

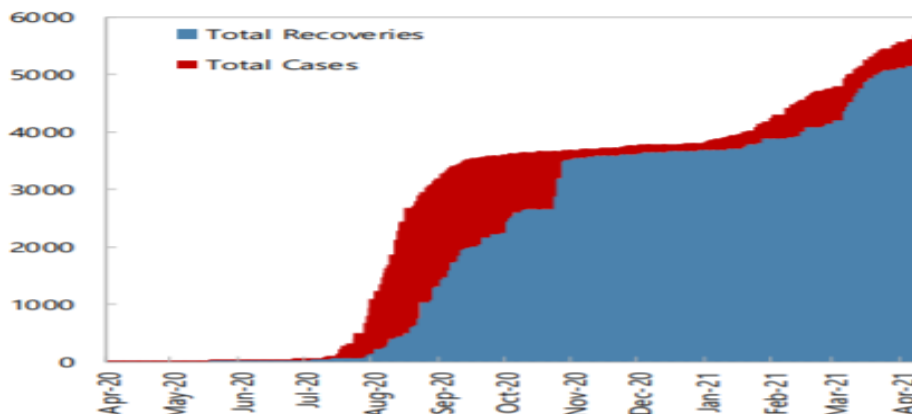
Desk Review of Covid-19 Impact on The Gambia

1. Introduction

The Coronavirus Diseases given the name (Covid-19) by the World Health Organization (WHO) on 11th February 2020 was first discovered in Wuhan, China and reported to WHO on 31st December 2019. Since its existence, it was first declared a Public Health Emergency of International concern on 30th January 2020 before being finally declared a Global Pandemic on March 11th, 2020 by the WHO.

In view of the above, The Gambia confirmed her first COVID-19 case on 17th March 2020, the case was reported on 16th March by a 28-year female who travelled back from the United Kingdom (UK). Two days after the confirmation of the first case (19th March 2020), the first case of death from a 71-year man was registered after a posthumous diagnosis. In The Gambia, the cases increased rapidly between July, 2020 to October 2020 and between February 2021 to April 2021, corresponding to the first wave and the second wave of Corona virus in the Gambia. Recovery rates is relatively higher during the second wave than the first wave, perhaps because the authorities have learnt fast during the first wave as well.

Figure 1: Trend in Covid-19 April 2020 – April 2021



Source: John Hopkins University and IMF Estimates

According to the 148th WHO situation Report on Covid-19, the disease has globally registered a total of 7,941,791 confirmed cases with 434,796 deaths. This was considered alarming and therefore became a global concern for individual countries to do something to curb the spread.

Accordingly, the government of the Gambia embarked upon a series of activities to contain the virus with a lockdown of the economy, with the introduction of WHO guidelines, regular washing of hand, avoid handshaking, crowds and use of face mask. Series of sensitization campaigns were carried out by the government to increase citizen's awareness of the COVID-19 and how they can protect themselves. These were further followed by social assistance in the form of food distribution and cash transfers to relief the effect of lockdown of the economy as well allowed the continuation of economic activities in rejuvenating the livelihood of the citizens. There were lot of support also from donors; the world bank for instance has provided about 19 million dollars support to the government COVID-19 preparedness and response plan. As of December 2020, the UNDP spent over 1.8 million dollars as support in various forms to state and non-state actors to help them cope with the negative effects of the pandemic (UNDP, 2020a). IMF and other donors have also provided support to the government to help in response to the pandemic.

Despite the fact that the first cases registered for all African countries were imported, it must also be noted that local transmissions have been observed and are on the rise. The alarm has been declared for more rigorous containment measures as recommended by WHO to be in place to avoid a rapid spread.

2. Government Response Strategies

Since the outbreak the government has undertaken many preventive measures including (i) suspension of non-essential travels by government officials, (ii) suspension of public gatherings, (iii) travelers from hotspot countries quarantine, (iv) border closures with Senegal, (v) the Government directives to maintain prices of essential commodities and prohibit the hoarding and re-exporting of essential commodities and petroleum products, (vi) keeping non-essential workers at home, and (vii) food and monetary aid packages to households in The Gambia. This section looks at the government response strategies adopted since the outbreak of the pandemic and the section is broadly divided into the Covid-19 awareness strategies, mitigation and preventive strategies, and treatment or Covid-19 vaccination.

