

## ICT in Education in The Gambia

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Source: *World Fact Book*<sup>1</sup>

*Please note:*

This short *Country Report*, a result of a larger *infoDev*-supported *Survey of ICT in Education in Africa*, provides a general overview of current activities and issues related to ICT use in education in the country. The data presented here should be regarded as illustrative rather than exhaustive. ICT use in education is at a particularly dynamic stage in Africa; new developments and announcements happening on a daily basis somewhere on the continent. Therefore, these reports should be seen as “snapshots” that were current at the time they were taken; it is expected that certain facts and figures presented may become dated very quickly.

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## Overview

The Gambia has seen tremendous developments in ICTs over the past few years. Progress has been made in telecommunications, yet the full impact of ICTs in the education sector is still yet to be realised and a draft policy is yet to be finalised. In those areas where progress has been made, the role of NGOs has been key.

## Country Profile

The Republic of The Gambia on the west coast of Africa is located on two banks of the River Gambia. With a population of about 1.5 million, it is the smallest country on the African continent and ranks 155 out of 177 countries on the United Nations Human Development Index.

From 1998 to 2001 The Gambia enjoyed consistent growth, averaging 5.4%, boosted by favourable weather and strengthening of reforms. However, in 2002 real GDP declined by 3% because poor rains reduced agricultural production, with a halving of the groundnut harvest and a reduction of about one-third in the output of other crops. The only sectors in the economy to show strong growth were tourism and construction. Real GDP rebounded to 7% in 2003, and 5% in 2004 and 2005.<sup>2</sup>

Table 1 provides some selected socio-economic indicators for the country.<sup>3,4</sup>

**Table 1: Socio-economic Indicators: The Gambia**

Indicator	
Population	1.5 million
Languages	English
2005 Economic activity 2005 (percent of GDP)	Agriculture: 33.0% Industry: 13.0% Services: 53.9%
Human Development Index	155 (out of 177 countries)
Human Poverty Index	86 (out of 102 countries)
Per capita gross national income (US dollars)	\$320 (2000); \$270 (2004); \$290 (2005)

## The Education System

Since 2002, a new basic education programme has been in place. Lower basic covers Grades 1 to 6 and upper basic covers Grades 7 to 9. Senior secondary education (Grades

10 to12) is for pupils between the ages of 16 and 18. At the end of Grade 12, pupils sit for the West African Secondary School-leaving Certificate Examinations (WASSCE).

Higher education in The Gambia is provided by the University of The Gambia, created in 1999, which comprises four faculties and Gambia College which includes four schools: Agricultural Science, Education, Nursing and Midwifery, and Public Health.<sup>5</sup>

Table 2 provides a quantitative perspective of some selected system indicators.<sup>3</sup>

**Table 2: Selected Education Data**

Indicator	
Primary enrolment (% gross)*	79.9 (200); 81.4 (2004)
Secondary enrolment (% gross)*	33.6 (2000); 46.9 (2004);
Ratio of girls to boys in primary and secondary (%)**	80.5 (2000); 97.7 (2004)

\*Percent of gross is the number enrolled as a percentage of the number in the eligible age group.

\*\*Ratio of girls to boys is the percentage of girls to boys enrolled at primary and secondary levels in public and private schools.

## ICT Policies

### National

The proposed Gambia National Information and Communication Infrastructure (NICI) Policy and Plans was designed to address the areas where ICT would facilitate the achievement of the Vision 2020 overall objective, which is to transform the nation into a middle-income country by 2020 through accelerating private sector development, restructuring economic management, developing the human capital base, and institutionalising decentralised and democratic participatory government structures, processes, and systems. The overall objective for the policy is to “leapfrog” several stages of development by establishing a participatory approach in building human resources and a conducive environment that utilises ICT as a platform to exchange data, information, and knowledge, and as a tool to implement applications and provide services to achieve higher growth rates in all spheres of socio-economic activities.<sup>6</sup>

The policy addresses 10 priority focus areas or pillars:<sup>7</sup>

- Infrastructure
- Regulatory issues
- Local governance
- Education
- Health
- Trade and commerce

- E-governance
- Agriculture
- Gender
- Media

The Department of State for Communication, Information and Technology is the lead agency responsible for implementing the policy.

