

AGDI Gender Outlook Series

8

THE GAMBIA

The African Centre for Gender (ACG) *Gender Outlook #8* aims to benchmark the Gambia's performance on the African Gender and Development Index (AGDI), highlight challenges and offer prioritized policy recommendations to accelerate progress towards gender equality. The AGDI is based on two components. The first is the Gender Status Index (GSI), a quantitative snapshot of 44 indicators that capture gender disparities¹ in the social, economic and political arenas. The second component is the African Women's Progress Scoreboard (AWPS), a qualitative self-evaluation of government performance in the implementation of more than 30 treaties, declarations, and resolutions affecting women's rights and women's empowerment in the social, economic and political arenas. All data² are provided by stakeholders in the Gambia, including various ministries and civil society organizations. This profile draws on the results from the AGDI Country Report for the Gambia, one of the 14 countries in Phase 2 of the AGDI³.

Key Messages

- The Gambia has one of the highest fertility rates in Africa, progressively accelerating since the 1980s. In order to

get the full benefits of the likely demographic dividend⁴, the Gambia has to provide accessible and good quality education in safe locations, particularly to empower girls and help them move into non-agricultural employment.

- Inconsistencies between customary/religious laws and national laws and international instruments give mixed signals to the society, creating a gray zone where early marriage, teenage pregnancy and various types of violence against women occur frequently and impede women's human capital formation.
- While the level of women's presence in civil society organizations is promising, their formal participation in national and local politics is highly limited. Breaking down damaging gender norms requires female leadership at the local and national levels.

Figure 1 provides a comparative perspective for the Gambia's GSI and AWPS. At the composite level, the two indices are not far from one another, with the AWPS on average recording a 70 per cent policy implementation score. A striking observation is that in the Political Power block, policy implementation significantly outperforms policy outcomes. This is largely due to women's complete absence from traditional governance structures and trade unions, although the Gambia is among a few countries with the highest scores in gender mainstreaming. The GSI score for Social Power, similar to all other study countries, is much higher than the score for the other two blocks and there is a significant gap between policy outcomes and policy implementation performance emanating from the Gambia's lack of policy

¹ The GSI for most of the indicators are calculated by dividing the indicator for female achievement by that for male achievement for the particular indicator. A tolerance level of 3 per cent is set around the full gender parity score, leading to a parity bandwidth of 0.97-1.03 whereby scores below (above) this bandwidth indicate gender disparity against women (men). However, there are eight reverse indicators, i.e. stunting, underweight, mortality, prevalence of HIV/AIDS, share of women under poverty line, time spent on non-market activities and domestic care and volunteer activities and youth unemployment rate, that follow a slightly different formula such that overshooting in these normatively negative indicators are neutralized for the consistency of the index.

² The Country Report from the Gambia was finalized in December 2011. While the ACG has strived to update various indicators using international databases, e.g. Demographic and Health Survey and the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the majority of the indicators are from 2011 and before and were provided by the government of the Gambia.

³ Other countries that were part of AGDI 2 are Botswana, Burundi, Cabo Verde, Republic of Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Malawi, Mali, Senegal, Togo and Zambia.

⁴ As mortality and fertility rates decline during the development process of countries, the working-age population increases substantially in relation to dependents, which may increase economic growth rates and per capita income for a period of time. The demographic dividend refers to this additional increase in per capita income in response to the demographic transition. For more details, see <http://www.unfpa.org/demographic-dividend>.

