

Enabling Social Innovation in The Republic of Gambia

Country Snapshot

Social innovation: "the processes and outcomes of developing novel approaches to address societal challenges facing people and planet." ¹

This snapshot represents a descriptive, non-exhaustive overview of key highlights from The Gambia's social innovation ecosystem.

- ✓ Direct focus on social innovation
- ✗ Connected but indirect focus on social innovation
- ✗ No focus on social innovation

INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

Official Definition of Social Innovation

No formal legal definition of "social innovation" has been identified in Gambian primary law. Policymakers and development partners informally reference the concept through frameworks aligned to the National Development Plan (NDP) 2023–2027 and the Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) Policy, though no single government-endorsed definition is consistently used. ^{2,3}

Government Body for Social Innovation

No single legally mandated agency explicitly handles social innovation. In practice, enabling functions are distributed across multiple ministries and public bodies with broader mandates:

- Ministry of Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology (MoHERST): Leads STI policy, oversees tertiary education research and coordinates science-driven innovation. ⁴
- Ministry of Trade, Industry, Regional Integration and Employment (MOTIE): Administers support programmes for MSMEs and entrepreneurship, a key vehicle for social innovation. ⁵
- National Enterprise Development Initiative (NEDI): Provides business development services, training and access to finance for micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), including youth and women-led ventures. ⁵
- Ministry of Communications and Digital Economy (MoCDE): Oversees ICT, e-government, and open data; hosts the ICT Agency (PURA) and national digital transformation frameworks. ⁶
- National Youth Council (NYC): Facilitates youth empowerment programmes and entrepreneurship support. ⁷
- National Women's Council: Coordinates women's economic empowerment programming, linking to social protection and livelihood innovation. ⁷

Government Strategy for Social Innovation

The Gambia's enabling policy environment for social innovation is embedded in broader national strategies rather than a standalone social innovation framework:

- National Development Plan (NDP) 2023–2027 (Green Recovery Development Plan): Prioritises green economic transformation, governance, food security, digital connectivity and inclusive social development; integrates innovation-relevant accelerators across SDG areas. ²
- STI Strategy 2021–2024: Aligned with the AU STISA-2024 framework; addresses research, development, ICT-enabled learning and innovation governance. ³
- e-Government Strategy 2021–2024: Aims to modernise public service delivery through ICT, foster innovation and promote a knowledge-based economy. ⁶
- Open Data Strategy 2023–2026: Promotes data-driven governance and innovation across government, private sector and civil society. ⁶

Policies, Laws & Regulations

Directly or closely linked (innovation + enterprise):

- STI Policy 2015–2024: Aligned to the AU STISA-2024 framework, covering science, technology and innovation governance and sector application. ³
- National Digital Policy / Digital Economy Master Plan 2024–2034: Sets the regulatory and strategy environment for digital transformation and innovation. ⁶

Broader enabling (social protection, CSOs, environment):

- National Social Protection Policy 2015–2025: Governs social protection systems including shock-responsive cash transfer programmes. ⁸
- NGO Act: Governs civil society organisations and non-profits, which are primary vehicles for grassroots social innovation.
- National Environment Act: Enables environmental and social management frameworks, promoting sustainability. ¹⁰

Official Statistics

No official cross-cutting statistics specifically for "social innovation" were found; data is tracked through national economic, social protection and ICT frameworks. Key available indicators include:

4th Gambia ranked in the CAF World Giving Index 2024 (score: 61; helped a stranger: 78%, donated: 38%, volunteered: 68%). ¹¹

174th/193 Gambia's UNDP Human Development Index 2024 ranking. ⁸

~9 in 10 children in the country live in multidimensional poverty, per recent UNICEF analysis — a key driver of community-led social innovation efforts. ⁸

Note: The Gambia was not included in the GII 2024 due to insufficient data coverage for the 133-economy index. ¹²

Government Programs

Examples of public programmes supporting innovation for social outcomes:

