



Republic of the Gambia

Ministry of Environment, Climate Change and Natural Resources

NATIONAL FOREST POLICY

2023 - 2032



ACRONYMS

| | |
|---------|--|
| AfDB | African development Bank |
| AGFP | All Gambia Forestry Platform |
| AU | African Union |
| BSc | Bachelor of Science |
| CF | Community Forest (ry) |
| CFC | Community Forest Committee |
| CFMA | Community Forest Management Agreement |
| CITES | Convention on International Trade in Wild Species of Fauna and Flora |
| CSO | Civil Society Organization |
| DFID | Department for International Development, United Kingdom |
| DoA | Department of Agriculture |
| DoF | Department of Forestry |
| DPWM | Department of Parks and Wildlife Management |
| DWR | Department of Water Resources |
| ECOWAS | Economic Community of West African States |
| EU | European Union |
| FAO | Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations |
| GBoS | Gambia Bureau of Statistics |
| GCCI | Gambia Chamber of Commerce and Industry |
| HDI | Human Development Index |
| IMF | International Monetary Fund |
| INDC | Intended Nationally Determined Contribution |
| JFPM | Joint Forest Park Management |
| M&E | Monitoring and Evaluation |
| MOHERST | Ministry of Higher Education, Research Science and Technology |
| MRC | Medical Research Council |
| MSc | Master of Science |

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| NAPA | National Adaptation Plan of Action |
| NARI | National Agricultural Research Institute |
| NCCC | National Climate Change Committee |
| NDP | National Development Plan |
| NFF | National Forestry Fund |
| NGO | Non-Governmental Organization |
| NTFP | Non-Timber Forest Product |
| PFM | Participatory Forest Management |
| PPP | Public Private Partnership |
| Ramsar | Convention on Wetlands of International Importance |
| RFLAC | Regional Forestry Licensing Advisory Committee |
| SFM | Sustainable Forest Management |
| SME | Small Medium Enterprises |
| TRAHAS | Traditional Healers Association |
| UNCBD | United Nations Convention on Biodiversity |
| UNCCD | United Nations Convention to Combat Biodiversity |
| UNFCCC | United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change |
| USAID | United States Agency for International Development |
| UTG | University of The Gambia |
| WB | World Bank |

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SECTION I Introduction

1.1 Overview of the Forestry Sector

The Gambian forests supply over 95% of the rural and urban population's needs for raw material such as firewood, charcoal, poles, timber, tool handles, non-timber forest products, example game, fruits, barks, fibre, leaves, resins, roots and leaves used as food, forage and medicine. Land erosion, loss of soil fertility and dropping water tables; three major issues for farmers that are closely linked to poor forest management. Livestock development mainly relies on savannahs while the mangroves provide habitats and biomass for fish, oyster and shrimp development. Forest resources, especially wildlife, landscapes, trees and shrubs, also contribute significantly to tourism development in The Gambia.

Except for the recent attempts to draw-up a holistic agriculture and natural resources policy, which is yet to be adopted, natural resources, agriculture and other land-based sector have hitherto operated under different and sometimes conflicting policies. These unharmonized policies, and their implementation, have sometimes engendered conflicting land-use practices to the detriment of the existence of a healthy forest estate. The non-existence of a national land-use policy and plan has often resulted in the allocation of land for inappropriate use, such as the conversion of forestland for agricultural use and settlement. Uncontrolled harvesting of trees for fuelwood and charcoal production are among the leading causes of forest degradation in The Gambia. It is reported that forests in The Gambia provides 90% of the country's domestic energy needs in the form of fuelwood and charcoal for over 90% of the population. As the population continues to increase, the fuelwood and charcoal demand continues to increase unprecedentedly and put more pressure on the country's remaining forest resources.

With a forest cover of 423,000 hectares; about 37.5% of the total national land cover, The Gambia still has 300,000 hectares of forest while the remaining 123,000 hectares is under other wooded land (National Forest Assessment, 2009 - 2010). The Forest Inventory of 1997 and the Forest Assessment of 2010 were carried based on different demand and different methodological approaches. The 1997 inventory registered 520,400 hectares as forest, while the 2010 Forest Assessment pegged the total area of forest at 423,000 hectares, representing a decline of 97,400 hectares of forest converted to other land use between the two national inventories. Assuming this trend of deforestation, estimated at 5 - 7% continues, more than half of the forest woodlands will be lost in the next three decades.

Forest resources are central to The Gambian environment and economic development. The forest cover includes woodland, savannah woodland, tree and shrub savannah and mangroves. These forest types are related to specific ecosystems. Forests offer a wide

range of habitats for both the terrestrial and aquatic biodiversity. Most terrestrial biological resources, in terms of quantity and diversity, are found in and close to the forests. Besides, forests condition key natural resources such as water and fertile soils. About 70% of the predominantly rural labour force was employed in the Agriculture and Natural Resources (ANR) sector, contributing between 20% and 25% to GDP and generating 40% of total export earnings, and an estimated two-thirds of total household income (GBOs, 2017). In the formal sector however, the contribution of forestry is masked by lack of data on trade involving forest products and the numerous employment opportunities the sector offers (it is currently estimated to be at 1% of the Gross Domestic Product).

The Forest Policy 2010 – 2019, like the preceding one, puts more emphasis on popular participation in forest resource management and recognizes multiple-use forestry. The policy was formulated in line with the environmental and socio-economic policy objectives of the Government. It was designed to contribute to poverty alleviation by calling for the active involvement of the local communities and the private sector in the management and development of the forest resources. In real terms, both the first and second forest policy (1995 – 2005, 2010 - 2019) aimed at making everyone see themselves as indispensable actors in the protection and the rational utilization of forest resources.

The Forest Policy 2010 - 2019 takes cognizance of the fact that sustainable forest management will always remain an imagination/illusion unless everybody becomes a stakeholder and actively participate in decision-making processes and in the implementation of management objectives. Participatory Forest Management (PFM), being the central pillar of the Policy, had expanded in a 'stop-start' manner from 2005 - 2015, with very little progress in the last 10 years. There were various reasons behind the trend such as human and financial resource limitations of DoF, frequent changes in the portfolios of Director of Forestry and the Minister, land conflicts, land-use changes (real estate development), increased population pressure, conflict of departmental mandates (Forestry, Lands and Wildlife), island approach towards sustainable forest management and the inadequate natural resource management capacities amongst Area Councils and Municipalities.

In spite of these challenges, at the end of the Policy period, about 33,342.93 hectares of forests have been placed under community control representing 16.67% of the Policy target of sustainably managing 200,000 ha. The Forest Policy provision on Community Forestry is recognized as one of the world's most inspiring and innovative forest policies; for example, it received the Silver Award in the World Future Council's 2011 Future Policy Awards.

The Local Government Act 2002 gives legal effect and force to the national decentralization policy of the Government of The Gambia. The policy envisages a greater

role and participation of local authorities and communities in the management of natural resources within the area of their jurisdiction. In this respect, the 2002 Local Government Act has extensive provision elaborating on the sharing and devolution of powers from the central Government to the local level. In particular, section 71 - 73 confers on Local Councils responsibility for the protection, control and management of forest resources, within their area of jurisdiction (Council Forests). The District Authorities are also conferred with responsibility to protect the environment and taking preventive measures against bush fire (Section 139).

These new responsibilities are quite innovative as they confer on the local authorities and communities the power to participate and control vital forest resources for their overall benefit on a sustainable basis. This is in line with best practices and implementation must be encouraged, pursued and complemented by building the capacities of Area and Municipal councils to ensure compliance with national policies and plans for the sector during this policy period (2023 - 2032).

