

OFFICIAL NAME: Republic of The Gambia

CAPITAL: Banjul

SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT: Multiparty Republic

AREA: 11,295 Sq Km (4,361 Sq Mi)

ESTIMATED 2000 POPULATION 1,278,700



LOCATION & GEOGRAPHY: Gambia is located on the west coast of Africa. It is completely surrounded by Senegal to the north, east, and south and the Atlantic Ocean to the west. It is a narrow strip of low lying land that is covered in thick mangrove swamps below the lower half of the Gambia River. The country can be divided into three topographical regions. (1.) The valley floor with built up alluvial areas known as Bango Faros. (2.) A dissected plateau with sandy hills alternating with broad valleys and (3.) a sandstone plateau which in parts extends into Senegal. The principal river is the Gambia. Major Cities (pop. est.); Greater Banjul 270,500, Serekunda 102,600, Brikama 24,300 (1986). Land Use; forested 28%, pastures 9%, agricultural-cultivated 18%, other 45% (1993).

CLIMATE: Gambia has a tropical climate with a hot wet season between June to October alternating with a cool dry season from November to April. During the dry season the Harmattan, a dry and dust laden wind blows from the Sahara Desert in the northeast. Average annual precipitation in Banjul is 1,295 mm (51 inches) and average temperature ranges are from 15 to 31 degrees Celsius (59 to 88 degrees Fahrenheit) in January to 23 to 32 degrees Celsius (73 to 90 degrees Fahrenheit) in June.

PEOPLE: The principal ethnic majority are the Mandinka who account for 40% of the population while the Fulani account for 19%, the Wolof for 15%, the Pyola for 10%, the Soninke for 8% and others including non-Gambians account for around 8%. The non-Gambians include British, Syrians, Lebanese and Asians.

DEMOGRAPHIC/VITAL STATISTICS: Density; 103 persons per sq km (266 persons per sq mi) (1991). Urban-Rural; 21.5% urban, 78.5% rural (1988). Sex Distribution; 49.4% male, 50.6% female (1990). Life Expectancy at Birth; 41.4 years male, 44.6 years female (1990). Age Breakdown; 44% under 15, 25% 15 to 29, 16% 30 to 44, 10% 45 to 59, 5% 60 and over (1990). Birth Rate; 47.4 per 1,000 (1990). Death Rate; 21.4 per 1,000 (1990). Increase Rate; 26.0 per 1,000 (1990). Infant Mortality Rate; 143.0 per 1,000 live births (1990).

RELIGIONS: Around 85% of the population are Sunni Muslims while Christians are estimated to account for less than 4% of the population with the remainder following local native tribal beliefs.

LANGUAGES: The official language is English, although less than 2% of the population can speak it while the national languages are Wolof, Fula and Mandinka.

EDUCATION: Aged 20 or over and having attained: no formal schooling 90.8%, primary 6.2%, secondary 2.6%, higher 0.4% (1973). Literacy; literate population aged 15 or over 27.2% (1990).

MODERN HISTORY - WWII TO 1993: Gambia gained internal self government from Britain in 1963 and gained complete independence on Feb. 18, 1965. On Apr. 24, 1970 Gambia became a republic. Since 1970 tourism has grown rapidly, however, many droughts have reduced agricultural production and seriously damaged Gambia's economy. In 1972 a constitutional amendment provided for the election of the President by the people which resulted in the election of Sir Dawda Jawara. In July 1981 troops from Senegal put down a coup attempt against the Gambian government. In Feb. 1982 Gambia and Senegal, who have always had close relations, formed a confederation which, like the earlier British colony, was called Senegambia. The confederation reaffirmed the close economic ties between the two countries and united their armed forces. However, the confederation collapsed in Sept. 1989 when Gambia sought greater powers. On Jan. 8, 1991 Gambia and Senegal signed a Treaty of Friendship and Co-operation which replaced the former confederation agreement. On Feb. 18, 1991 Pres. Dawda Jawara pardoned all the prisoners implicated in the coup attempt of 1981. In Dec. 1991 Pres. Jawara announced his intention to resign, although later reversed his decision at the request of his People's Progressive Party (PPP). On Feb. 14, 1992 Pres. Jawara announced presidential and legislative elections for April 29, 1992. The elections resulted in Pres. Jawara being re-elected for his 5th term as president while the PPP won the majority of seats in legislative elections. On May 11, 1992 Pres. Jawara announced a new government and appointed the former economic affairs minister, Saihou S. Sabally, vice president. In July 1992 some 1,300 Senegalese refugees sought refuge in Gambia as a result of fighting in the Casamance region in Senegal. In Mar. 1993 there were further influxes of Senegalese refugees from the Casamance province. On April 7, 1993 Gambia officially abolished the death penalty, although since its introduction upon independence only one had been carried out. In April 1993 the leader's of the banned Movement for Justice Party in Africa party from the abortive 1981 coup attempt returned to reactivate the legalized party. In June 1993 the government announced a new weekly service for Gambia Airways to London and in Aug. 1993 an agreement was reached with the British Overseas Development Administration for 1 million pounds for English language and mathematics teacher training.

CURRENCY: The official currency is the Dalasi (D) divided into 100 Bututs.

ECONOMY: Gross National Product; USD \$372,000,000 (1993). Public Debt; USD \$348,800,000 (1993). Imports; D 2,363,486,000 (1993). Exports; D 543,751,000 (1993). Tourism Receipts; USD \$26,000,000 (1993). Balance of Trade; D -1,675,900,000 (1992). Economically Active Population; 412,000 or 47.2% of total population (1992). Unemployed; N/A.

MAIN TRADING PARTNERS: Its main trading partners are the UK, the Netherlands, France, Italy, Germany, Switzerland, Portugal and Senegal.

MAIN PRIMARY PRODUCTS: Cassava, Cattle, Fish, Ground Nuts, Millet, Palm Kernels, Rice, Timber.

MAJOR INDUSTRIES: Agriculture, Fishing, Food Processing, Forestry.

MAIN EXPORTS: Fish, Ground Nuts and Processed Products, Hides and Skins.

TRANSPORT: Railroads; nil. Roads; length 2,388 km (1,484 mi) (1986). Vehicles; cars 5,500 (1989), trucks and buses 1,000 (1989). Merchant Marine; vessels 8 (1990), deadweight tonnage 1,651 (1990). Air Transport; N/A.

COMMUNICATIONS: Daily Newspapers; total of 2 with a circulation of 2,000 (1992). Radio; receivers 140,000 (1994). Television; nil. Telephones; units 16,300 (1993).

MILITARY: 800 (1994) total active duty personnel while military expenditure accounts for 0.8% (1993) of the Gross National Product (GNP).