

GAMBİYA'NIN EKONOMİK DİPLOMASİ EKOSİSTEMİ

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Öz

Bu makale, bağımsızlıktan bu yana Gambiya'nın dış politikasında ekonomik çıkarların merkezi bir rol oynadığını ve bu nedenle ulusal kalkınma planları aracılığıyla dış ekonomik yardım çekmeye yönelik bir vurgu olduğunu savunmaktadır. Politika belgeleri, düzenleyici çerçeveler ve kurumsal yapılar üzerine yapılan bir analizden hareketle çalışma, Gambiya'nın ekonomik diplomasisinin ardışık hükümetler tarafından nasıl kavramsallaştırıldığı ve uygulamaya konulduğunu incelemektedir. Bu çalışma, Gambiya'nın ekonomik diplomasisinin büyük ölçüde kalkınma iş birliği ile sınırlı kaldığını; buna karşılık ticaret ve ticari diplomasi faaliyetlerinin, ülkenin tüm cumhurbaşkanları döneminde ihmal edilebilir düzeyde olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Makale, devlet öncülüğündeki ekonomik diplomasi için aktörler arasında koordinasyonun güçlendirilmesi gerekliliğini vurgulamaktadır. Sonuç olarak, ticaret, yatırım ve piyasa odaklı etkileşime yönelik bilinçli bir yeniden kalibrasyon yapılmadığı sürece, Gambiya'nın dış politikasının yardım bağımlılığı ve dış koşulluluk kalıplarını yeniden üretmeye devam edeceği sonucuna varılmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Ekonomik Diplomasi, Yardım, Gambiya, İşbirliği ve Kalkınma

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ECOSYSTEM OF THE GAMBIA'S ECONOMIC DIPLOMACY

Abstract

This article argues that economic interests have been central to The Gambia's foreign policies since independence, which is why there has been an emphasis on attracting external economic assistance through national development plans. Drawing on an analysis of policy documents, regulatory frameworks and institutional arrangements. The study examines how the economic diplomacy of The Gambia has been conceptualised and operationalised by successive governments. This study demonstrates that The Gambia's economic diplomacy has largely confined to development cooperation, while trade and commerce diplomacy have been negligible under all presidents of The Gambia. The paper highlights the need to enhance coordination among actors to unify state-led economic diplomacy. It concludes that without a deliberate recalibration towards trade, investment, and market-oriented engagement, The Gambia's foreign policy will continue to reproduce patterns of aid dependence and external conditionality.

Keywords: Economic Diplomacy, Aid, The Gambia, Cooperation and Development

INTRODUCTION

This study intends to analyse the conceptualisation and operationalisation of economic diplomacy in The Gambia. It is argued that since independence, a gap has persisted between the country's detailed policy goals of trade and investment promotion and its aid dependency. Accordingly, the study addresses two questions: (1) How have successive governments conceptualised and operationalised economic diplomacy in the policy and regulatory frameworks of The Gambia? (2) What explains this gap and the dominance of aid dependency? To situate these questions within the broader literature, it is noted that economic diplomacy has been an essential tool for small states to secure aid, security, and political autonomy in the global economy. Many states have restructured their foreign policy institutions and redefined their diplomatic mandates to focus on market access, value-chain integration, and attracting strategic investments. This is well documented in many advanced and emerging economies (Bayne, 2008; Okano-Heijmans, 2016). By contrast, less attention has been paid to small aid-dependent states like The Gambia. To address this gap in the literature, this article provides an in-depth analysis of The Gambia's economic diplomacy from independence to the present, thereby contributing a comprehensive case study of a small aid-dependent state to the larger literature. It argues that despite a continuous rhetorical commitment to trade, investment, and self-reliance, the country's economic diplomacy has remained predominantly aid-centric. Nonetheless, this study's main limitation is its focus on state-level policy and institutional frameworks as the primary source of data. It excludes primary data from policymakers and implementers, thereby limiting our understanding of the decision-making and implementation processes. The global literature on economic diplomacy has primarily focused on great powers and advanced economies, emphasising state capacity and geopolitical ambitions (Katzenstein, 1985; Okano-Heijmans, 2016). In this context, states leverage networks to boost trade and economic governance. However, economic diplomacy in least developed countries is often overlooked, being associated more with aid effectiveness and development, creating a gap in the understanding of small states' foreign policy in economic management. The central question addressed in this article is: how is economic diplomacy conceptualised and pursued by The Gambia as a small state? The Gambian case illustrates the shortcomings of the prevailing

assumptions in the economic diplomacy literature. Despite its long-standing emphasis on economic development since independence in 1965, the country continues to rely heavily on aid and remittances, in the absence of meaningful export diversification or investment-driven growth. This raises the important question of why economic diplomacy has not evolved beyond dependence on aid, despite formal promises to improve trade and investment. This article offers three key points about Gambian economic diplomacy. Firstly, it argues that economic diplomacy is often conflated with development aid, which downplays trade and investment. Secondly, there is fragmentation and poor coordination among ministries and agencies that affects negotiating and policy coherence. Lastly, it argues that donor-driven planning frameworks promote an aid-first approach, limiting the potential for market-oriented diplomacy and policy independence. The article integrates small-state theory and dependency approaches to explain the persistence of aid dominance despite changes in government and policy goals. It highlights the vulnerabilities and limitations faced by small states, specifically The Gambia, and how external financing influences domestic policy. Empirically, it maps The Gambia's economic diplomacy ecosystem from 1965 to 2022, presenting it as a system of actors and practices through various development plans and policies. This study uniquely documents continuity in economic diplomacy amidst political changes, providing a comprehensive overview of its operationalisation in Africa's smallest mainland state. Findings from the Gambian case highlight the need for deliberate investment in trade negotiation and economic diplomacy to avoid dependency in small and least developed countries. It concludes that aid-centric diplomacy can be detrimental and calls for an economic diplomacy strategy that prioritises trade and investment.