1.2 Challenges of the forestry sector

The forestry sector in The Gambia is faced with a myriad of problems that are related to social, environmental and administrative issues. The country experienced a significant increase in population over the past two decades as a result of natural birth and immigration. According to data and information contained in the GEF-7 Project Identification Form (PIF) for The Gambia, the country's *"population for 2020 is estimated at 2.31 million people and a population density of 204 persons per km² making the country one of the most densely populated countries. At macro-level, The Gambia is among the Low-Income, Food Deficit Countries (LIFDC) of the world. Its GDP per capita was recorded at USD534.30 in 2017 which is only 4% of the world's average and also averaged USD512.15 from 1966 until 2017 with a Gini coefficient of 35.9 points in 2015. Its UNDP Human Development Index (HDI) was estimated at 0.460 (i.e., ranked 174th country) in 2017 with slightly increasing poverty levels. The 2010 Integrated Household Survey (IHS) indicated a poverty headcount rate of 48.4% compared to 58% of the 2008 Poverty Assessment Report with rural and urban disparities. In 2010, the rural and urban poverty headcount ratios were computed at 73.9% and 39.6%, respectively indicating that poverty is a rural phenomenon"*.

Given the pervasive poverty and the dependence on wood for the supply of more than 90% of domestic energy needs, the increased population has placed unprecedented pressure on the already degraded forest resources for the supply of fuel wood and charcoal. The demand for timber for construction has also increased with the consequence that illegal logging and chain saw operation have increased beyond the capacity of the Department to control. Furthermore, as a direct result of the increased population, there has been a spike in the demand for land for expansion of existing

settlements and the creation of new ones, especially through the emergent real estate development sector in the West Coast Region. This has meant encroachment into existing forest areas and the conversion of abandoned agricultural space or fallow lands, which have potential to grow back into forest, to create new settlements. Unless the country resort to better land use planning and the strict implementation of these plans, the forest resource is likely to continue to degrade and diminish in area, potentially resulting into significant loss in its environmental protection functions, placing the same population at increasing risk of climate-related disasters, such as floods and drought and deceases.

Administratively, the Department of Forestry (DoF), in its efforts to sustainably manage forests and the forestry sector in general has been constrained by human and financial resources limitations. The staff numbers remained low, with a virtual absence of a cadre of professional forestry staff. Annual development budget allocation to the Department has been traditionally low (between D5m and D6m per year, on an average) during the preceding policy period (2010 – 2019). This leaves the Department with the only option of the National Forestry Fund (NFF) to finance its development activities. This Fund is accessed often with difficulty, constraining the timely implementation of activities. Frequent changes of leadership at the Department and the Ministry, with sometimes the President of the second republic withholding the position of Minister responsible of Forestry, has not helped the development of the forestry sector either.

Another principal challenge that the Department faces is linked to conflicts of mandates between it and related sectors such as wildlife, lands and agriculture, resulting from overlap of institutional responsibilities. There is need for better consultations and coordination of activities between these departments to ensure a better management of forests.

Inadequate knowledge and capacity amongst local communities, Civil Society Organizations (CSO), Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) and local authorities, poses challenges to their effective engage in forest protection and management. Many individuals and groups see forestry as the responsibility of the Department of Forestry and would therefore not be bothered with forest protection issues. On the other hand, CSOs and NGOs even whereas may be willing to involve with community sensitization, are usually constrained by lack of resources.

Forest fires have been amongst the biggest enemy to forest conservation and development in the country. Although there had not been a regular monitoring of fires, the National Forest Assessment (NFA) of 2010 reported that about 50% of the forest area of the country was burnt in 2010. This is reminiscent of the situation in the country during the preceding two to three decades. The situation has not abated and seems to be on the increase. Coupled with the fall in the total annual rainfall and the moisture stress that this

induces in the soils, forest fires have increased in intensity and frequency resulting in the death of mature and young trees alike, contributing significantly to forest degradation. The Department of Forestry is faced with the challenge to secure sufficient public support to prevent and control fires. This is due to general apathy towards the phenomenon amongst the local population many of whom see fire prevention and management as the responsibility of the Department. Uncontrolled grazing, and over grazing poses a serious challenge for forest regeneration. The regeneration is either consumed or trampled to death making forest restoration works ineffective. The situation is further complicated by the occasional drought or long period of dry spell that renders the regrowth weak and vulnerable to the impacts of fires and grazing.

Apart from community-owned forests under community forestry arrangements with the Department, which are often closely protected, the rest of the state forests, including those forest parks not under JFPM programme, remains 'open to unrestricted use' as the public does not feel responsible for their management. Protecting and controlling the use of this vast open forest estate is therefore left to the Department of Forestry which has serious human resource and infrastructural capacity and mobility limitations to adequately oversee the management of the forest estate of the country.

In its efforts to inculcate a culture of tree planting and tree management amongst the local population, the Department of Forestry has been challenged by the lack of interest in plantations establishment and tree management amongst the general public, despite the obvious benefits for fuelwood, timber and fencing post production. Changing this public attitude remains a serious challenge, overcoming which would require more intensive awareness and education measures and the collaboration of related natural resources sectors.

A major challenge that the department faced during the second republic was to secure political support for its activities, particularly for expansion of community forestry. Instead, there were politically motivated conflicts over forest land ownership and political support for the establishment of estates. Community forestry expansion efforts were frustrated by the lack of willingness at the political level to process the necessary documents, such as the Community Forest Management Agreement (CFMA), that would grant ownership of forest resources to the communities. The back to the land policy of the second republic encouraged and caused rampant and uncontrolled encroachment into and destruction of natural forest stands.

The Department has limited personnel and transport capacity to patrol the woodlands with the view to controlling illegal taking and transportation. In addition, the police that maintain check points on the major roads are virtually stretched to the limit of their capacity and could not provide needed assistance to the Department to arrest and prosecute offenders. Furthermore, the judicial system has not been up to expectation

with the consequence that cases remain pending in some local tribunals and magistrate courts for a long time before they are heard. This has negative implications for accountability in the sector. Neither the staff of the department nor the law enforcement officers or personnel of the judiciary system can be adequately held accountable for the lapses in enforcing the forest laws due to capacity and structural inadequacies.

Sustainable forestry management is not done in a vacuum. It is based on reliable data and information. Unfortunately, data and information on the forestry sector is at best scanty and its availability 'epileptic' since it relies on project opportunities as opposed to planned and regularly executed surveys and assessments funded by the Government. Information such as the forest area and density, species composition, removals, regeneration rates, fires coverage and damage, and deforestation and forest degradation rates are not readily available in the country. The last forest assessment was done in 2010 with the assistance of FAO and there has not been any other since then. This situation makes forest management planning a difficult task.

1.3 Forestry in the international and sub-regional context

The Gambia is a signatory to many international conventions and agreement that rely on forests and trees to achieve their objectives. These include principal United Nations Conventions like the Convention on Biological Diversity (UNCBD), the Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) and the Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The Gambia has also acceded to the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations system, Goal 15 of which seeks to "protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss". All of Gambia's national plans to implement these Conventions make reference to implementation of sustainable forest management at national level in order for the country to meet its international obligations under these conventions. At the sub-regional level, the country participated in the development of, and has signed, the ECOWAS 'Convergence Plan for the Sustainable Conservation and Management of Forest Ecosystems in West Africa' which was adopted by the Summit of Heads of State and Government in 2013. The Plan is designed to address the challenges of sustainable forest management in the sub-region. It recognizes the importance of involving local communities in forest management in the sub-region and therefore proposed the wider implementation of community forestry. The Plan further recognizes the need for concerted management of transboundary forest resources, which calls for collaborative action between the member states. The Gambia has prepared a 'country business plan' to implement national level actions in line with the Convergence Plan.

1.4 Overview of the implementation of 2010-2019 forest policy

The implementation of the 2010 – 2019 forest policy had mixed successes. The lack of stability in the leadership of the Department coupled with insufficient financial and human resources contributed significantly to the non-realization of some of the policy objectives. Furthermore, lack of political support for the expanded implementation of community forestry and the surge of illegal exploitation of forest resources, which the Department could not control, given the political environment between 2010 and 2016, compromised policy implementation and consequently the sustainable management forests.

Although the Department made some gains in training foresters, especially at technical (certificate) level, the numbers remained critically low for the professional cadre. More of the professional staff were trained in non-forestry but related areas such as geography, gender, economics and rural development. This did not permit the advancement of scientific forestry and the trend should not continue if the Department would meet its forest management objectives. For the Department to meet its professional forest management needs in the future, it would have to reorient its training strategy to produce more professional foresters at BSc and MSc levels to better address the challenges of sustainable forest management.

