders and with the technical assistance of multi-disciplinary facilitation teams (MDFTs). The plans are approved by the committee, which also coordinates their implementation.

The ward committee directs the preparation of the ward plan, also in consultation with ward stakeholders with the assistance of MDFTs. It is approved by, and implemented through, the ward committee.

At the council level, the plan is directed by the council. It is prepared at the council's department of planning and development, approved by and implemented through the council.

The plans are linked politically, administratively and in the identification and implementation of development programmes and activities.

The plans are financed through the same financial resource base. The technical and lands input of planning and development coordination is mobilised through the same extension and outreach strategy, and they are all guided by the same legislative framework although they are at different levels of the same local government territory.

The largest council is Brikama Area Council with a population of 393,000 and the smallest is Banjul City Council with a population of 35,000, the average size being 170,500. About 40% of the population lives in urban areas.

5 DEMOCRATIC AND POLITICAL STRUCTURES IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Councillors are elected by universal adult suffrage using a ward system. Each ward elects a single member. Mayors are directly elected by universal suffrage using the first-past-the-post system. The term for both is four years. The system is uniform across local government throughout the country.

Participative local democratic structures

include the establishment of committees to interact with civil society organisations.

The decision-making process within councils is through a committee structure that makes recommendations to general council for ratification.

Less than five% of the elected councillors are women, and one mayor and one deputy mayor are women.

5.1 Councils

Councils are required by law to establish the following committees: finance, establishment and development. They have no discretion to establish any further committees.

Councils are led by directly elected mayors with executive powers. This position is full-time with commensurate remuneration set by the National Assembly.

5.2 Local government staffing

Staff are recruited by the individual local authority and they retain the power to discipline and dismiss. Central government also deploys staff to the councils from time to time.

No officers are required by law. The head of the paid service is the chief executive officer. The typical staffing structure has at its apex the CEO. The second-tier staff are directors – finance, administration, services, and planning development. Third-tier staff are the section heads to whom the general staff work.

5.3 Independent scrutiny

Independent scrutiny is provided by two bodies, internal audit and the ombudsman. These are empowered by the constitution, the Local Government Act 2002 and the Local Government Finance and Audit Act 2004.

6 DISTRIBUTION OF SERVICE DELIVERY COMPETENCE

The statutory functions of councils include the provision of basic services to local communities, the promotion of community development and self-help, the protection of the constitution and the promotion of democratic governance.

7 FINANCE

7.1 Revenue

The total aggregate revenue of Gambian local government in 2003 was D118,207,492 or US\$4,546,000.²

The main sources of revenue are:

1. Rates	41%
2. Rents and fees	33%
3. Licences	14%
4. Taxes	3%
5. Other	9%

Local government is responsible for setting and collecting taxes and rates. Ministerial supervision is exercised over the setting of local taxes.

7.2 Revenue-sharing

There is no policy of revenue-sharing and the specific grants are very small, making only 0.1% contribution to local government revenue overall. There is ministerial supervision of locally raised taxes.

7.3 Expenditure

The total aggregate expenditure of local government for 2003 was D111,207,492, or US\$4,277,000. The main items of expenditure were:

1. Essential services	25%
2. Development projects	24%
3. General administration	11%
4. Treasury	15%
5. Markets	5%
6. Civil education	5%
7. Health and social welfare	3%
8. Education	3%
9. Cleansing services	3%
10. Other	6%

Local authorities are not permitted to set deficit budgets.

8 ORGANISATIONS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The Gambia Association of Local Government Authorities (GALGA) is a voluntary organisation recognised in law.

GALGA's functions are to: promote the development of local government administration; protect the interests of all member local authorities; provide a forum for discussion and exchange of ideas and experience relating to local government administration and service delivery with a view to solving problems; support local authorities in their implementation of their policies; and provide a channel of communication between central and local government.

GALGA is funded by membership subscriptions, grants and revenue from income-generating activities.

It is affiliated to a number of international local government bodies including the CLGF, the UCLGA, the Municipal Development Programme (West and Central Africa) and Africities.

9 INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

The relations between central and local government are regulated by law. The Local Government Act 2002, which is based on

Chapter 193 of the 1997 Constitution, provides for roles and functions and the conduct of local government in the Gambia to central government through the Department of State for Local Government and local government authorities.

The Local Government Act 2002, which regulates the relationship between the levels of government, also provides for structures by way of committees, advisory boards, and established positions such as secretary of state, permanent secretary, director, chief executive etc.

The Gambian Association of Local Government Authorities is a key body in the promotion of intergovernmental relations.

10 E-GOVERNMENT

There is a national strategy to promote e-government and its implementation is at the early stages. Currently the national website is promotional and of limited interactivity. It is said to provide links between central and local government but the official national website does not provide outside users with access to local government sites or email addresses.

In 2005 there were 49,000 internet users in the Gambia representing 3% of the population.³

11 ENVISAGED REFORMS

There are expected to be substantial cross-cutting reforms in the judiciary, parliamentary reforms and civil service reforms.

The envisaged local government reforms will have wide-ranging impacts on public administration in the Gambia, demanding increased resource allocation to local government and the decentralisation of a number of functions, powers and authorities to the councils.

The councils generally lack the capacity to manage the expected increase in their responsibilities and functions. A major long-term capacity-building programme will be needed at the level of councils for the success of the decentralisation programme.

12 MISCELLANEOUS

12.1 Traditional leaders

Traditional leaders play a key role in the governance of the Gambia, mediating relations between the grass roots and government.

13 SUMMARY

Local government in the Gambia is enshrined in the constitution and was established in its current form by the Local Government Act 2002. It is almost wholly funded by locally raised revenues. Its intergovernmental

relations are formally arranged and the Gambia Association of Local Government Authorities is recognised in law.

References

- 1 CIA World Factbook 2007
- 2 Dalasis 26 = US\$1, *Financial Times Guide to World Currencies*, 28 July 2003
- 3 CIA World Factbook 2007.