Background of Study

The Gambia gained its independence in 1965, initially adopting a parliamentary system until April 1970, when it transitioned to a presidential system (Hughes & Perfect, 2006). Dawda K. Jawara, who was then the prime minister, assumed the presidency and governed until 22 July 1994, when his government was overthrown in a coup d'état. The Armed Forces Provisional Ruling Council (AFPRC) under the

chairpersonship of Captain Yahya A.J.J Jammeh ruled the country until 1996 when a new republican constitution came into effect after a national referendum, thus returning the country to a presidential system of government. Jammeh contested and won the 1996 presidential elections and thus became the first president of the Second Republic of The Gambia (Saine, 2009). He continued to be the president until January 2017 when his mandate expired, having lost the December 2016 presidential election to Adama Barrow. Although Jammeh initially refused to step down – faced with national, regional and global pressures, he stepped down and went into exile to Equatorial Guinea in January 2017 (Aljazeera, 22 January 2017). Barrow is currently serving a second mandate which ends in January 2027, having won the December 2021 presidential elections.

The Gambia has always prioritised economic growth. From 1960-1965, the Gambia's economy was at a 30% deficit, with a total revenue of £9 million (Jawara, 2009). In 1967, the Ministry of External Affairs had two personnel only; there was one college, three high schools, one technical school, and about 10 primary schools. There existed one road; and a revenue of about US \$7 million (Rice, 1967). Furthermore, only two hospitals existed, one in the capital city and another in the hinterland (Sallah, 1990). Moreover, groundnut remained the only cash crop marketed by the state agency, Gambia Produce Marketing Board, formerly Gambia Oilseeds. While the economy had grown between 4-5% in the 1960s, the droughts in particular, affected the cash crop production and annual average growth dropped to 1.5% (Sallah, 1990).

By 1985, debt servicing could not be met by the government 'because of too-costly schemes of expansion, inappropriate exchange-rate and pricing policies, and adverse exogenous factors' (Sallah, 1990), thus the Gambia sought a bailout package from the Bretton Woods Institution. Although the IMF had praised Jawara's financial discipline and celebrated the Gambia as one of the most successful cases of structural adjustment policies, the economic situation of the Gambia remained precarious when Jammeh took over in 1994 (Saine, 2009). Similarly, when Jammeh lost the election in 2016, the Gambia's gross international reserve was \$60 million, just 1.6 months income cover. Moreover, the Gambia remained highly indebted in 2017, with a GMD 48 billion (\$ US 1 billion) debt being equivalent to 120% of its GDP. Also, poverty was estimated to be about 49%

(Gambia, NDP 2017). The economy of the Gambia is still undiversified, heavily relying on foreign aid and remittances. As of 2021 unemployment stood at 35% (Gambia Bureau of Statistics, n.d). As a result, the Gambia has continued to seek for development cooperation with developed countries.

Literature Review: Economic Diplomacy Between Aid and Trade

The existing literature on economic diplomacy highlights several consistent patterns. Despite changes in economic diplomacy, one of its distinct characters has been the role played by state actors. It is argued that national economic interests, domestic demands and competition drive economic diplomacy of developed and great powers while in underdeveloped countries, the need for economic development had been the driving force. Nonetheless, middle powers use economic diplomacy to reshape regional and global orders (Okano-Heijmans, 2016). Accordingly, economic diplomacy is both an economic and political tool. Aware of this, investments in economic diplomacy by states has been on the increase. Summits on economic diplomacy are also on the increase and studies on the subject have increased (Okano-Heijmans, 2016). All major powers and regional organisations have organised summits relating to economic diplomacy.

Economic diplomacy is defined 'as the use of political means as leverage in international negotiations, with the aim of enhancing national economic prosperity and the use of economic leverage to increase the political stability of the nation' (Okano-Heijmans, 2016, pp. 29-30). Nicholas Bayne defined it as the 'method by which states conduct their external economic relations. It embraces how they make decisions domestically, how they negotiate internationally and how the processes interact' (Bayne, 2008, p. 1). Economic diplomacy constitutes three components: commercial diplomacy which is the advancement of trade and investments in key sectors or firms; trade diplomacy which focuses on the bargaining and trade-offs in the development of trade and investment policies; and development cooperation which is the use of positive inducements and sanctions for the promotion of development. Economic diplomacy is different from business diplomacy – while governments are the main actors in the former, investors and corporations are likely to be the main actors in the latter (Okano-Heijmans, 2016).