However, before delving into what actions taken by government, it is important to have a good understanding of the context and the set of financial resources available to government since the outbreak of the pandemic. After the first case of Covid-19 was detected in the Gambia, The pandemic challenged the government in unprecedented ways and required unprecedented interventions. The government responded with two key emergency spending measures. The first was a D500 million COVID-19 Emergency Respond Fund introduced through an emergency decree in March 2020. This fund was a swift reallocation from the 2020 budget to prevent and control the spread of the virus. The second was a Supplementary Appropriation Bill (Supplementary Budget) totaling D2.845 billion, which the National Assembly approved in July 2020. D363 million was allocated to Covid-19-related costs, including the payment of quarantine arrears owed to hotels, financial assistance to Gambian students abroad, recovery of the tourism sector, and support to farmers.

Table 1: Covid-19 Funds Received by Gambia Government

Amounts (in millions)	Sector	Source	Comment
D500	Variment – travel budget	GoTG budget 2019/20	This was the second resource envelope released- there is no evidence that it was subject to Cabinet approval
\$10	World bank COVID response	World Bank	This first resource envelope agreed to between the Ministry of Health and WB, and was drafted by the country WB staff who was present in the country when COVID-19 hit
\$ 6.4	Special Drawing Rights response to COVID-19	IMF	This was the third resource envelope announced by GoTG
D734	Debt repayment moratorium- part of COVID-19 relief funds	Multi-lateral funders/lenders to be paid back after five years	This was the third acquisition and reallocation of funds, and used arbitrarily to purchase rice, sugar, onions, over a period of 72 hours.
	Total in GMD	3.61 Billion	
	Total in USD	\$59,322,010.89	
	Comment	51% of the total budget	7 billion (32.8 percent of GDP) in 2019.

- **Awareness Creation Strategies**

The awareness creation was an important public health measure with the main aim of ensuring that Gambians have accurate information on the COVID-19, which is important for the country's containment efforts. Due to the massive awareness campaign by government, media houses and CSOs, household reported to have already heard about the covid-19 pandemic and are aware of at least one preventive measure against covid-19 according to the GBoS High Frequency Survey, Wave 3, 2020. Nearly all households apply at least one preventive measure, with the most widely applied measure being hand washing and the use of masks and gloves (GBoS High Frequency Data, Wave 1, 2020). The most widely used channel for disseminating information about covid-19 is radio, cited by 77% of households, particularly 80% of rural households. Next is television, cited by 65% of all households and 85% of households living in Banjul and Kanifing agglomeration.

- **Mitigation and Preventive Strategies**

Several mitigation and preventive strategies were instituted by the government and households as well to contain the spread of Covid-19 and flatten the curve, and as well as support families to live with Covid-19 realities. The government for example ordered lockdown measures on 21 days which was extended for a couple times to ensure that people stay at home and avoid coming in contact with each other. Sanitary measures such as handwashing dishes were situated at all public places, social distancing was ordered for a long time even after lockdown was lifted.

To help families to cope with the economic hardship of the pandemic, increased support from household relative in the form of remittance was realized, while the government provided social support to vulnerable households as well as firms in sectors hit hard by the pandemic such as tourism. The GBoS High Frequency Survey report gathered perception on the overall government social assistance program and the special needs of women and children in households, whether in monetary or non-monetary aid form. Overall 22% of households received remittances since March 2020 with 7% received local transfers and 15% received remittances from abroad. About 34% and 14% of recipients received remittances as recent as January and February 2021 respectively. More than half of households in the poorest quintile and in rural areas report that remittance levels have remained the same whereas more than half of households in the richest quintile, in and around the

Capital and other urban areas have reported declines in remittance levels. About 10% of households receiving remittances report changes in their transfer channel since March 2020. Changes in channel appear to be more common among recent recipients- Jan. 2021 (29%); Feb. 2021 (17%); and those receiving through Western Union (31%); during last visit (27%); informal agents (12%), family/friends (12%).