### **Education**

A draft ICT Policy framework for State Education has been ongoing since 2002. It is expected to be finalised by the end of March 2007. Core elements of the ICTs in education policy include the following:

- Network all educational institutions and institute a mandatory computer literacy programme in all educational entities in the country coupled with continued training of all educators.
- Strategically position the newly established University of The Gambia by appropriately integrating ICT in all of its curricula.
- Forge alliances with a carefully built up “high-end” ICT training institution to be established by the public sector or in partnership with the private sector (or preferably by competent Gambian entrepreneurs with the support of government) and position it as an ICT training hub not only for the Gambia but also to the entire West Africa region. Information technology skills must be a mandatory requirement and carefully integrated in the entire curriculum of the entire educational sector.

The major implementation agency for the proposed policy is the Department of State for Education.

There is a proposed second policy for schools, sponsored by DFID, but it is at a very early stage of development.

### **Infrastructure**

#### **National**

The Gambia has been slow in liberalising its telecom sector, which has in many ways affected the penetration levels of the various ICTs indexes. The State Telco Gamtel is the only fixed network operator; however two mobile operators are in operation. There also exist many private ICT initiatives, especially in the capital Banjul, that provide Internet and computing services.

Table 3 provides a snapshot of the state of national ICT infrastructure.

**Table 3: ICTs in Gambia**

Indicators	
Fixed-line operators	1
GAMTEL	44,000
Total fixed-line telephone subscribers (2005)	44,000
Cellular mobile operators	2
GAMCEL	147,478
AFRICELL	73,841
Total cellular mobile subscribers (2005)	221,319
Internet data service providers	4
Internet users per 100 inhabitants (2004)	4
International voice gateways licences	1
International data gateways licence	1

*Source: Pura&ITU<sup>8</sup>*

### Education

At the tertiary level, a computer lab with a high-speed Internet connection provided by the Government of Taiwan and the Government of Gambia is currently serving the university community with other private-sector initiatives. At the Gambia Technical Training Institute (GTTI) there are two networked labs connected to the Internet.

At the secondary level, a project by the Ministry of Education to provide a computer lab for all state schools in The Gambia has led to 16 state secondary schools (out of 31) being equipped with state-of-the-art ICT labs. The schools received Pentium IV computers and were networked. The project was supported by the World Bank, but further funding has yet to be arranged for the other schools.

Internet connection at these schools has remained a challenge with only a select few schools currently having access. Most of the schools have their connection through a private sector initiative or NGO support

At the primary level, while there is no co-ordinated government initiative for ICTs, several initiatives by individuals and NGOs have helped equipped some schools with computer labs.

### Current ICT Initiatives and Projects

Table 4 summarises the current and recent ICT initiatives and projects in The Gambia.