The 2010-2019 forest policy anticipated that Local area councils would be adequately engaged to build their capacity for forest management. However, this did not happen. While the Department may have had good reason for this, such as lack of adequate staff to do the training, it was obvious that the Department would have benefited from this as the training would have increased the local authorities' appreciation of the environmental and other economic values of forests away from seeing forests as sources of revenue, which causes forest degradation.

The Department efforts to create awareness on forest management and conservation were more concentrated at community forest level. Given that CFs coverage is small, compared to national forest cover, there was need for more work in awareness creation at the general public level in order to improve the latter's perception of forestry and thus the Department's visibility at national level. To do this, the Department needed, but failed, to widely use the public media such as the national radio and television services to reach out to the wider public. However, DoF made good use of community radios to target some local communities. Due to the limited time devoted to country-wide awareness campaigns, one could argue that there was limited success in promoting the creation of a positive public attitude towards the forestry profession. Inadequate systematic awareness campaign, and the failure to implement the forest laws, had caused an escalation of illegal production and movement (especially across the international border and through the seaport of the country), of charcoal, rosewood and mahogany by private and unlicensed operators. This had set in motion an almost unstoppable trend of forest

degradation. It will take a strengthened and highly motivated forestry staff to be able to reverse the trend.

The Department had the foresight to create a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) unit to monitor development in the forestry sector. However, this unit lacks professional M&E staff and requisite resources to effectively execute its mandate such that the Department was unable to adequately monitor and report on progress in forest management, project implementation and forest area dynamics. The importance of M&E to generate knowledge on the dynamics of the different forest types and for determining remedial measures to enhance sustainable forest management cannot be overemphasized. The Department therefore needs to pay more attention to the training of qualified M&E staff and to facilitate their work by providing them with the wherewithal to undertake regular monitoring of developments in the forest sector.

While the Department had appreciably tried to link to the efforts of related line departments such as Fisheries, Livestock services and Parks and Wildlife Management (DPWM), there remained such a big gap in these relations that integrated approach to resources management could not be achieved. These departments needed to make efforts to strengthen their relations to create understanding and avoid conflicts over resources management responsibilities. The relations with the DPWM needed particular strengthening given DPWM's focus on biodiversity conservation. Collaboration between the two departments will go a long way in bringing large areas of natural forest under management.

Given the current structure and staff of local Area Councils and Municipal Councils and the absence of dedicated natural resources management activities in their development programmes, the Department was seriously challenged to get these councils to mainstream natural resources management into their operations. The Councils would have to have core natural resources management staff to be able to take on an added natural resources management portfolio. For the new policy period, the Department would need to focus on creating awareness on conservation needs at Council levels as a prelude to assisting the Councils to mainstream management in their programmes.

Partnership was built with some CSOs, community forest committees and the All Gambia Forestry Platform. However, there is need for further work in this area in order for the Department to make more gains in sustainable forest management and protection. The Department had very limited outreach programmes specifically directed towards these non-public sector operators. Given their closeness to communities and therefore the potential that they have to mobilize communities to implement forest management, the Department would need to create a consultative forum involving these CSOs/NGOs for the purpose of maintaining and enhancing joint actions in forest management and in awareness creation at the wider national level.

Funding for programmes and activities were limited during the 2010 – 2019 policy period. Most of the department's operational funding was sourced locally from the regular budget and the National Forestry Fund (NFF). Resources allocated from the annual national budget were indeed minimal. The Department therefore had to fund most of its operations from the National Forestry Fund. Resource for the NFF comes from revenue from sale of timber from the plantations and the sale of confiscated timber or other related forest product, as well as from payments from Community Forest Committees, which were all on decline due to the poor situation of the forests in general and the stall in the creation of community forests. This coupled with the Ministry of Finance's clench on the NFF Resources, makes the NFF an unreliable source of financing for forestry operations in the country. With this scenario, the Department needs to venture into more innovative funding mechanism and increase its efforts to rein in more international funding through the preparation of project concepts and proposals.

No forest resource assessment or inventory was conducted since 2010 making it difficult to determine progress the forest management. The knowledge gap regarding the status of the forest is increasing making the need for another inventory urgent.

There were very few, if any, management plans developed and implemented for forest parks and plantations. The consequence was the uncontrolled illegal exploitation and degradation of these parks and plantations and, consequently, the reduction of their revenue potentials, and by extension, the Department's ability to negotiate for increased budget allocation from the Ministry of Finance.

The Department promoted ecotourism development at community and private forests levels. However, the potentials at the forest parks levels were inadequately exploited. The Department of Forestry needs to increase its efforts to promote ecotourism as one way of generating income and securing wider forest conservation. There had not been much gain in the introduction and promotion of alternative sources of energy by the Department of Forestry. In the interest of wider forest protection and conservation, the Department should have increased collaboration with the alternate energy sectors to secure a wide use of energy saving (cooking) devises. However, this was not realized and much remained undone for the promotion of the utilization of alternative energy devises.

While there existed potential for the development of cottage industries for processing of herbs and fruits into beverages and medicines and other entrepreneurial interventions, not much was done to officially harness this potential. Individuals, especially women, were however extensively engaged in the buying and selling of non-timber forest products. Despite the potential of NTFPs the Department had no focused strategy for development in this area. More efforts were needed to encourage wider interest in the exploitation of these potentials.

SECTION II

The New Policy 2023 – 2032

2.1 Policy Context

This Forest Policy replaces the second policy which ended in 2019. The purpose of the policy is to achieve the sustainable management of sufficient forest cover that could meet the social, economic, and environmental and livelihood needs of the current and future generations. This Forest Policy 2023 - 2032 is developed in the context of the implementation of the Gambia National Development Plan (NDP) 2018-2021 and the National Forestry Strategy and Action Plan (2019 – 2028). It also integrates policy provisions of the 'Validated Supplementary Agriculture and Natural Resources (ANR) Policy' 2017 - 2026, as well as other national development initiatives. The new policy envisions contributing to the implementation of The Gambia's obligations in the frameworks of international and sub-regional conventions and agreement that the country is party to. These include the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (UNCBD), the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Convention on International Trade on Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (Ramsar) and the ECOWAS Forest Convergence Plan, amongst many others in which forestry is an important component. The policy takes into consideration the need to strengthen the complementarity between forestry and other development sectors such as parks and wildlife management, fisheries, agriculture, water resources, land and community development.

One of the cross-cutting enablers identified for the successful implementation of the strategic priorities of the National Development Plan (NDP) 2018-2021, which this policy seeks to support is "Promoting environmental sustainability, climate resilient communities and appropriate land use". The maintenance of a sustainably managed forest cover is a prerequisite to attaining these ends. Given the forests' role in maintaining environmental stability, providing food and feed for livelihoods, protecting the agricultural space and providing energy and other livelihood support systems, the national forest policy would, of necessity, have to be appropriately linked to the wider national development context which the NDP provides. The Forest Policy 2010 - 2019 called for the development of a national forest strategy to put the policy into effect. The said strategy and plan of implementation both for 2019 – 2028, were developed late and approved only at the end of the policy period in 2019. They could therefore not be implemented during the said policy period. The Strategy contains important strategic elements which, if implemented accordingly, will go a long way towards the attainment of sustainable forestry in the country. Therefore, this new forest policy 2023 – 2032 has taken into consideration the provisions of the strategy and plan to take forward their implementation in support of the implementation of the new policy. A supplementary Strategy and Plan would need to be prepared for the full implementation of the new policy.

The new policy also recognizes the need for collaborative approach to forest management especially between the related sectors of agriculture, parks and wildlife, livestock services, fisheries and lands as well as with the local authorities. It therefore made provisions that will enhance this collaboration in the interest of development in all the sectors and in the interest of national development in general. Like the previous two policies, this new policy was developed bearing in mind the important role that communities and non-state actors play in bringing about sustainable forest management. It therefore provides for their close engagement throughout the implementation of the policy. Furthermore, the development of the institutional capacities of the Department of Forestry and collaborating communities and the Area councils has received attention in the policy as well as gender parity in forest management and benefit sharing. For the latter purpose, the policy calls for special attention to gender issues, especially support to women's forest-based enterprise development.