- **Treatment and Covid-19 Vaccination**

The pandemic had its toll in The Gambia affecting the health, social and economic wellbeing of the citizens. Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic when all countries are desperate to contain the virus transmission, the beginning of COVID-19 vaccine rollout for many countries made a lot of people hopeful about the pandemic. In early part of 2021, The Gambia received the first consignment of 36,000 doses of COVID-19 vaccine (AstraZeneca) through the COVAX facility, which was a significant step in government's national COVID-19 response plan. This was followed by the receipt of 929,200 syringes and 9300 safety boxes (UNICEF The Gambia) also through the COVAX facility. Senegal also donated 10,000 Sinopharm vaccines to the country, but their roll out was delayed due to widespread public suspicion on their efficacy. Additionally, the World Bank approved \$8 million financing for The Gambia to strengthen immunization systems and service delivery capacity to support the COVID-19 vaccination roll-out. This is part of a \$19 million financing towards the implementation of government National COVID-19 preparedness and response plan (World Bank, 2021).

According to the High Frequency Survey report, more than two out of three households expressed willingness to be vaccinated against covid-19 if a vaccine were approved. However, household heads in the wealthiest strata and in urban areas are much less favorable to vaccination. The reasons cited by households reluctant to be vaccinated vary widely, the main reasons being lack of confidence in the vaccine or the authorities responsible for vaccine distribution and fear of deteriorating health. Moreover, regarding willingness to pay for vaccination, 58% of households are in favor of it; however, the majority are only willing to pay an amount of less than 500GMD.

3. Sectoral Impact of Covid-19 in The Gambia

3.1. Health Care

The health sector in the Gambia is divided into primary, secondary and tertiary health care delivery. PHC concentrated in villages and have community health worker and Traditional Midwife. The Gambia's Primary Health Care (PHC) system has been challenged, with 16 nurses and mid-wives per 10000 people, 11 hospitable beds per 10,000 people and health expenditure remaining low at 4.4 percent of GDP compared to countries with very high human development where the averages are 81 nurses and mid-wives per 10,000 people, 55 hospital beds per 10,000 people and health expenditure of 12 percent of GDP. The secondary health care delivery is provided by large and small health centers and are staff by resident nurses, doctors and ancillary staff. Tertiary health care provides specialist consultant services in four main referral hospitals in Gambia (UNDP, 2020).

The impact of the Covid-19 on the health care system is that it has diverted attention from other diseases in terms of financial resources and health workers. Hence, those with chronic diseases such as asthma, diabetes, high blood pressures are left unattended. Similarly, those living with HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and other illnesses will be highly affected as little medical attention is given to them. Additionally, the great difficulties that Covid-19 brought to households and businesses, especially the household heads and business owners, can lead to a surge in stress and mental health disorders, which can lead to increase crime, domestic violence, and psycho-social trauma. Women are poised to be more affected by the cumulative effects of lack of basic healthcare at all levels of health care, inability to earn income through petty trading and the increased childcare demands due to school closures.

3.2. Tourism

Since the outbreak of the disease Tourism was the first sector got hit during the pandemic. Hotels and lodges, Restaurants and Bars and the informal sector linked with this sector were immediately hit once the virus spread to Europe. After the country's first case on 17th March, 2020 and the subsequent closure of the country's airspace, the tourist season was declared closed. The COVID-19 pandemic has weakened economic activity particularly the tourism sector which has declined by 62-percent arrivals in 2020; and the CBG's business sentiment survey and the composite index of economic activity (CIEA) pointed to significantly weak economic activity during the year. As a result, establishments in the Tourism sector reported a loss of GMD6.8 billion losses in revenue, of which 95 percent emanates from loss to restaurants and hotels.

According to the GBoS survey, establishments resort to reducing staff, or reducing pay or disposing of the stock of establishments. Out of the 266 establishments 167 resorted to reducing staff, 65 reduce pay and 28 establishments disposed stock (GBoS, 2020).