**Table 4: Summary of Current and Recent Initiatives and Projects**

<p><b>Project:</b> Computer Literacy Programme: school teachers and principals, trained on keyboarding, word processing, basic troubleshooting and maintenance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Ogranisation(s)/funding sources:</i> Department of State for Communication, Information and Technology; funded by the Government of The Gambia.</li> <li>• <i>Contact:</i> <a href="http://newgambia.gm">newgambia.gm</a></li> </ul>
<p><b>Project:</b> Wider Net Project: setting up a small intranet comprising five work stations and a server</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Ogranisation(s)/funding sources:</i> University of Gambia</li> <li>• <i>Contact:</i> <a href="http://widernet.org">widernet.org</a></li> </ul>
<p><b>Project:</b> iEARN Gambia: involves teachers in about 20 schools in collaborative project work</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Ogranisation(s)/funding sources:</i> Department of State Education</li> <li>• <i>Contact:</i> <a href="http://learn.org">learn.org</a></li> </ul>
<p><b>Project:</b> Education Management Information System (EMIS): management of education resources (financial, material, and human); deployment of computers to secondary schools, and use of computer packages in teaching of science</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Ogranisation(s)/funding sources:</i> Department of State for Communication, Information and Technology; funded by the Government of The Gambia.</li> <li>• <i>Contact:</i> <a href="http://newgambia.gm">newgambia.gm</a></li> </ul>
<p><b>Project:</b> Gambia-UNESCO ICT Fellowship Center: recognising ICTs in the service of persons with disabilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Ogranisation(s)/funding sources:</i> The National Federation of The Gambia, UNESCO clubs and centres, and the Department of State for Communication, Information and Technology</li> <li>• <i>Contact:</i> <a href="http://stockholmchallenge.se">stockholmchallenge.se</a></li> </ul>
<p><b>Project:</b> Peace Corps Computer Project: bringing computer equipment to Gambian Schools through donations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Ogranisation(s)/funding sources:</i> Peace corps</li> <li>• <i>Contact:</i> <a href="http://iicd.org">iicd.org</a></li> </ul>
<p><b>Project:</b> Gambia HELP Computer Project: building computer labs and teaching a key group of students and staff at each school the skills necessary to keep the labs up and running</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Ogranisation(s)/funding sources:</i> Gambia Help; funded by Rotary International/ Garfield High School's</li> <li>• <i>Contact:</i> <a href="http://gambiahelp.org">gambiahelp.org</a></li> </ul>
<p><b>Project:</b> Computer Training in Sierra Leone and The Gambia: train-the-trainer programmes that includes office applications and Web design</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Ogranisation(s)/funding sources:</i> Develop Africa, Inc. and individual donations</li> </ul>

- Contact: [universalgiving.org](http://universalgiving.org)

**Project:** YMCA Computer Training Center: offering computer literacy classes, consultancy and customised IT training

- Organisation(s)/funding sources: British Volunteer Organisation (VSO); YMCA
- Contact: <http://www.ymca.gm/>

## Implementing ICT in Education: What Helps and What Hinders?

Generally there is a commitment to improve ICTs in education in the Gambia. There are three major obstacles however:

- Gender bias in access to ICTs
- High attrition rate of teachers with ICT skills
- Heavy reliance on donor support for ICTs in education

Table 5 provides a summary of the current stage of ICT development in The Gambia in terms of enabling or constraining features in the education system.

**Table 5: Factors Influencing ICT Adoption**

Factors	Enabling Features	Constraints
<i>Policy framework and implementation plans</i>	A commitment to policy development and political will at the ministerial level	
<i>Advocacy leadership</i>		Lack of adoption of ICT by teachers and school administrators
<i>Gender equity</i>		In some schools computer labs are opened after normal school hours, which is not conducive for girls' involvement.
<i>Infrastructure and access</i>		Unreliable electricity
<i>Human resource capacity</i>		High attrition rate of teachers who have ICT skills as they leave for the private sector
<i>Learning content</i>	A commitment to make ICT an examinable module	Lack of a standard ICT curriculum for all schools
<i>Attitudes</i>		Lack of adoption of ICT by teachers and school administrators

<i>Sustainability</i>	Too much reliance on donor and philanthropic funding
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## Notes

1. The World Factbook 2007. <https://cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/ga.html>
2. Country Brief: The Gambia. 2006. World Bank. <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/AFRICAEXT/GAMBIAEXTN/0,,me nuPK:351648~pagePK:141132~piPK:141107~theSitePK:351626,00.html>
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7. UNECA. <http://www.uneca.org/disd/events/accra/e-strategy/The%20GAMBIA%20NICI%20EXPERIANCE.ppt>
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