The biggest threat to the existence of a healthy forest cover in the country is the annual forest fires which ravage virtually the whole country (and across the border in Senegal), and illegal logging and cross border trafficking. The policy calls for cross border collaboration between the two national authorities and their respective border communities in order to effectively address these two menaces and for the development, for the first time, of a national forest fire management strategy. Furthermore, the policy seeks to promote sub-regional collaboration through the implementation of the ECOWAS Forestry Convergence Plan.

2.2 Policy Principles

The need to conserve and develop The Gambia's forests, based on sustainable management principles and practices, is paramount. For the sector to make positive developmental gains in order to continue to sustainably provide for the country's social, economic and environmental needs now and into the future, the policy guiding its management has to be premised on some basic but fundamental principles that relate to institutions, individuals, organizational laws and systems and their relations to the conservation and sustainable utilization of the forest resources. Given Gambia's engagements with international, regional and sub-regional conventions and instruments, the policy needs to take cognizance of the country's obligations in this regard. In view of these, this policy will be guided by the following core principles.

- a. The principle of **good governance, accountability and transparency**. The Department of Forestry shall ensure transparency in the implementation of forestry activities, including forest management and development, good governance in management and administration of the sector including in the issuing of licensing, and in staff development, and accountability for its actions, not only to increase the visibility of the sector and to win the trust of the public,

- but also to maximize the sector's contribution to national economic development. This accountability principle also applies to communities and forest users who shall be guided by the forest management principles and prevailing forest laws. This principle also takes into consideration the issue of tenure security.
- b. The principle of **collaboration and cooperation for a multi-sectoral approach to integrated and sustainable forest management**. Experience from the implementation of previous policies show that not much cross sector collaboration and coordination was achieved, with the consequence that deforestation and forest degradation continued unabated. With more collaboration and coordination with related sector departments, particularly wildlife, agriculture, fisheries, lands, physical planning, police and community development, the forestry sector's exclusive mandate and unique advantages will be recognized. This collaboration and coordination will increase inter-sectoral awareness of the limitations of each sector thus enhancing consultations before implementation, and coordination of sector initiatives that have implication for forestry, thereby contributing to sustainable forest management.
 - c. The principle of **equity and inclusiveness**. This principle recognizes the rights of access to, and ownership of, forest resources by communities. It will ensure that monetary and non-monetary benefits derived from the utilization of forests reach the communities in a manner that will sustain their interest in forest protection and conservation. It takes into account the need for consideration of gender equality in forest management and the informed involvement of all stakeholders in forest-management-decision-making processes. It will consider cultural heritage, paying attention to traditional knowledge forest/tree management practices.
 - d. The principle of **orienting forest management to respond to national development programmes**. Forestry has an important role in national development. Consequently, national development plans recognize this important role and make provision for the sector's contribution thereto.
 - e. The principle of **evidence-based forest management**. Interventions in forest management need to be based on reliable data and information that can reliably inform management decision making. Such data and information will come from regular monitoring and evaluation of activities, surveys, assessments and inventories to secure an adaptive management of the resource base.
 - f. The principle of **capacity development**. To achieve sustainable forest management, the Department of Forestry will need to develop its human and institutional capacity to handle the challenges of the sector, to conduct research

- as appropriate and resource accounting. Beyond this, the Department will need to also increase capacity and awareness amongst the forest fringe communities in particular, and the general public, to give effect to inclusivity and equity in forest resource management and development as well as equitable benefit sharing and improved livelihoods. This principle also recognizes the human, financial and institutional limitations of the Department of Forestry which may limit its ability to implement all the policy provisions during the policy period and therefore proposes capacity development during the policy period.
- g. The principle of **global engagement**. The Gambia is signatory to many international and regional conventions and agreements that have forestry implications. The policy and its implementation will need to enhance government's ability to meet its obligations under these conventions and agreements. The policy will therefore ensure the mainstreaming of relevant international agreement and conventions in implementation of forestry interventions.
 - h. The principle of **strengthening decentralization of forest administration**. This recognizes that the Department of Forestry will never have the human and institutional capacity and capability to manage 100% of the national forest cover. To achieve that, local government authorities and communities would need to be involved, in an informed way, in the management and administration of the resource.
 - i. The principle of **public private partnership (PPP)** for increased investment in the forestry sector. The potential for increasing private sector investment in forestry exists. However, an enabling policy environment would need to be created to encourage and attract this investment.
 - j. The principle of **sustainable funding** for forestry development. There is need to secure predictable and sustainable funding from national, regional and multi-national funding sources to ensure sustained engagement in and development of the forestry sector. This goes to recognize that national budgetary resources will not suffice to fund forestry sector development in the country.
 - k. The principle of **learning from experiences**, both local, indigenous and international, to promote sustainable forest management and to improve forest and tree cover. There exist good knowledge and experiences on dryland forest management in the Sahel region of West Africa. These can be of enormous benefits when applied in The Gambia. Local knowledge and experiences in tree management need to be equally sought, documented and applied.
 - l. The principle of promoting **transboundary and regional cooperation** to enhance transboundary and regional forest management. The interconnectedness of the forest space between The Gambia and the Republic

of Senegal makes cooperation in the management of the transboundary forests a paramount need. Gambia also needs to demonstrate its commitment to ECOWAS environmental and natural resources conventions, agreements and plans by implementing forestry related sustainable management policies, strategies and plans.

2.2 Policy Vision

The policy envisions an integrated forest sector with sufficient forest cover that provides sustained environmental, economic, socio-cultural, aesthetic and livelihood support benefits to the present and future generations and positively contribute to food security, while ensuring the integrity of the forest ecosystem.

2.3 Policy Goal

The goal of this policy is to conserve and sustainably manage and develop at least 30% forest cover in the country that can contribute to national socio-economic and environmental development and protection and to meeting The Gambia's commitments under relevant international and regional conventions and agreements.

2.4 Policy objectives

The following objectives will be pursued under this policy:

- i. Promote and enable sustainable forest management to improve and strengthen the ecosystem services of all types of forests.
- ii. Strengthen the institutional and operational delivery capacity of the Department of Forestry for greater facilitation and implementation of sustainable forest management and forest research.
- iii. Establish and strengthen data and information base for better informed forest management planning and implementation.
- iv. Promote the development of a forest-based industry for poverty reduction and livelihood improvement in the rural areas.
- v. Promote transparent governance, equity and accountability in forest management and development.
- vi. Encourage and secure adequate funding for development of the forestry sector.
- vii. Promote an integrated approach to sustainable forest management through involvement of local councils, CSOs, women and youths as well as other non-state actors, and to harness indigenous knowledge for the purpose.

These policy objectives are addressed under the following statements of policy orientation, statements and strategies.

2.5 Policy Statements

2.5.1 POLICY ORIENTATION I: Promoting sustainable forest management, biodiversity conservation and the maintenance of a healthy forest ecosystem

Policy Statement 1: Promote integrated and collaborative management, rehabilitation and restoration of all types of forest.

Forests serve multiple functions such as environmental protection, provision of food for human consumption and feed for livestock, biodiversity conservation and community livelihood support. The responsibility for these functions lies with different sectors within the government, supported by non-public sector interests. Unless these sectors are consciously involved in forest management the forestry sector risks being uncontrollably and unsustainably utilized and therefore compromised. Sustainable forest management calls for an integrated approach that recognizes the role of each of these sectors in forest protection and development. Doing it alone by the Department of Forestry is unlikely to meet the policy goals. Strategies need to be defined and implemented to ensure viable integrated approaches to sustainable forest management.

Strategies:

- Strengthen collaboration and cooperation with NGOs, CSOs and related sector departments for community institutional capacity building for a durable community engagement in sustainable forest management.
- Increase awareness on the values of a functional forest ecosystem to increase public appreciation of forests.
- Address the underlying causes of deforestation and forest degradation through the promotion and implementation of multi-sector approaches to forest protection and management.
- Build capacities of communities, including the youth and women, to enhance their participation in sustainable forest resources management.
- Collaborate with related sector departments and institutions to undertake sectoral planning and policy development that will enhance the inclusion of forestry and other sector considerations as relevant in new sectoral resource policies as relevant.
- Ensure that all forestry programmes and actions are developed and implemented within the framework of existing national development plans and policies as well as national action plans to implement international commitments as relevant.