- NEDI MSME Support Programs: Ongoing business skills training, access-to-finance schemes and incubation for MSMEs, including for youth and women-led ventures. ⁵
- National Social Protection Programs (Cash for Work, School Feeding): Administered through the Office of the Vice President with UNICEF support; address vulnerability and create pathways to livelihoods. ⁸
- Open Data & Digital Connectivity Initiatives: Under MoCDE; aiming to enable data-driven innovation by government agencies and civil society. ⁶

ECOSYSTEM

Stakeholders

Key enabling actors operating across digital, environmental and community innovation:

- Gambia Environmental Alliance (GEA): First governing body for environmental CSOs in The Gambia, supporting 50+ member organisations in community-based conservation and sustainable livelihoods. ¹³
- Gambia Chamber of Commerce and Industry (GCCl): Facilitates private sector engagement with innovation and enterprise development. ⁵
- University of The Gambia (UTG) and partner research departments: Support applied research and human capital development. ⁴
- UNDP The Gambia: Engaged across SDG, digital transformation and inclusive development programming. ⁷
- UNICEF Gambia: Partners with the government on social protection, child poverty, nutrition and education innovation. ⁸



Support Initiatives



Support modalities include development partner-funded grants, technical assistance, and community outreach. The AU-EU D4D (Digital for Development) Hub project supports digital innovation capacity. The Canada Fund for Local Initiatives (CFLI) funds small, high-impact projects in governance, gender equality and human dignity. ^{6 4}

Collaboration



Inter-sectoral collaboration is largely project-based and donor-driven. The UN Gambia Cooperation Framework 2024–2028 provides a structured coordination platform across UN agencies, government and civil society on six SDG transition areas: food systems, energy, education, social protection, digital connectivity and climate resilience. ⁷

FINANCE

Financing Schemes



Social innovation in The Gambia is predominantly financed through international development aid, UN agency grants and government social protection allocations. Key sources include:

- World Bank, African Development Bank, IDA: Infrastructure, social protection and digital economy financing. ²
- UNICEF and UNDP: Social protection systems, nutrition, education, child poverty and SDG programming. ^{7 8}
- EU (via D4D Hub, CFLI and bilateral programmes): Digital innovation, governance and gender equality. ^{6 4}

No single official estimate of annual funding dedicated specifically to "social innovation" was found. The government faces an approximately 80% financing shortfall for the NDP's top outcomes. ⁷

Financing Inclusivity



Financing is increasingly targeted to women, youth and rural communities, but access gaps remain for smaller community organisations. Formalisation and patient-capital remain significant barriers. ^{5 8}

SOCIETY

Public Awareness of Social Innovation



Public awareness of social innovation as a formal concept is nascent. Awareness is growing through community-based environmental, education and digital initiatives, but no comprehensive national framework exists. Discourse typically centres on "community development", "entrepreneurship" and "NGO work". ^{3 13}

Research



Applied research is limited but growing, concentrated in areas of health, agriculture and ICT-for-development. The University of The Gambia (UTG) and international partners conduct applied social research, though institutional capacity for research-driven social innovation remains constrained. ^{4 3}

Education & Human Capital



No nationally standardised social innovation qualification pathway exists. Entrepreneurship education is offered informally through NEDI, youth councils and NGO programmes. Access to quality tertiary education remains limited; digital skills development is a growing priority under the National Digital Policy 2024. ³ ⁶

Entrepreneurship



—th / **—** countries

Enabling conditions for business

124th / **141** countries

45.9 Global Competitiveness Index score (2019)



MSME entrepreneurship is the primary commercial form of social innovation, supported through NEDI and international development partners. ⁵

Social & Environmental Consciousness



Solidarity



Participation

61% population

Volunteering

4th CAF World Giving Index 2024 — score: 61 (helped a stranger: 78%, donated: 38%, volunteered: 68%). ¹¹

CAF World Giving Index 2024

—th / **180** countries

Sustainability

The Gambia's EPI ranking and climate score were not publicly available in disaggregated form at the time of publication. ¹⁵
Environmental Performance Index (EPI)2024