Figure 1. African Gender and Development Index Snapshot – The Gambia

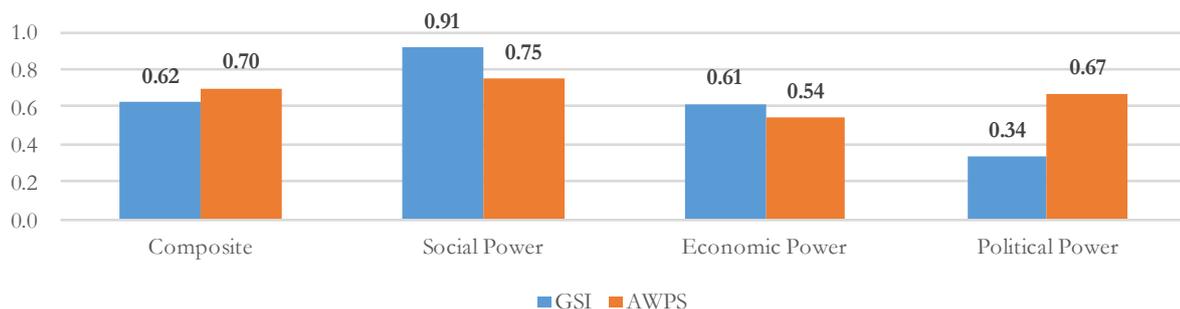
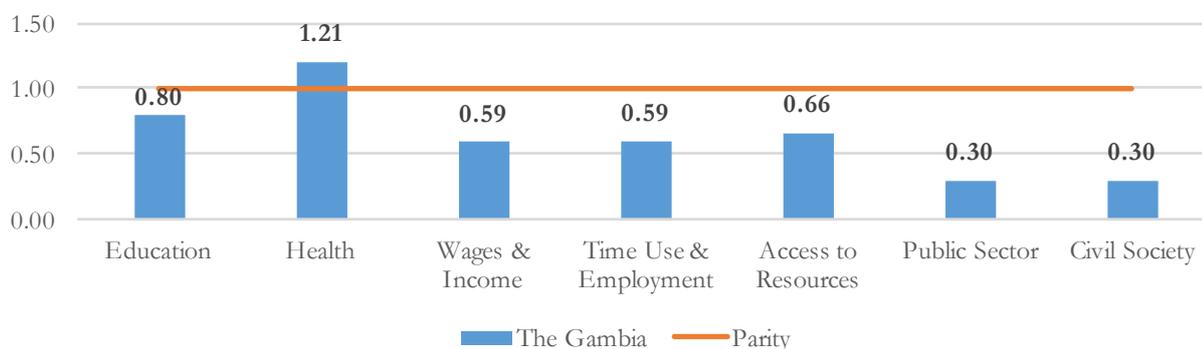


Figure 2. Disaggregating Gambia’s Gender Status Index



action on safe abortions. In order to boost its GSI score, the Gambia needs to focus particularly on the Economic Power block. The key message regarding the AWPS is that while several international instruments and policies have been ratified and adopted as policy commitments, their translation into development planning and budgetary allocations is lagging significantly behind.

Figure 2 benchmarks each sub-component of the Gambia’s GSI. It is notable that women reach and exceed parity only in the *Health* sub-component and this is due especially to women’s greater use of antiretroviral treatment (ART) services. The low score in *Education* reflects the fact that the young men’s literacy rate is double the rate for young women. In the Economic Power block, all sub-components are around the two-thirds level, with *Access to Resources* featuring gender parity in ownership of livestock and access to credit. Strong policy commitment is needed to reduce general gender disparities and lift women out of poverty. While the Gambia has a relatively high score in the AWPS Political Power block (0.67), its GSI scores show that only one-third of the distance to gender parity is covered. Addressing women’s absence from traditional governance structures as well as trade unions would immediately elevate Gambia’s score.

- The **Social Power** block is made up of the *Education* and *Health* sub-components. The key problem to address is the alarmingly high gender disparity in literacy among the 15-24 age group. The country also needs to boost girls’ enrolment rates in secondary and tertiary education.