According to Okano-Heijmans (2016), states have made efforts to merge agencies in the spheres of economic diplomacy for efficiency, which led to the ‘Concordat’ in the Netherlands. In the 1980s and 1990s Australia, Canada and Argentina respectively, joint their foreign offices with trade departments. In Japan, trade negotiations are led by the chief negotiator who is an official of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Norway on the other hand takes a middle ground allowing the foreign ministry to lead multilateral trade negotiations while the ministry of trade deals with bilateral trading matters; whereas in the United States, the Office of the Trade Representative (USTR) is part of the Executive Office of the President. In the European Union, the chief negotiator is always from the Directorate-General for Trade and negotiates on behalf of the member states. Additionally, new representations either consulates or trade offices are being opened in commercial capitals and development hubs, a recognition of the interrelated nature of commerce, trade and development cooperation (Okano-Heijmans, 2016).

Economic diplomacy is operationalized in various ways by different entities. For instance, since the adoption of the Cotonou Agreement, the EU has tied political objectives to development cooperation, compelling developing countries to work towards attaining political objectives such as good governance, free press and respect for fundamental human rights (Hurt, 2003). Qualification for American Growth Opportunity Act (AGOA), a US initiative is also tied to political objectives (Mattoo, et al., 2002). China’s first precondition for any development cooperation is the acceptance of the One-China policy. States who recognise Republic of China on Taiwan are denied the benefits of China’s economic diplomacy. There are variations too in the sectors prioritized by states in their economic diplomacy. For example, Asian countries often focus on diverse areas in the private sector to promote growth at home and abroad, Middle Eastern countries and Russia on the other hand focus on the energy sector (Okano-Heijmans, 2016).

The literature gap on scholarship on The Gambia is evident. Although there are numerous studies and reports on The Gambia’s economic and development status, such works especially those authored by the IMF and the World Bank are mainly descriptive and diagnostic with little or no regard to the economy as a dimension of foreign policy or as a form of diplomatic engagement. Foreign policy studies on The Gambia on the other hand is growing, however, most of them are generalised

studies. For example, Omar Touray focused on all major partners including Germany's economic relations with The Gambia detailing the former's contribution to The Gambia until 1994 (Touray, 2000). To our knowledge this is the first comprehensive published work on the country's foreign relations. While the work is wide in terms of geographic scope and the timeline, its focus was on documenting the role of international factors, the presidency and the development need of The Gambia in attracting development aid. Accordingly, details on the ecosystem of The Gambia's economic diplomacy are lacking.

Jawara's autobiography on the other hand has a chapter on the international relations of the Gambia during his presidency where he mentioned visits to foreign heads of state and a number of supports received by The Gambia from those states. The chapter did not provide a detail account of the relations between those states although it mentioned a number of aid packages received. Implicit in the narration of the diplomatic engagements is Jawara's summit diplomacies in attaining foreign aid. Another chapter specifically focused on early relations with Senegal and another on the Senegambia confederation (Jawara, 2009). For Jawara the confederation was a political and socio-cultural union. In both chapters, economic diplomacy was absent. In fact, Senegal's push for closer economic diplomacy during the confederation has been blamed as a cause for the collapse of the confederation (Richmond, 1993). It is important to state that most of the work on The Gambia's foreign relations is on its neighbour, Senegal. This includes, studies focusing on post immediate independence relations, confederal relations, and post confederal relations as well as relations with Jawara (Gubb, 2000) (Senghore, 2008). However, these publications do not have economic diplomacy as their focus. Therefore, the Jawara period (1965-1994), has not attracted studies focusing on The Gambia's economic diplomacy.

Nonetheless, Deborah Brautigam's study on Chinese foreign aid to The Gambia and how China's domestic ideology influenced its development cooperation can be regarded as one study on economic diplomacy (Brautigam, 1994). However, Brautigam's (1994) study has China as its main focus without accounting for policies and actors in The Gambia's economic diplomacy. Moreover, there are other studies that focus on the early years of Jammeh's rule. Abdoulie Saine's chapter on

foreign relations, in which economic interests are depicted as a defining rationale of Jammeh's foreign policy between 1994-2009 is one example Saine, (2000). Fatou Janneh's comparison of Jawara and Jammeh's leadership personalities takes a psychological approach and is thus devoid of an economic perspective. While most studies have maintained that economic interests have been a consistent objective of both the Jawara and Jammeh governments, our review shows that no comprehensive general study (1965-2022) on The Gambia's economic diplomatic relations, or on its relations with another country in a comprehensive manner exists.

Theoretical Framework: Small States Dependency and Economic Diplomacy

This study adopted an integrated theoretical framework combining small state theory and dependency to provide a deeper understanding of economic diplomacy in The Gambia. The literature review is incorporated into this framework for a contextual analysis of the scholarship. Firstly, for small state theory; although there is no consensual definition of small states and the borderlines between such categories as 'micro state', 'small state' and 'middle power' are usually blurred and arbitrary (Mouritzen & Wivel, 2005; Raadschelders, 1992). Small states are more visible and prominent than at any other point in world history and their diplomacy is a distinct area worthy of individual analysis (Baldacchino, 2020). Many scholars look at small states' diplomacy in terms of their administrative capacity, narrow export bases and their limited bargaining power in the international arena (Katzenstein, 1985; Thorhallsson, 2006). The framework contributes to a deeper understanding of general diplomatic themes, goals and methods. For many small states, their foreign policies aim for security, prosperity, and citizen welfare (DiploFoundation, n.d.). Moreover, for a microstate like The Gambia, economic diplomacy is driven by its fiscal vulnerability and survival imperatives. Development cooperation thus becomes the dominant instrument of necessity rather than choice.