- Consider the international commitments of The Gambia in developing programmes and actions for the forestry sector.

Policy Statement 2: Promote, strengthen and expand community-based and participatory forest management.

It was apparent for a long time before the first national forest policy in 1995 that vesting the responsibility of forest management in the public sector alone was a wrong strategy and that sustainable forest management and utilization would not be met or achieved. Consequently, the 1995 policy introduced the concept of community-based forest management for a wider engagement of the Gambian population in forest management and development. Except for a temporary 'hiccup' in the implementation of this community engagement process during the second republic, the process had proven to be effective in forest protection and development and in mobilizing wider community interest in forest management. Lessons learnt from successes of the introductory period need to be escalated in order to meet the policy objective of maintaining and managing 30% forest cover in the country.

Strategies:

- Increase awareness campaigns on community forestry.
- Develop the capacities of local authorities, especially Area Councils; communities; CSOs; and private individuals to effectively participate in sustainable forest management.
- Engage the political leadership at Ministerial and local authorities' levels to strengthen political and local administrative support for the consummation of CFMAs, including securing durable forest and tree tenure for communities and private sector and individuals wishing to own and manage forests according to SFM principles.
- Urgently conclude all pending PCFMAs and CFMAs from the previous policy period.
- Seek and develop new CF Agreements.
- Bring more forest parks under the Joint Forest Park Management (JFPM) programme.
- Strengthen collaboration with farmers' platforms on forest management.

Policy Statement 3: *Strengthen capacity for tree planting and plantation establishment and management.*

Given the current high rate of forest degradation resulting from the conversion of forest space to other conflicting land uses, and the selective removal of valuable tree species for commercial purposes, and also given the relatively slow rate of growth of indigenous tree species, The Gambia is threatened by a potential shortage of quality timber and other wood products for construction and domestic energy production. Urgent measures therefore need to be put in place to stem the trend by the establishment of plantations of fast-growing species that could potentially meet the country's timber and fuelwood demands into the future.

Strategies:

- Develop a national forest plantation management and development strategy.
- Encourage private and individual involvement in woodlot and plantation establishment.
- Increase tree nursery production.
- Strengthen plantation development and management training in the national forestry school curriculum.
- Create a plantation development funding window in the NFF.
- Strengthen genetic improvement of plantation species through strict seed selection processes.
- Reintroduce and actively promote and implement the annual national tree planting campaign involving the highest political level in the country.

Policy Statement 4: *Broaden and strengthen the delivery of sustainable forest management at national and decentralized service level.*

Given the Gambian populations' large dependence on Forests and forest products for livelihood support, and the threat of deforestation and forest degradation the country faces, there is need for increased efforts to protect and sustainably manage the remaining forest cover from further destruction through a combination of public, private and community partnerships to sustainably manage, develop and utilize the existing forest cover.

Strategies:

- Strengthen collaboration with related sectors for forest biodiversity conservation and development.

- Strengthen partnership with international development agencies, institutions and local non-governmental actors to further the delivery of sustainable forest management.
- Improve upon and strengthen existing partnerships or agreement with local communities and private and individual forest enterprises, on all forms of forest management, based on experiences gained during the preceding policy periods.
- Enhance the improvement and development of the national forest estate through sound forest management interventions, including application of dryland forest management practices and sustainable land management principles.
- Promote private sector involvement in forestry development.
- Encourage and support investments in forestry by individuals, the private sector and communities (including women's groups) through improved and secure forest and tree tenure arrangements to ensure long-term commitments to forestry investment in the country.
- Promote ecotourism to encourage and enhance SFM and forest biodiversity conservation and development.
- Build capacity of the private sector, individuals and communities as well as local government authorities for a durable engagement in sustainable forest management and development.
- Continue to empower local communities for wider engagement in sustainable forest management.

Policy Statement 5: Increase employment opportunities and sustainable livelihoods in the forestry sector in the rural areas.

The rural population depends, to a largely extent, on forests for food, feed, housing and energy. The forest also constitutes an important source of income for the population through the commercialization of non-timber forest products such as wild fruits, fuelwood, fibre, medicinal and other herbal products and honey. In order to maintain the flow of these benefits to the communities and to encourage and secure the latter's participation in sustainable forest management, efforts need to be made to promote and support the transformation and value addition of these products for increased benefits and improved livelihoods.

Strategies:

- Strengthen and expand current enterprise development experiences and initiatives in the forestry sector.

- Promote alternative livelihood in the forestry sector, and outside the sector, as relevant, for the sustainable conservation and development of the forests and forest biodiversity.
- Seek and consummate collaboration with relevant and interested NGOs, CBOs and development partners, through Memorandum of Understanding (MOUs) and similar arrangements, for the expansion and strengthening of enterprise development at community and individual levels.
- Collaborate with AGFP and other organizations and associations, to train communities, individuals and the private sector on value addition for Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs).
- Promote cross border collaboration for capacity development on value addition for NTFPs.
- Organize annual forest trade fairs to enhance access to markets for forest products.

Policy Statement 6: Combat illegal logging and chainsaw operations.

There has of recent been a surge in the ownership and operation of chainsaws in the country resulting in rampant and illegal tree felling, often without a valid permit. The situation merits strict control in order to reduce deforestation and forest degradation in the country.

Strategies:

- Develop and implement a national strategic plan to combat illegal logging.
- Develop appropriate legislation for imposition of stiffer penalties for illegal logging and chainsaw operation for better deterrent.
- Encourage and engage the security services in the control of the movement of forest produce within and across the border.
- Intensify public awareness and education on the impacts of illegal logging and chainsaw operations.
- Promote transboundary collaboration to control cross-border movement of all types of forest produce.
- Reduce and control the number of chainsaw licenses in the country.

Policy Statement 7: Promote and support farm forestry - agroforestry, fuelwood, boundary planting.

The inter-phasing and combination of forestry and agriculture is an important aspect of sustainable land management for improved agricultural productivity and wood supply for

domestic consumption. However, this management practice is not widely employed in The Gambia despite its potential to contribute to livelihood improvement in the rural areas. This policy therefore seeks to promote agroforestry and on-farm forestry to enhance tree cover in the country while contributing to increased income for farmers.

Strategy:

- Promote agroforestry; on-farm fuelwood plantation establishment and farm boundary planting in collaborate with the National Agricultural Research Institute (NARI) and Department of Agriculture (DoA).
- Provide seedlings to farmers and monitor the planting and management of the plantings.
- Create awareness on the economic and environmental benefits of agroforestry, on and off-farm planting.
- Strengthen agroforestry training at the Kafuta Forestry and Wildlife Training School.
- Organize agroforestry training for farmers in collaboration with NARI and DoA.

Policy Statement 8: Strengthen forest parks protection and management.

There are 66 gazetted forest parks, including six forest plantations that cover a total area of 34,027 ha at the time of their establishment in the early 1950s. Some of these have become so degraded from uncontrolled fires, over exploitation, and illegal encroachment to convert to farms and settlements that they can no longer be recognized as 'forests'. The increasing human population and the accompanying pressure for additional land for use for agriculture, settlement and for construction and energy, makes it urgent to focus on the conservation of these forest parks, which already have legal protection status, lest they are lost in the very near future. To this end therefore, some strategies that need to be employed for their conservation and protection include:

Strategies:

- Secure/consolidate the boundary demarcation of all forest parks and redraw their maps and archive the cadastral information in the Departments of Physical Planning and Forestry, and in the Ministry of Justice.
- Prepare management plans for forest parks and incorporate ecotourism development in these plans.
- Establish new forest parks.

- Strengthen security/surveillance for all forest parks through the use of drone technology and other surveillance systems to detect encroachments, land use change and illegal dumping of wastes.
- Increase number of forest parks under collaborative management.
- Collaborate with DPWM to implement biodiversity conservation measures in forest parks.
- Encourage and incentivizes community engagement in the implementation of fire protection and management measures for the parks.