In *Education*, while there is gender parity at pre-school and primary levels, there are large disparities between urban and rural areas, as well as across different regions. Beyond primary schooling, gender disparities grow, particularly in tertiary education. While there has been a promising trend since 2007 with more and more girls enrolling in universities or vocational training, there has been an unfortunate concentration in areas which are traditionally considered as “female”. This occupational segregation results in a disproportionately large number of Gambian women in the services sector. While the government has shown commendable initiative in seeking to strengthen the capacity of all its citizens, gender norms and violence against women in its many forms are some of the biggest challenges facing the country in raising the quantity and quality of education for girls. Early and forced marriage as well as teenage pregnancy are among the top factors behind girls not attaining higher education. A key statistic on the quality of education in the Gambia is

Figure 3a. GSI for Education indicators

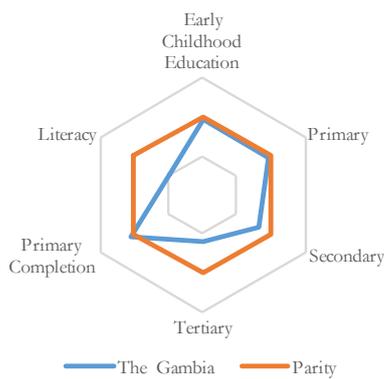
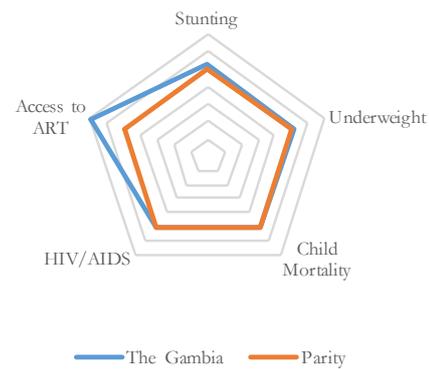


Figure 3b. GSI for Health indicators



Notes: ART = antiretroviral treatment; mortality is the mortality rate of children under the age of 5 years; HIV/AIDS relates to prevalence for those between the ages of 15 and 24.

that it has the largest gender disparity in youth literacy rates among the 13 countries under review.

In *Health*, while child health indicators generally reflect gender parity, as evident in other AGDI Round II countries under review, there are many more women than men accessing antiretroviral treatment. This is directly linked to the fact that the HIV/AIDS prevalence rate for young women is twice that for young men. It is discouraging to note that women are less knowledgeable about HIV/AIDS prevention methods than men. This justifies immediate policy action, particularly information campaigns, to reach women with such crucial knowledge.

- The **Economic Power** block is made up of the *Income, Time Use and Employment* and *Access to Resources* sub-components. Women dominate two sectors in the Gambia: agriculture (rice farming and horticulture) and the informal sector, and face significant disparities in each sector.

In *Wages and Income*, across the indicators with available data, parity is within reach only in income drawn from the informal sector. While cash crops are farmed by men, women engage in subsistence farming and household chores, a combination that has negative consequences on the environment in the form of overuse of wood and fresh water. Large gaps are observed across wages in all sectors, which is consistent with the gender disparity with respect to female-headed households in poverty.

In *Access to Resources*, large disparities are observed in immovable property such as land and housing. Despite the fact that women constitute 60-70 per cent of the labour force in agriculture, there is insufficient support in the form of access to land, labour-saving technology, extension services or optimal allocation within households when it comes to household production. In spite of the Women's Act of 2010 that guarantees women's right to acquire, own, manage and dispose of property⁵, women's access to land is mostly governed by customary law under which women

Figure 4a. Economic Power block

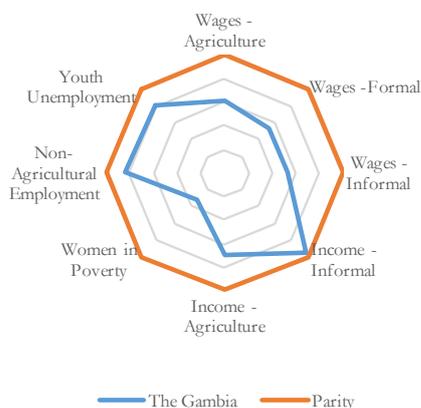
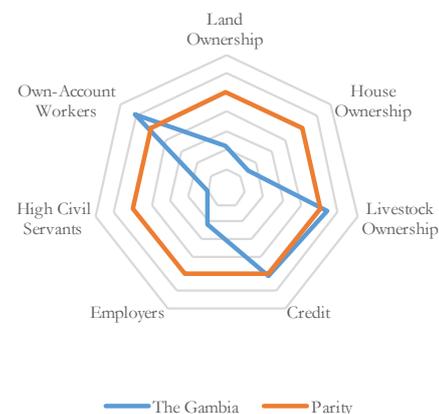


Figure 4b. Economic Power block (contd.)