Proposition 1 (Small States Hypothesis): The smaller a state's administrative capacity and export base, the more its economic diplomacy will concentrate on development cooperation rather than trade or commercial diplomacy, regardless of stated policy preferences.

Secondly, dependency theory shows how aid-dependent states adopt external priorities through conditionalities and donor coordination mechanisms (Brautigam, 2000). The dependency theory emphasises structural asymmetries: core states are typically more economically developed, politically stable, and technologically advanced, while periphery states are often less developed, politically unstable, and reliant on the core for resources and investment. When applied to economic diplomacy, dependency theory provides an analytical lens for understanding how aid-dependent states adopt external priorities through conditionalities and donor coordination mechanisms (Brautigam, 2000). In this regard, investment and trade diplomacy require institutional capacity, negotiation experts, infrastructure to promote exports and regulatory frameworks that are systematically weak. Aid, therefore, substitutes for productive economic diplomacy. The Gambian state is not a passive recipient of external pressures. However, successive governments have actively courted aid, framed development plans around donor preferences, and allocated scarce human resources to aid coordination rather than trade negotiation. The more useful insight from dependency theory is the concept of conditionality chains: donor requirements at the macro level (budget support conditionalities) cascade down to sectoral plans, project designs, and even staffing decisions, creating a web of external influence that is difficult to escape.

Proposition 2 (Dependency Hypothesis): The higher the ratio of aid to government expenditure and the greater the number of donor coordination mechanisms, the more domestic policy priorities will align with donor frameworks, and the less institutional capacity will remain for trade and investment diplomacy.

The integration of the two theories provides a more in-depth explanation than either one alone. They provide the persistence of aid-centric diplomacy across different presidential regimes (Jawara, Jammeh, and Barrow). If aid dependence were merely a matter of leadership preference, we would expect significant shifts in economic diplomacy following the 1994 coup or the 2017 transition. Instead, as this article demonstrates, continuity characterises The Gambia's economic diplomacy. This continuity is explained by structural factors (small-state vulnerability) and external factors (donor-driven planning frameworks) that constrain any government, regardless of its rhetoric.

Methodology and Materials

This study adopts a qualitative research design based on document analysis. This is particularly appropriate for examining economic diplomacy, as it enables the systematic interpretation of policy intentions, institutional roles, and patterns of continuity across time. This facilitated an in-depth analysis of the documents to understanding how economic diplomacy is conceived across policy and legislative instruments. The primary source of the data is derived from 15 national documents of The Gambia, three bilateral agreements, seven domestic newspaper stories, two reports, two websites and several secondary materials. Nine of the 15 national documents are successive development plans and a national vision developed from 1975 to 2018, and three national constitutions (1965 Constitution, 1970 Constitution and the current 1997 Constitution) as well as two national policies, namely, the Trade Policy and the Aid Policy. These were analysed to understand the conceptualisation of economic diplomacy.

Additionally six websites, namely that of the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Employment, Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs, Office of the President of the Republic of The Gambia, The Diaspora Directorate, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, International Cooperation and Gambians Abroad, and the Gambia Chamber of Commerce and Industry (<https://motie.gm/>, <https://mofea.gm/>, www.op.gov.gm, <https://diaspora.gm/>, <https://www.mofa.gm/>, <https://gccci.gm/>) were consulted, serving as the primary source of data for our analysis. The websites were mainly used to access and understand the organogram of ministries and their role in economic diplomacy to inform the mapping of actors in economic diplomacy. These sources were complemented with secondary sources such as journal articles on the subject of the study. The materials were purposively selected based on their relevance to foreign economic engagement and institutional coordination for the subject under study. We conducted document analysis to understand the intent and function of economic diplomacy and the assigned actors. The rest of the paper focuses on the ecosystem of The Gambia's economic diplomacy with analyses of the development plans and relevant legal instruments.

Findings and Analysis of the Ecosystem of the Gambia's Economic Diplomacy

The development plans

Under the economic and development situations described in the background, successive Gambia governments initiated several plans to develop the country, all of them largely anchored on the goodwill of the international community. For instance, in 1963, the Public Investment Programmes were launched, lasting until 1974, the programme was mainly funded by the UK. The First Development Plan launched in 1975 lasted until 1980/1981; and the Second Development Plan, followed lasting from 1981 to 1985. Both were extensively funded with foreign aid (Seckan, 2020). Furthermore, the Economic Recovery Plan was launched in 1985 (Sallah, 1990), and it was followed by the Programme for Sustained Development (1990). These were followed by the Strategy for Poverty Alleviation I (1993), which was supported by the International Monetary Fund's Enhanced Structural Facility Strategy (1998-2002) (International Monetary Fund, n.d). The Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), came with PRSP I (2003-2005) and PRSP II (2007-2011) respectively, again largely funded by foreign aid. The Programme for Accelerated Growth and Employment (PAGE) which lasted until 2015/2016 was launched in 2012, and the National Development Plan (NDP) was launched in 2018 (Seckan, 2020).