Policy Statement 9: Promote biodiversity conservation in forest areas.

Forests of the pre-1980s were biologically more diverse than they are today. While it may not be possible to restore the biodiversity of yesteryears, given the current state of deforestation and forest degradation, every effort must be made to bring back some degree of normalcy in select forest areas. This will be achieved only when strict biodiversity conservation measures are implemented generally but more particularly in potential biodiversity hotspots. For specific strategies and actions under this policy statement reference is invited to the biodiversity conservation policy of the Department of Parks and Wildlife Management which should provide the general guidelines for biodiversity conservation in forest parks and other state forest areas.

Strategies:

- Collaborate with the DPWM to develop strategies for biodiversity conservation in forest parks, community and state forests.
- Collaborate with the DPWM to undertake regular biodiversity assessment in Protected Areas, including forest parks.
- Collaborate with DPWM to create awareness on the economic, social and environmental importance of biodiversity conservation at landscape level.
- Support the DPWM to establish additional state and community Protected Areas.
- Collaborate with the DPWM to implement the National Biodiversity Action Plan in all types of forests in the country.
- Promote ecotourism development for biodiversity conservation.
- Engage non-state actors that have a history and interest in biodiversity conservation in the promotion and protection of biodiversity in state and community forests.

Policy Statement 10: *Promote awareness on role of forest in climate change mitigation and adaptation and contribute to the implementation of the national climate change policy.*

Gambia is a signatory to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and its ancillary agreements, such as the Paris Agreement. Forests are regarded as key factors in climate change mitigation and adaptation due to their ability to sequester large volumes of carbon. As party to the Convention, The Gambia, in an effort to live up to her commitments under the Convention, has developed plans and strategies to implement relevant provisions of the Convention and the Agreements through appropriate and sustainable forest management practices. These plans and strategies include a National Climate Change Policy, a National Adaptation Programme of Action (NAPA) and the Intended Nationally Determined Contribution (INDC). Each of these strategies and plans recognize the important role that the national forest estate has to play in achieving their objectives. Consequently, this forest policy, in recognition of the role assigned to the sector, seeks to facilitate the implementation of forestry interventions that will enhance forests' contribution to climate change mitigation and adaptation in the country and in meeting the country's international obligations under the Convention.

Strategy:

- Collaborate with the National Climate Change Committee (NCCC) to undertake nation-wide campaigns for awareness creation on forest and climate change.
- Collaborate with the NCCC to develop and implement training programmes on forests and climate change at college and community levels.
- Collaborate with the National Climate Change Committee to regularly assess forest carbon stocking, to help secure funding for forest carbon management.
- Seek international funding for forest climate change work especially for community levels.
- Develop and implement forest management plans that conform to and contribute to the implementation of the National Adaptation Programme of Action (NAPA) and the Intended Nationally Determined Contribution of The Gambia.
- Link Community Forests to national climate change programmes and mechanisms for economic benefits of communities.

Policy Statement 11: Encourage and implement collaborative transboundary forest management

The frequency and intensity of forest fires across the common southern border of Senegal and Gambia is high and so is the movement of forest produce. Given the length and porosity of the international boundary and the recent surge in illegal forest activities on both sides, the two countries need to scale up efforts to collaborate for better control of forest fires and illegal activities along the border. Only through this collaboration could a meaningful protection and development of the transboundary forests be achieved.

Strategies:

- Facilitate collaboration with the Senegalese side for cross border control of forest products movement.
- Seek and Collaborate with the All Gambia Forestry Platform (AGFP) and CSOs and communities across the common border to undertake cross border forest fire campaign, fire prevention and management and tree management.
- Encourage and support exchange programmes between local communities in Gambia and Senegal to develop and strengthen community-level collaboration on forest management and utilization.
- Promote mutual learning on fire management techniques and forest restoration between communities across the border.
- Promote cross border learning of value addition and commercialization of NTFPs.
- Organize, in collaboration with NGOs and CSOs across border, forest fairs involving local communities and use the occasion to disseminate information on fire prevention and management.

Policy Statement 12: Combat forest fires to stem forest degradation and to encourage natural regeneration.

Forest fires are the biggest cause of forest degradation in The Gambia. Fires consume not only the annual regenerations, but they also kill mature trees and consume dead wood that could potentially serve as fuelwood for local consumption. The resulting absence of dead wood in the forests forces commercial and local collectors alike to resort to killing life trees for fuelwood, further fueling the cycle of destruction and degradation. Forest fires also cause loss of property, lives and livelihood in the rural areas with consequent negative impact on the national economy. Protecting forests from fires is perhaps the single most important strategy to restore the forest cover of the country. To begin to do this there is need to:

Strategies

- Intensify forest fire campaigns at national level – using national radio and televisions media as well as community radios.
- Establish and train fire committees in the rural areas to assist with sensitization and control of fires.
- Develop and implement regional fire management plans and frameworks with communities and other non-state actors.
- Provide financial support for fire protection works such as fire line establishment around forest parks.
- Provide the Department of Forestry with supplies of firefighting equipment and tools that could be used by communities to fight fires.
- Sensitize communities about, and implement as appropriate, early control burning programmes at regional level.
- Undertake country wide national forest fire prevention campaigns, in collaboration with the DPWM, DLS and DoA, involving the politicians such as Parliamentarians and Ministers as appropriate.

Policy Statement 13: Conserve and sustainably utilize mangrove resources

The Gambia is endowed with an extensive (36, 000 ha NFA 2010) area of mangroves that provide protection for the coastal ecosystems, provide spawning ground for fishes and crustaceans and sanctuary for birds and other marine and terrestrial life forms and also play an important role in capturing carbon for climate mitigation. Given these multiple functions, that cut across different sectors, the protection and management of mangroves calls for the collaboration of many public and non-public sector interests. Consequently, this policy requires to:

Strategies

- Establish and widely disseminate information on mangrove types, their areas and ecological functions for public awareness.
- Collaboratively Develop and implement integrated management plans for the different mangrove ecosystems based on sustainable management concepts.
- Restore degraded mangrove lands in collaboration with fringe communities, CSOs, sector departments such as DPWM, Fisheries, Lands and other interested groups.
- Undertake regular monitoring of and reporting on the dynamics of the mangrove ecosystems.
- Seek international funding for mangrove management.

Policy Statement 14: Create awareness about the forestry sector and its importance to national development.

The importance of the forestry sectors' contribution to economic development in The Gambia cannot be overemphasized. The sector is source of more than 90% of the domestic energy used for cooking and heating, which when converted to imported fuel equivalent will likely reach billions of dalasis annually in import savings. It supplies virtually all the timber needed for house construction and for furniture making. As source of food, feed and medicines, Gambia's forest contributes support and improvement of rural livelihoods, important for the growth and development of the national economy. Furthermore, biodiversity conservation and protection of agricultural space as well a water resources conservation are important economic and ecological functions of forests. Unfortunately, these important functions have been taken for granted in the country by both politicians and the general public. In order to change this perspective, there is need to create awareness about the positive economic and livelihood attributes of forests. The Department of Forestry has developed a communication strategy that needs to be intensively and widely implemented to create the desired awareness amongst the general public.

Strategies:

- Review and revise, as necessary, the forestry communication strategy and provide resources for its implementation.
- Create public awareness on the values of forests.
- Determine, as close as possible, the true contribution of forests to the National Domestic Product (NDP) and disseminate the information at national level.
- Implement intensive public education on the links between forest resources over-exploitation and environmental degradation and (rural) poverty.
- Enhance capacities of communities, including the youth and women, for better understanding of the importance of forestry through their participation in sustainable resource management.
- Encourage and support CSOs and NGOs to develop and disseminate public awareness materials on the benefits of sustainable forest management.
- Ensure public participation in all forestry programmes, including policy and legislative development, and ensure that forests' contribution to economic development receive adequate attention during the process.
- Disseminate information on forestry events, issues and trends related to forest economic values to allow informed participation by the wider public as well as the forest fringe communities in forest management.
- Provide advisory services through a dynamic forestry extension service to promote social acceptance of forestry.