Table: Loss to Tourism Establishments

Type of Establishment	Total loss (GMD)	% share of the loss
Hotel	6,430,000,000.00	94.6
Camp	15,000,000.00	0.2
Lodge	7,731,680.00	0.1
Eco Lodge	5,684,500.00	0.1
Motel	260,000.00	0
Apartment	3,510,589.00	0.1
Guest House	12,200,000.00	0.2
Restaurant	33,800,000.00	0.5
Fast Food	65,000.00	0
Cafeteria	-	0
Bar & Cocktail Lounge	2,820,000.00	0
Beach Bar	27,600,000.00	0.4
Ground Tour Operator	58,400,000.00	0.9
Night Clubs	3,361,163.00	0
Forex Bureaus	4,865,476.00	0.1
Casino/Gaming/Betting	24,500,000.00	0.4
Retail Shop/Gift Shop	5,010,000.00	0.1
Other	160,000,000.00	2.4
Total	6,794,808,408.00	100

Source: GBoS Rapid Assessment of Tourism and Related Sectors, 2020

On a more positive note, a pre-harvest survey conducted by the Ministry of Agriculture came out highly positive and activity in construction and wholesale trade have been robust, supported by large remittance inflows (estimated at US\$590 million in 2020, an 80-percent increase over 2019). The pandemic has therefore led to IMF staff estimate a stagnation (a zero-percent growth) of economic activity in 2020 (compared to a strong growth of 6.1 percent in 2019), and inflation subsided from 7.7 percent (y/y) at end-2019 to 5.7 percent at end-2020, reflecting weak domestic demand and stability in the local currency dalasi (which depreciated by 1.0 percent (y/y) relative to the US dollar). However, inflation went up in recent months, to 7.4 percent at end-March 2021,

driven primarily by somewhat temporary and seasonal factors, such as disruptions of global and regional trade, the onset of Ramadan and the uplifting of lockdown measures.

A protracted COVID-19 pandemic could weaken further economic activity (including delayed tourism recovery), widen fiscal and financing gaps, and strain the financial sector. Despite the recent increase in forex reserves, these risks reaffirm the financing needs. The presidential and parliamentary elections planned for December 2021 and April 2022, respectively, could put pressures on public finances and disrupt reform momentum.

The upsurge of new COVID-19 variants has dented The Gambia's economic prospects. For 2020, economic growth is estimated at zero percent; the sharp decline in tourist arrivals was partly attenuated by robust construction sector and strong agricultural production. Economic activity is expected to rebound in 2021 (with projected growth of 4.9 percent), albeit slower than previously envisaged due to the new COVID wave and the reinstated travel restrictions in many countries. The construction sector, agricultural production, and large investment projects are expected to support growth.

3.3. Education

The first steps taken by the government of the Gambia after the first case in the country were the banning of public gatherings and the closure of all schools including Universities by declaring a State of Public Emergency (SoPE), so schools and tertiary institutions have remained closed since then. During this period, private schools and government institutions have been attempting to find a solution to this challenge; how to teach students who are not allowed to go to the school. Whilst private schools took the path of online classes, public schools through the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education (MoBSE) have started classes on television and radio for certain subjects at most levels. The results for this have been mixed, with people, particularly in rural areas complaining about their lack of access to a television to follow these classes. There is anecdotal evidence that those with radio have difficulty understanding what is being taught because they cannot see what the teacher is writing on the board. Also, students in the commercial field have raised concerns highlighting that they are left out because their core subjects are not featured. There are also the concerns for students in non-formal education such as those in madrassas that also augment the risks and burden of children not going to school.

The closure of schools has affected over 67,000 children in The Gambia. This is only the number from Early Childhood Development to senior secondary school not including tertiary education where there are about an additional 6000+ students. The implications are that it will be difficult for schools to achieve 100 percent school contact hours in 2020. The Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education have been using innovative methods such as the use of media platforms for children to have access to education while being at home. According to the GBoS High Frequency Survey for wave 4, more than nine out of ten households sent all of their school-going members back to school for the new academic year, and about 5% sent only some. For most households (60%) that did not send any or all of their children back to school in the current school year, the registration process has not yet been completed and will be completed soon.