One similarity within the development plans is their emphasis on the need for foreign aid, from bilateral and multilateral partners. In fact Vision 2020, the overall long-term development of The Gambia devised in 1996 by the Jammeh-led government promised to capitalise on sound macroeconomic policies at the domestic level while at the international level it promised 'a new diplomatic drive...good and fruitful neighbourliness with both regional governments and other government...maintaining dialogue and cooperation with development partners' (Government of The Gambia, 1996). Since the launch of the Vision, successive medium and long-term plans have had a heavy emphasis on economic diplomacy. For example, the government recognised that the attainment of PAGE would 'require an important level of financial resources...from The Gambia's

development partners’ (Government of The Gambia, 2013). Furthermore, it envisaged the attraction of external funds in the form of general and sector budget support, and project aid in line with the principles of the Paris Declaration. PAGE also promised to enhance the alignment and harmonisation of aid ‘through thematic groups between development partners and the Government. These thematic groups would be expected to focus on the priorities of the PAGE’ (Government of The Gambia, 2013).

The successor of PAGE, the NDP whose cost has been put at US \$2.4 billion states that: ‘because of the state of the economy, external support will be vital to enable The Gambia to meet the financing needs of the National Development Plan’. It goes on to state that ‘Government will work with both traditional and non-traditional partners to secure the necessary financing’ (Government of The Gambia, 2018). However, these programmes and plans were and are not isolated from multilateral financial arrangements and global development initiatives. For example, both the PRSPs and PAGE benefitted from multilateral fundings geared towards attaining the Millennium Development Goals. Similarly, the NDP has been aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals to attract international funding. Accordingly, the development plans of The Gambia have given economic diplomacy a central role. Additionally, legal and policy instruments of The Gambia have catered for economic diplomacy. Below, we discuss key instruments defining The Gambia’s economic diplomacy.

Domestic and international instruments

Chapter XX, Section 211 of the 1997 Constitution of The Gambia proclaims that the state policy shall be not enforceable in any Court but the State and its organs must endeavour to ensure their centrality in any policy formulation. Section 215 which outlines the economic principles of The Gambia tasks the State to ensure economic growth, employment and prosperity of Gambian citizens, and the development of a self-reliant economy. However, by a self-reliant economy, it is meant that The Gambia should not build a dependent economy but this is not a rejection of economic diplomacy. In fact, Section 215 goes further to task the state to be ‘encouraging and protecting beneficial foreign investment’ to The Gambia. This is clearly a call for economic diplomacy, more precisely trade and commerce diplomacies. Moreover Section 215 proceeds to task the state to promote and

protect The Gambia's interest, and the establishment of a 'just and equitable international economic and social order' (The Gambia, 1997).

While the constitution gives leverage to the state to pursue economic diplomacy, Section 79 had forbidden 'any engagement with any other country which causes it [Gambia] to lose its sovereignty without the matter first being put to a referendum and passed by such majority' as may be stipulated in an Act of the National Assembly. By this section, the government can enter into any diplomatic engagement without restriction except if The Gambia's sovereignty would be at stake. Moreover, the constitution forbids overreliance on any state, thus implicitly forbidding aid dependency. However, these principles are not enforceable in any Court and governments may go against them without any penalty. Nonetheless, the incorporation of these principles is a novelty considering that the country's 1965 and 1970 constitutions contained nothing similar (The Gambia, 1970).

Although there may be numerous subsidiary legislations and policies related to the country's economic diplomacy, we will limit our review to two only, the Aid Policy and the Trade Policy of The Gambia. The Trade Policy maintains that The Gambia operates a liberal trade regime, and seeks to improve trade and exports to reduce poverty. The policy further commits to the promotion of multilateral trade, ECOWAS relations, and strengthening bilateral relations. The policy further seeks to 'support production activities for the domestic and international markets;...[and] strengthen bilateral, regional and multilateral trade corporation'. Furthermore, the policy seeks the integration of The Gambia into the global economy (The Gambia Ministry of Trade, Regional Integration and Employment, 2011). With the above position, it is clear that trade with bilateral and multilateral partners is given importance in the policy.

While The Gambia has mainly supported ECOWAS decisions, promotion of production for domestic and international markets has not been vigorously pursued. Notwithstanding, the Gambia continues to play a somewhat significant role in reexport to Guinea Bissau and Mali among others. The Trade Policy adds that The Gambia will pursue political and economic relations with the overall aim of increasing export opportunities for the country. The Aid Policy on the other hand,

is meant to guide the ‘sourcing and managing external aid resources, especially grants and loans, that qualify as Official Development Assistance (ODA)’. Together the two have defined what is envisaged from trade diplomacy and development cooperation. However, the extent to which they are pursued remains unknown as the Gambia’s economic diplomacy is largely limited to development cooperation.