- Increase use of national radio and television services for awareness creation on forestry matters.
- Undertake national tree planting and forest fire campaigns, tours involving the Minister and related sector ministries and underline the economic importance of forestry during these campaigns.

Policy Statement 15: Promote urban forestry to meet the aesthetic, environmental improvement and consumption needs for forest products in urban centers.

Trees play an important role in improving urban environments, especially regarding temperature amelioration. They also improve urban sceneries, and where green parks are created they provide an ambient temperature that permits conducive environments for recreational and other outdoor activities. Urban forestry also has the potential to produce tree products for the consumptive needs of the urban communities. Such includes posts and poles, fruits and medicinal products. Although there is much fruit-tree planting, there is not much 'non-fruit' amenity tree planting in the urban centers. Therefore, there is need to encourage roadside planting and the creation of green spaces in urban areas.

Strategies:

- Undertake awareness creation on importance of trees in urban areas.
- Promote private nursery production in urban areas.
- Work with municipal and area councils and the Department of Physical Planning to identify, designate and plant 'green areas'.
- Encourage annual amenity planting in towns and cities in collaboration with councils, women and youth groups, and NGOs.
- Encourage urban fuelwood production (individual fuelwood lots/trees in backyards where possible).
- Contribute to disaster risk reduction by creating green belts around settlements for carbon capture, soil erosion control and to prevent windstorm hazards.

Policy Statement 16: Promote the development and adoption of alternate energy sources.

Fuelwood extraction and illegal charcoal production is perhaps the second most important cause of forest degradation in The Gambia. The negative impacts of these extractive

activities can be tempered with the introduction and use of alternative sources of energy and wood energy-saving cooking devices. There is experience in the country within the Department of Community Development and amongst other non-state actors on the construction of alternative energy devices and energy saving stove. Well-developed and popularly accepted, these have the potential to reduce the extractive pressure on the already degraded forests.

Strategies:

- Collaborate with Department of Community Development and other relevant sector departments and non-state actors to promote the use of alternate energy sources such as solar heating devices.
- Train Forestry staff in energy-saving stoves production.
- Encourage learning through exchange programmes on the development, use and dissemination of improved stoves.
- Train and support local artisans on manufacture and sale of energy-saving stoves.
- Undertake awareness raising campaigns on the economic value of energy saving stoves and their value for forest conservation.

Policy Statement 17: Compliance with International Conventions and Agreements.

The Gambia is party to many international and regional natural resources conventions and agreements that are directly relevant to the sustainable management of forest resources. The implementation of these conventions and agreements would require their domestication into the national laws, such as the Forest Act and Regulations, to require the relevant sectors to implement action, as necessary, to contribute to government's efforts to meet its commitments under these international and regional arrangements.

Strategies:

- Amend the Forest Act and Regulations to incorporate the implementation of key provisions of the international and regional conventions and agreements as relevant.
- Ensure conservation measures and sustainable utilization of forest resources that guarantee fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising therefrom.
- Adopt precautionary measures to anticipate, prevent, or minimize the causes of forest degradation and loss and mitigate any loss through impact assessment of all development measures and schemes.

- Adopt an integrated approach to resource management that will integrate, as far as possible and as appropriate, the conservation and sustainable utilization of forest resources into relevant sectoral or cross sectoral plans, programmes, policies and laws.

2.5.2 POLICY ORIENTATION II: Capacity Development, Training and Research

Policy Statement 18: Strengthen the institutional and human resources capacity of the Department of Forestry.

The Department of Forestry is poorly staffed in terms of numbers and professional and technical qualities. Going forward and faced with increased pressure on the remaining forests from the ever-increasing population and its developmental needs, the challenges of forest management will mount. The Department therefore needs to adequately prepare for this eventuality and act accordingly.

Strategy:

- Develop and implement strategy to build staff strength, in number and quality.
- Especially ensure adequate number of trained forest Rangers, Guards and Scouts particularly for forest parks management.
- Upgrade the National Forestry and Wildlife Training School to provide training at Diploma and Higher Diploma levels.
- Work with the University of The Gambia (UTG) for a gradual introduction of BSc forestry in its curriculum with the view to produce professional foresters in greater numbers in the near future.
- Undertake annual or biannual in-service training to capture new developments and to strengthen understanding of micro/macro-economic linkage with other sectors to foster better collaboration with other institutions.
- Expand and strengthen infrastructure – stations, nurseries and communication systems, to enhance the Department’s delivery capacity.
- Provide training to and collaborate with CSOs, NGOs, Sector departments and local authorities to increase delivery capacity of the Department.
- Create public awareness on value of forests to enhance forest protection and development.

Policy Statement 19: Strengthen forestry education, training and research.

The Department of Forestry has very weak professional forestry capacity. There are barely five professional foresters, (Bachelor of Science – BSc and Master of Science – MSc combined). Professional forest management planning and management and forestry research have so far received only minimum attention. In fact, the Department was not involved in any forestry research during the 2010-2019 policy period. Opportunities do exist however for professional training on forest management and research through the scholarship programme of the Ministry of Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology (MoHERST) as well as through collaborative ventures with the University of The Gambia (UTG) and the National Agricultural Research Institute (NARI) and the research centers in the sub-region. The Department needs to take advantage of these opportunities during this policy period to improve its forest management and research delivery capacities.

Strategy

- Use the comparatively cheap opportunities in Africa to train more professional and technical forestry staff.
- Encourage and secure the incorporation of forestry education in high schools and at college level and ultimately at UTG.
- Seek, identify, collate and report on indigenous knowledge on forest and tree management and use.
- Collaborate with NARI to undertake applied research on forest restoration at forest park and community forestry level.
- Seek collaboration of the Medical Research Council (MRC) and the Traditional Healers Association (TRAHAS) for research on the processing for value addition, of medicinal and forest-product-based beverages and other NTFPs.
- Undertake adaptive/applied research on forest restoration, rehabilitation and other silvicultural techniques.
- Establish basic forestry research infrastructure in the Department in collaboration with NARI.
- Promote agroforestry research in collaboration with NARI and the Department of Agriculture.
- Train forestry researchers.
- Seek increased funding for adaptive research.

2.5.3 POLICY ORIENTATION III: Data and Information Capture, storage and Dissemination

Policy Statement 20: ***Strengthen the data and information base for the forestry sector for management, Monitoring, evaluation, and reporting.***

The importance of M&E to generate knowledge on the dynamics of the different forest types and for determining remedial measures to enhance sustainable forest management cannot be overemphasized. The Department needs to strengthen its Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Unit to monitor, record and report on developments in the forestry sector, including project implementation. This calls for the training of professional M&E staff and equipping the Unit with the requisite wherewithal to undertake regular monitoring of the forest ecosystem.

Strategy:

- Strengthen the M&E Unit with the training and deployment of professional staff and common reporting system in the Department.
- Ensure regular training of the M&E staff and introduce the use of drone technology and Geographic Information System (GIS) for monitoring and evaluation.
- Establish a forestry information data base, capture and storage system for monitoring and evaluation.
- Develop a national classification system of forest types that could be amalgamated into FAO and other international classification systems.
- Based on the Gambia Forest Management Concept (GFMC), develop guidelines for natural dryland forest management and establish criteria for monitoring and evaluation of successes and failures.
- Undertake regular forest inventory and assessment and ensure that the outcomes advise forest management in the country.
- Identify and Document cultural and sacred sites for protection and development and inclusion in the forest data system.
- Institutionalize annual reporting system on regional and national forestry operations.
- Identify cultural sites of biodiversity significance and record them in the data system and develop guidelines for their protection and development.
- Equip all forest stations with standardized format for data capture and storage.
- Collate all forestry information at national level to advise forest management decision making.

- Develop a GIS database system for geo-referencing of forest data and information.
- Establish a forest monitoring system to generate information needs of the enhanced transparency framework under the UNFCCC reporting requirements.

2.5.4 POLICY ORIENTATION IV: Development of a Forest Based Industry

Policy Statement 21: Promote and strengthen private forestry.