Although commendable, MoBSE's approach risks further exacerbating inequalities that exist in the education sector. Students from wealthier (more advantaged) backgrounds are more likely to complete school and perform better in exams. Students from the rural areas and public schools are more likely to have these deficiencies. These inequalities may further be entrenched if the current situation persists and those disadvantaged are not able to get the same access to the content provided by MoBSE on television and radio.

The Ministry of Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology (MoHERST) in collaboration with GSM operators and the University of the Gambia worked closely together to make available, in April, real time online classes for students to continue their learning. This approach allows students to connect to Google Classroom and Google Meet for free. The content (recorded classes and lecture materials) is made available for all students at a near zero cost. This allows those without time, or the means to access online classes in real time to access the content later on. Despite MoHERST's effort, some tertiary institutions could still not host online classes, this has resulted in the significant loss of credit hours. A segment that has remained more difficult to deal with is the Gambia Technical Training Institute (GTTI) and other Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutions. Due to the nature of some of their programs, hands on programs, it would be more challenging to solve the problem. However, this provides the opportunity for the increased use of technology in the education sector and to take advantage by doing things differently in the sector.

3.4. MSMEs

The large informal sector of the Gambia economy is dominated by MSMEs -71%, and they employ more than 95 % of informal sector workers. Since the outbreak of Covid-19 government has taken measures to reduce the spread by introducing lockdown measures during which businesses were non-operational. The resulting reduction in business activity has reduced earnings of business owners which had a disproportionate impact on the MSMEs. Moreover, border closures between the Gambia and Senegal seriously impact on the income of informal cross-border traders at border towns such as Amdalai, Farefenni and Giboro. However, a stimulus packages given by the Gambia government covered some struggling MSMEs, especially those in the tourism sector.

To have an idea of the MSME landscape in the country from a household perspective, the IHS 2015/2016 collected information on MSME by LGA, their average income and status of registration. As the table below indicates, the level of informality, i.e number of non-registered MSME is higher, and the average income pattern show that business is most profitable in the urban Gambia- Banjul, Kanifing and Brikama, in line with expectation. Hence, any government stimulus packages that seeks to support MSMEs should focus on these local government areas.

Table: MSME information by LGA

LGA	No. of Enterprise (Est.)	Average Monthly Revenue (GMD)	Registered for Income Tax (Percent)
Banjul	382	35,525.06	4
Kanifing	4,399	61,561.97	4
Brikama	10,401	20,689.29	4
Mansakoko	4,468	21,706.72	15
Kerewan	11,955	8,759.51	14
Kuntaur	1,460	7,781.67	5
Janjangbureh	1,061	6,870.85	4
Basse	7,218	11,607.78	14

Note 1: Estimate of average monthly revenue removes to top 2 percent of revenue earners (outliers).

Note 2: These figures are for 2016. No adjustments were made for the duration due to lack of adequate information to scale to 2020.

Source: UN, 2020

3.5. Employment

According to the last Labor Force Survey in 2018, the working age population of the Gambia is 1.26 million from a population of 2.3 million people. Majority of the working age population (68.2%) is youth (15-35 year) and 31.8% are 36-64 years, while the labor force participation rate is 53%, with higher proportion in the rural area (58%) than the urban area (49.2%). Unemployment rate is at 35.2%, female and youth unemployment rate are 57.1% and 41.5 % respectively. Underemployment is largest in urban areas (64.5%) and for female (60.7%) than in rural areas (35.5%) and for male (39.3%).

To estimate the effect of Covid-19 on employment in the Gambia, the MOTIE estimates that 52,752 jobs will be lost for informally employed people for both the formal and informal. This is alarming for a country that face high poverty and unemployment rates. The sectoral distribution of the projected job losses indicates that wholesale and retail trade, repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles, construction, transportation and storage, accommodation and food service activities comprise nearly 30 percent of the rise in job losses.