Regarding international instruments, The Gambia became a contracting party to GATT on 22 February 1996. Furthermore, it became a member of the WTO on 23 October 1996. Although the Gambia is neither a signatory nor an observer to any WTO plurilateral agreements, all WTO trading partners enjoy the MFN treatment from the country. As a least developed country, The Gambia too enjoys special and differential treatments as set by WTO Agreements. However, the Ministry of Trade decries the country’s limited benefits from multilateral trading system due to low investments in institutions dealing with trade and the lack of a Mission in Geneva to engage in negotiations. However, The Gambia has now opened a Mission in Geneva but, it is unclear yet to what extent this will further the Gambia’s economic diplomacy.

Notwithstanding, The Gambia is a founding member of ECOWAS and participates in the Common External Tariff (CET) negotiations. It is also harmonising its Tariffs with CET and the EPA between ECOWAS and the EU. Unprocessed goods within ECOWAS are also accorded duty-free entry to The Gambia according to the Trade Liberalisation Scheme. The Gambia is a member of the West African Monetary Zone (WAMZ) and has been discussing with members to establish a common currency. It has also been supporting the creation of ECOWAS Customs Union. Moreover, the Gambia is a signatory to the Abuja Treaty which established the African Economic Community in June 1991 to promote regional integration. In addition to these, the country has signed several bilateral trade, investment and commercial agreements. Each of those has its own specifications. For example, there is a fishing agreement with the EU and another with Senegal, each promoting the exploitation of fisheries. To what extent these are beneficial to the country as envisaged in the Constitution and policies remains a mystery. In fact, both had come under heavy criticism in the National Assembly.

Agencies and Actors in the Gambia's Economic Diplomacy

There are many agencies and actors in the economic diplomacy of The Gambia; perhaps foremost among these is the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs. The economic diplomatic powers of the Ministry include the coordination and management of all external grants and loans; budgetary allocation to foreign affairs, taxation and revenue related policies such as foreign trade taxes; and property management of oversea missions of The Gambia. The Ministry has nine directorates, three of them, Directorate of Aid Coordination, Project Coordination Unit, and Loans and Debt Management, being mainly involved in economic diplomacy. Also, one of its three semi-autonomous agencies, the Gambia Revenue Authority has an important role in economic diplomacy as it has mandate over taxes, exercises and licensing. It is the Authority that may offer duty or tax waivers to investors. Moreover, the Ministry has two deputy permanent secretaries, one in charge of aid and projects, and the other managing international cooperation, both being important actors in the economic diplomacy of The Gambia.

Furthermore, the Directorate of Aid Coordination has an oversight responsibility over all projects and programmes funded by multilateral agencies, organises the project managers' forums for assessing project status, leads the aid policy's implementation and oversees the Aid Management Platform of the Ministry. The Directorate is also responsible for the coordination of visits of multilateral agencies such as the World Bank, BADEA to the Gambia. It is further tasked to mobilise resources for the implementation of the National Development Plan. The Directorate's objective is thus summed: 'support the effective coordination of aid inflows/outflows as well as delivering sound policy advice on compliance and performances to senior management on bilateral and multilateral donor funded projects', which puts it at the forefront of The Gambia's development cooperation.

The Directorate of Debt Management is on the other hand mandated to manage all public debt, domestic and external; takes part 'in loan negotiations', approves disbursement, analyse debt sustainability, maintains a 'loan-by-loan database on government and government guaranteed external debt and on external grants to the government'. The directorate is also the 'main channel of communication with the

external creditors and donors’ thus allowing it to interact ‘with the IMF and the World Bank on debt sustainability analysis and debt strategy formulation and implementation’.

According to the Ministry, the Project Coordination Unit was created to avoid duplication of efforts from different project implementation units in order to save resources. To this effect, the Unit manages several projects such as the Green Climate Fund (GCF), and the Integrated Financial Management System (WB). Moreover, the Unit serves as an interface between the ministry and donors on projects within the Ministry while reporting to donors monthly and quarterly on project statuses. Nonetheless it also has negotiatory powers. Despite the creation of the Unit, aid supervisory and coordinating functions are still spread across several units and departments as well as ministries across the government.

Another important actor is the Ministry of Trade, Industry, Employment and Regional Integration. Although its main mandate is tilted towards local development, its role extends to economic diplomacy. It is tasked with promoting investments and trade, and participating in trade negotiations. Furthermore, the ministry coordinates matters relating to regional integration, and multilateral agencies such as the World Trade Organisation, International Trade Center, Labour Organisation, among others. Its strategic objectives include enhancing trade cooperation with bilateral, regional and multilateral settings. Three directorates within the ministry, namely Trade, Industry and Investment, and Regional Integration, are active players in economic diplomacy.

The Industry and Investment Directorate is the representative of the Ministry on forums dealing with investment and industry. The Trade Directorate plays ‘the lead role in trade negotiations’, in addition to its advisory role on foreign trade export matters. ‘The Directorate is also responsible for all bilateral and multilateral trade issues, and also coordinate ECOWAS matters in the country’. The Directorate of Regional Integration on the other hand, deals with all matters pertaining to integration within AU, ECOWAS and Organisation of Islamic Conference. It also coordinates preparations for negotiations on integration for safeguarding The Gambia’s interest. Moreover, the Gambia Import and Export Promotion Agency under MOTIE, in addition to promoting private investments in the Gambia,ⁱ

remains a stakeholder in trade diplomacy receiving foreign investors, providing information and advisory services for investors.