Although the current stocking of timber in the natural forest stands is low, there is conceivable potential for private sector engagement in natural forest management and plantation establishment for the purpose of ecotourism and for timber, post and pole production. Already there exist successful experiences on private natural forest management in the country that could be up-scaled with support and guidance from the Department. For the private sector to confidently engage in forestry it has to be assured security of tenure of land and the trees that it will grow and provided with incentives regarding the harvest and sales of the products.

Strategy:

- Review legislation to strengthen private tree and forest tenure rights.
- Provide private forest owners with technical assistance to manage their forests sustainably.
- Promote and support the establishment of commercial plantations, including fuelwood plantations.
- Advise and ensure compliance with environmental protection guidelines.
- Create awareness on sustainable wood utilization and value of transformation.
- Promote and support private tree nursery production.
- Promote and support private natural forest management and ecotourism.
- Promote and support private and community involvement in forest biodiversity conservation in collaboration with the DPWM.
- Exempt private forest owners from payment of licenses and permits related to the exploitation of products from their forests.

Policy Statement 22: *Promote the development of a Forest-based Industry for livelihood improvement.*

There exist local experience in small-scale processing of NTFPs for commercial purpose, which when supported can be escalated to help improve rural livelihoods. The potential also exist for establishment of small and medium scale enterprises (SME) for forest product processing to enhance their commercial values, such as forest-based beverages, medicines and honey production. To realize this potential government would need to create conditions that would encourage investors into the sector.

Strategy:

- Develop a comprehensive list of all non-timber forest products, identifying those that are of high commercial value.
- Promote value addition of non-timber forest products of high commercial value for export.
- Work with the Ministry of Trade and other stakeholders, such as the Gambia Chamber of Commerce and Industry (GCCl), to promote the transformation and commercialization of non-timber forest products.
- Provide for adequate regulatory framework for exploitation, recording and commercialization of non-timber forest products.
- Identify forest areas of good biodiversity and cultural value that have high ecotourism potential and work with the Ministries of Tourism, Trade and Culture to develop these sites for ecotourism.
- Create incentives for private and community-based Ecotourism.
- Promote and support beekeeping and products processing and value addition.
- Strengthen legislation against illegal timber and non-timber forest product trade.
- Embark on a study tour to learn the utilization of gum / resins at industrial scale, especially gum arabic.

Policy Statement 23: *Enhance forestry contribution to meeting international commitments.*

Forests and trees play important roles in biodiversity conservation, climate change mitigation and adaptation and desertification control and protection of wetlands. The Gambia being party to all of the United Nations conventions covering these areas has obligations to implement them as relevant. It has accordingly prepared national strategies and plans to implement the conventions and their related protocols. Each of the plans calls for interventions in the forestry sector, especially regarding forest and tree

management, to meet its objectives. Consequently, this policy would implement forest and tree management measures to contribute to the implementation of the conventions as relevant.

Strategy:

- Collaborate with the national focal offices of each of the conventions to create awareness on forest, biodiversity, desertification and climate change interfacing.
- Promote and support local level tree growing.
- Promote community-based forest ownership and management to increase the area of first under sustainable management.
- Promote forest biodiversity conservation.
- Collaborate with the focal offices for each of the conventions to implement the forestry components of their implementation plans.
- Seek funding from the secretariats of the conventions, through their respective national focal offices, for the implementation of forestry intervention to implement the conventions as relevant.

2.5.5 POLICY ORIENTATION V: Transparent Governance, Equity and Accountability

Policy Statement 24: Promote transparent governance and equity and strengthen people's participation in sustainable forest management.

The first national forest policy of 1995 recognized government's inability to manage the national forest estate by itself alone. Consequently, the policy and the ensuing laws called for the institutionalization of community ownership and management of forests and trees outside of forests. The realization of these objectives was premised on participating communities and individuals befitting, directly and indirectly, from their involvements. It was also premised on the government and its agencies ensuring that the rights and privileges of the participating communities and individuals are protected, through a transparent administration of the forest laws and regulations.

Strategy:

- Strengthen institutional frameworks for effective community, individual and private sector participation in sustainable forest management.

- Ensure transparent and equitable benefit sharing between the government and the non-state actors in forest and tree management development.
- Provide training for communities, women, youth and NGOs/CBOs to enhance community-level understanding of responsibilities, rights and privileges in forest management.
- Establish a tracking system for forest product exploitation and movement involving local authorities and communities.
- Create Regional Forest Licensing Advisory Committees (RFLAC), comprising CSOs, NGOs, Communities, local authorities and representatives of regional Technical Advisory Committees (TACs) to advise on forest licensing and permit issues.
- Fix and control number of exploitation and utilization licenses per region;
- Impose ban on exploitation in heavily degraded forest areas in collaboration of the RFLACs.
- Empower communities to monitor and control forest exploitation licenses; chainsaw operations and movement of forest produce,
- Strengthen collaboration with security services for better compliance with the forest regulations.
- The Department of Forestry to produce and share an annual report on its operations including licensing.

Policy Statement 25: Promote gender Mainstreaming and equity for sustainable forest management.

Forestry has often been regarded in The Gambia as men's domain despite its gender neutrality as regards its impacts and benefits. Only in recent years, when community forestry was introduced, did women begin to be actively involved in the management of forests through their participation in community forestry. The experiences from this involvement have so far demonstrated that women are perhaps more committed to forest management than their men folks. Furthermore, more women than men seem to be engaged in the marketing of non-timber forest products, such as charcoal, fruits, herbs and fibre.

Strategy:

- Provide targeted gender segregated training on sustainable forest management and utilization.
- Encourage and support women and youth participation in sustainable forest products utilization, transformation and commercialization.

- Ensure women and youth participation in forest management decision making at national, regional and community levels.
- Encourage and support women and youth engagement in targeted enterprise development in the forestry sector.

2.5.6 POLICY ORIENTATION VI: Funding Sustainable Forest Management

It is unlikely that there will ever be sufficient funding for the implementation of sustainable forest management across the forest landscape in The Gambia. Yet the protection and or management of a critical (30%) forest area are necessary for the sustained provision of forest goods and services for the present and future generations. Every effort should therefore be made to mobilize financial resources, locally and from outside, to implement SFM at every level in the country.

Policy Statement 26: Actively seek funding for sustainable forest management and forest products transformation and value addition.

Strategy:

- Demonstrate the economic, social and environmental benefits of forests and seek increased funding for their management from the annual national consolidated budget.
- Seek means to increase contribution to NFF from private and community sources.
- Seize opportunities offered through relevant international, regional and sub-regional, as well as bilateral funding windows for sustainable forest management including:
 - o Financial mechanisms of international conventions and agreements that Gambia is party to.
 - o Regional and sub-regional programmes funding opportunities such as in AU and ECOWAS.
 - o Bilateral funding opportunities within USAID, DEFID, EU, AfDB, WB/IMF.
- Work with the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to identify funding opportunities availed to The Gambia by development partners.
- Train staff in project proposal development.
- Develop funding proposals to be submitted to potential donors.
- Increase awareness amongst potential donors about the forestry situation in The Gambia with the view to attracting technical and financial support for the sector.

- Revise, upwards, the license fees for sawmills and other commercial forest produce operators.
- Introduce tax levy on income from forest-based ecotourism.
- Introduce and implement 'payment for ecosystem services of forests' as relevant.

2.5.7 POLICY ORIENTATION VI: Review of the Forest Policy and Legal Framework

This policy was developed based on the findings and recommendations of the review of the implementation of the 2010-2019 Forest Policy. Given the social, economic, political and environmental changes that occurred during the said policy period, and after an analysis of The Gambia's international and regional obligations and other documentations and best practices relating to conservation of forest resources, it has been found necessary that the Forest Policy 2023 - 2032 and its accompanying legal framework should be periodically examined to determine their compliance, or otherwise, with these obligations and best practices. In view of this, this new policy should be reviewed and revised ten years from the date of its adoption by the Cabinet. The review and updating of the policy every ten years will also identify gaps and constraints and make recommendations for changes in the policy that will follow and the supporting legal framework to ensure maximum compliance.

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