5 Article 11. Available at: <http://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/docs/MONOGRAPH/90619/115464/F-1335047347/GMB90619.pdf>.

Figure 5a. Political Power

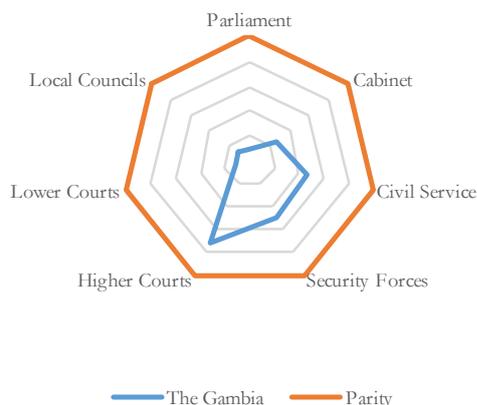
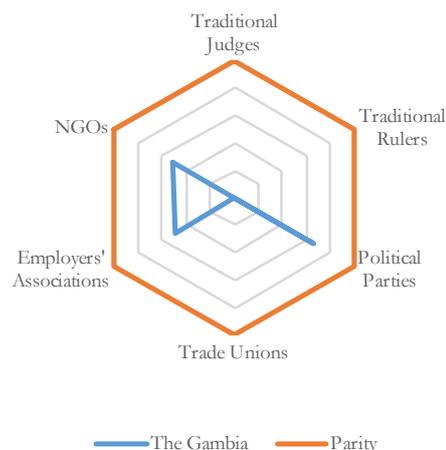


Figure 5b. Political Power (contd.)



borrow land from their husbands rather than own it⁶. Lower female educational attainment in rural areas is a strong barrier against uptake of technology which could kick start a virtuous cycle that could empower women across all three sub-components of the Economic Power block.

In terms of *Management*, women dominate the informal sector as own-account workers and slightly exceed parity in accessing credit. What remains unclear is the power of credit in starting a virtuous cycle for women entrepreneurs to turn into employers. Given the short-term approach and relatively high interest rates, however, unconditional cash transfers may be more useful for a larger proportion of women. The presence of women in higher ranks across the private sector is minimal and, as in many other countries, the private sector lags significantly behind the civil service where there are smaller gender disparities in wages and employment.

- The **Political Power** block is a function of the quantity and quality of female participation in the *Public Sector* and *Civil Society*.

In the *Public Sector*, while 58 per cent of the electorate are women, only 2 out of 48 seats in parliament were won by women in elections at the time of reporting. Recent data from the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) suggest that there is a further decline in the proportion of women in parliament.

Even though gender wage gaps are lowest in the civil service, women generally appear to have minimal representation with the exception of in the higher courts. The affirmative action to have at least one-third representation in the Cabinet seems to be fading away as recent data from the IPU suggest only 21 per cent representation for women. Some state-owned enterprises have introduced similar quotas and close to a third of top decision-making positions are occupied by women in the civil service at the time of reporting. What lags behind the most is perhaps what matters most: women's underrepresentation in local politics, where women's agency is highly limited.

In *Civil Society*, the Gambia records one of the highest levels of female participation at the higher echelons of political parties, employers' associations and NGOs. The main problem in this component is women's absence in trade unions. The Gambia could easily boost its GSI score if women's representation in trade unions increases from its current level of 0 per cent. The minimal presence of women in parliament is in turn inconsistent with women's visibility in such a vibrant civil society. There is no doubt that affirmative action in the form of initial quotas could raise the level of female participation in the political scene. In addition, removing land ownership as an eligibility criterion for elections will expand the pool of female candidates.

6 OECD (n.d.). Social Institutions and Gender Index for Gambia. Available at: <http://www.genderindex.org/country/gambia>.