Additionally, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Gambians Abroad (MoFA) is another actor tasked with advancing the interest of The Gambia in all spheres. Thus, the minister of (MoFA) is mandated to work as the principal aid to attain the president's foreign policy goals. The minister is also one of the main negotiators and signatories to many agreements including those relating to trade, and development cooperation. Furthermore, by default, Gambian representatives in the foreign service are tasked with promoting the interests of The Gambia. In fact, in 2017, Barrow appointed six ambassadors at large to attract and promote investment and tourism to The Gambia. This was followed by several other appointments with similar roles. The increase in the number of ambassadors at large, designated for investment, goodwill and business adds to the plethora of actors in The Gambia's economic diplomacy under MoFA. It is important to add that the Office of the President is another important actor in this field. The presidency receives, hold meetings and negotiations with economic diplomats, while embarking on or despatching missions overseas for economic diplomacy.

Meanwhile other ministries are free to lobby for funds and projects and to engage in economic diplomacy. For example, the ministries of Basic and Secondary (MoBSE), Climate Change and Natural Resources (MECCNAR), Agriculture (MOA), Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology (MoHERST), Tourism and Culture are part of the agencies involved in the Gambia's economic diplomacy in diverse ways. For example, MoBSE has negotiated and won development aid from bilateral and multilateral partners. It remains a main actor in development cooperation relating to education and has been pivotal in the implementation and management of donor funds relating to the Millennium Development Goals. In fact, it has a Project Coordination Unit which manages all projects. Similarly, the MOA has negotiated and attracted projects relating to development cooperation from the Africa Development Bank, World Bank, World Food Programme just to mention a few. Accordingly, it is fair to state that if not all, most ministries in The Gambia are now actors in the country's economic

diplomacy. The newly created Ministry of Digital Economy with effect from 2022, will add to the plethora of actors and agencies.

Moreover, the National Assembly has an oversight role in The Gambia's economic diplomacy. Any treaty including those dealing with loans, finance, trade, development cooperation, negotiated and signed by the president or any minister, must be ratified by the National Assembly before it takes effect. Nonetheless, since independence the ruling parties have had a majority thus making it easier to have treaties ratified by the Assembly. Our review indicates that the Assembly has not rejected any treaty relating to loans and grants, even when President Barrow had a rift with his former party in 2019. Still, the National Assembly Members are selected to represent The Gambia in the ECOWAS Parliament where resolutions dealing with cooperation and trade may be passed. Also selected members do participate in the EU-ACP parliamentary forums.

Additionally, the National Assembly Select Committee on Foreign Affairs evaluates and make recommendations on matters relating to foreign affairs, including development cooperation; while the Finance and Public Accounts Committee examines public expenditures of monies it appropriated or those laid before it for consideration. Also, the Select Committee to Monitor the Implementation of Government Projects' mandate includes monitoring projects initiated through development cooperation. The Gambia Chamber of Commerce and Industry (GCCCI) is the National Surety for the ECOWAS Inter-State Road Transit Scheme since 2006, thus adding to the number of actors.

Accordingly, there are numerous actors both state and nonstate in The Gambia's economic diplomacy. In fact, overtime several nongovernmental entities, NGOs in particular have joined the club of economic diplomats attracting funding from traditional and non-traditional bilateral and multilateral partners of the government. For example. both the EU and US do grant NGOs funds to implement projects. NGOs in The Gambia are required to be registered by the Attorney General Chambers which is responsible for the registration of companies, businesses and associations, and the NGO Affairs Agency under the Ministry of Lands, Regional Governments and Religious Affairs. While NGOs are required to submit reports to NGO Affairs agency, they do not deal directly with government except in projects where government bodies are implementing partners or supervisory entities.

Besides, private businesses, investors and individuals are increasingly taking prominent roles in The Gambia's economic diplomacy. For instance, in 2020, the Association of Cement Importers and Distributors in The Gambia threatened to pull out of the economic sector if government failed to control the inflow cement from Senegal.

The expansion of economic diplomacy, liberalisation and privatisation, poverty, a burgeoning state apparatus have increased the number state and nonstate actors in The Gambia's economic diplomacy. The real benefit of the increase in state actors in the field is difficult to determine. While the diffusion of economic diplomatic roles in the different ministries gives every ministry the opportunity to engage in development cooperation, the lack of coordination makes it difficult to have a comprehensive approach. For example, some of the roles within the three directorates of the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs are overlapping. Likewise, the roles in MOTIE too. How is this increase in actors without coordination affecting The Gambia?