With most workers and MSMEs in the informal sector relying on daily work to sustain families and businesses, the impact of Covid-19 on people and businesses is expected to be highly negative. Women and children are most affected by shocks due to their vulnerability and higher disproportionate involvement in the informal sector.

Data on the share of the population employed in different sectors indicate that majority of workers are in urban areas of Banjul and Brikama and are mostly in the services sector.

3.6. Trade

Trade is an important aspect of the Gambian economy for job creation and reducing poverty. Strategically, the country is situated at the coast and considered as an entre-pot for many landlocked countries in West Africa supported by relatively low import taxes, efficient port and customs services and limited administrative barriers. Promoting private sector growth through industrial production and linking the global value chain is an important goal of the NDP.

The Gambia has suffered from an increasing reliance on imported goods with little domestic export emanating from the country. This has led to a current account deficit for a very long time with the latest figures being -8.5 % (2019) and -11. 9% (2020). The exports of the Gambia are mainly agricultural products such as groundnut, cashew nut, fish and fish products, which are mainly exported without much value addition. Re-export trade which used to be vibrant sector for earning foreign exchange has been on the decline due to low competitiveness and trade-related policy decisions. Trade facilitation is hindered by inefficiencies at the sea port, lack of automation, poor custom services, and noncompliance to ECOWAS protocols in Interstate Transport Scheme within the ECOWAS region. Hence the need to promote industries that add value to the raw agricultural products, meet international sanitary and phyto-sanitary standards, access high value markets, and leverage the regional integration drive in ECOWAS and Africa.

Globally, the impact of Covid-19 on trade was estimated to be greater than the decline in trade due to the financial crisis in 2008-2010, with exports from Asia and North America hardest hit (WTO). In the Gambia, the outbreak of Covid-19 has led to the closure of border with Senegal and the closure of airspace has led to the decline in the supply of essential commodities such as oil, onions, potatoes, chicken legs, sugar and cement resulting in higher domestic prices for these products.

The government reacted by ordering the keeping of prices constant and the prohibition of hoarding commodities and re-export, which did not help much (UNDP, 2020).

4. Conclusion

This document, a desk review of Covid-19 Impact in The Gambia, aims to review the previous works that has been done on Covid-19 and its impact on the Gambia since it outbreak. It does this by first setting out the government strategies and responses and then delve into the sectoral impact of the viral disease, focusing on key sectors that are mostly affected by the pandemic. The review has revealed the following findings:

First, the amount of financial resources that is allocated to fighting Covid-19 is very large. Though data on where the funds were used is not readily available, it is however clear that the government supported MSMEs in key sectors like tourism through financial reform packages; households receive monetary and food aid from household as Covid-19 mitigation strategies; Rented facilities to quarantine primary and secondary contacts of infected patients; and spending on Covid-19 awareness campaign especially at the beginning of the pandemic.

Second, several awareness campaigns where undertaken by government, media, and CSO resulting in great understanding and awareness of Covid-19 according to the GBoS survey. And of the means of dissemination, Radio and Television is seen as the most effective ways of relating information on Covid-19.

Third, preventive and mitigation strategies instituted by government include social distancing, lockdowns, sanitary measures, and social assistances to vulnerable household and businesses.

Fifth, after two waves of the virus The Gambia received Corona Virus vaccination and started vaccination process. Through the COVAX initiative the Gambia receive doses of AstraZeneca amounting to 36,000 does, followed by the receipt of 929,200 syringes and 9300 safety boxes (UNICEF The Gambia) also through the COVAX facility, while Senegal also donated 10,000 Sinopharm vaccines to the country.

Sixth, the sectoral impact of the Covid-19 cuts across health care, education, tourism, employment, MSMEs, and trade. In all sectors government made efforts to relief the hardship actors face through financial and non-financial reliefs.

Finally, this review has revealed that most of the studies that are conducted under Covid-19 are commissioned by development partners and little studies were commissioned by the Gambia government.

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