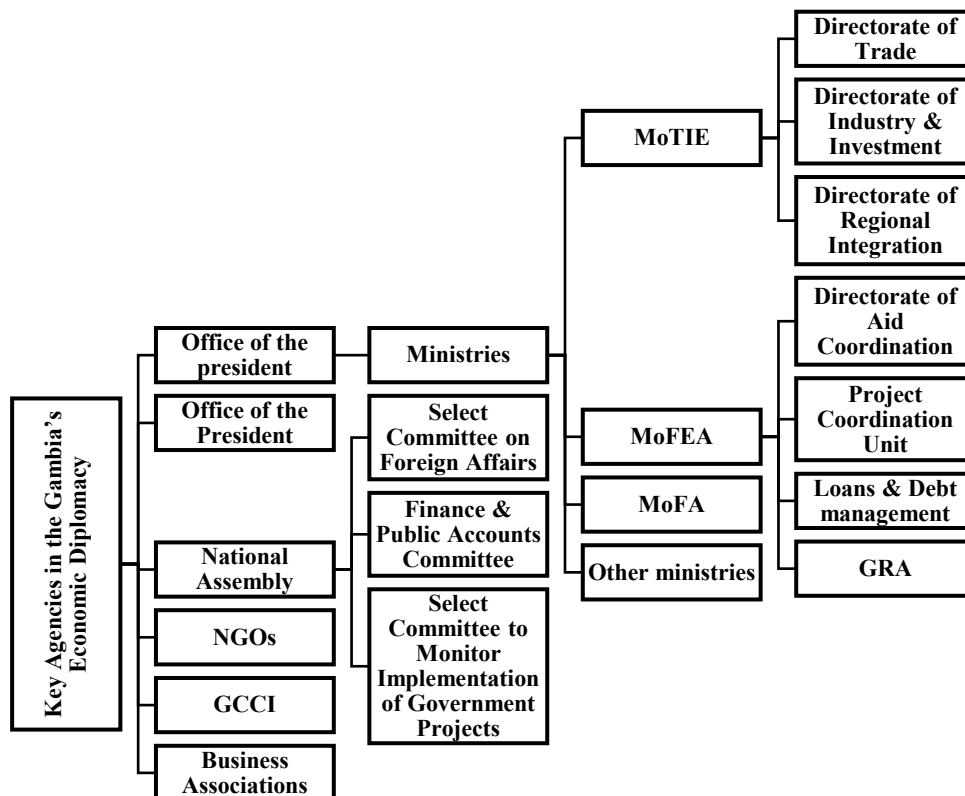


Figure 1. Authors' Illustration of Agencies in the Gambia's Economic Diplomacy

Discussion

The findings confirm two theoretical propositions in answering the central research question: Why has The Gambia's economic diplomacy not evolved beyond aid dependence despite formal commitments to trade and investment? Confirmation of Proposition 1 (Small States Hypothesis): The Gambia's small population, narrow export base (historically groundnuts, tourism, re-exports), and limited administrative capacity have indeed concentrated its economic diplomacy on development cooperation. The country has never had a dedicated trade negotiation unit with sustained technical capacity. Its Geneva Mission was established only recently, and its impact remains uncertain. By contrast, development cooperation is deeply institutionalised. For example, MoFEA has multiple directorates for aid coordination, debt management, and project implementation and sectoral ministries have parallel aid management structures. This is not a failure of leadership but a structural outcome of small-state constraints. Confirmation of Proposition 2 (Dependency Hypothesis): The ratio of aid to government expenditure in The Gambia has been high for decades. Although, donor coordination mechanisms thematic groups under PAGE, alignment with MDGs and SDGs, Paris Declaration principles have systematically aligned domestic development plans with donor frameworks. The National Development Plan (2018) explicitly states that external support is "vital". This alignment has come at a cost: institutional capacity for trade and investment diplomacy remains weak. The Ministry of Trade itself has acknowledged that The Gambia has not fully benefited from the multilateral trading system due to low investments in trade institutions. Aid has substituted for, rather than complemented, productive economic diplomacy. Despite three different presidential regimes (Jawara, Jammeh, Barrow), a coup 1994, democratic transition 2017, and multiple development plans. Notwithstanding, the Gambia's economic diplomacy has remained consistently aid-centric. For example, Jammeh's 1996 Vision 2020 promised a "new diplomatic drive," but the plans that followed (PRSPs, PAGE, NDP) all emphasised external financing. Moreover, the 2017 transition brought hopes of reorientation, yet the NDP (2018) repeats the same language of aid indispensability. This continuity confirms that structural factors (small-state vulnerability) and external factors (donor coordination mechanisms) operate independently of domestic regime type. The Gambia case is not unique.

Other small African states such as Malawi and Lesotho exhibit similar patterns of aid-centric diplomacy (Whitfield, 2009). Nevertheless, some small states have successfully reoriented toward trade and investment. For example, Botswana, for example, used diamond revenues strategically while maintaining aid relationships (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2003). Rwanda, despite its small size and post-conflict context, has deliberately invested in investment promotion and trade facilitation (Behuria, 2019). These comparisons suggest that aid-centric diplomacy is not inevitable but requires deliberate political prioritisation and institutional investment—precisely what The Gambia has not sustained.

Conclusion

This study aimed to answer two fundamental questions: how is economic diplomacy conceptualised and operationalised in The Gambia and the why has aid centric diplomacy continued to dominate. The findings show that trade, investment and self-reliance are formally conceptualised as seen in the regulations and policies, yet development cooperation prioritizing aid remains operationally dominant. The study reveals institutional fragmentation within an ever-growing number of state actors, nature of donor driven development planning, and state vulnerability. The article shows that The Gambia's economic diplomacy faces structural challenges linked with small-state vulnerability and limited institutional capacity. As a result, The Gambia remains heavily dependent on development cooperation. Despite constitutional commitment and policy commitment to trade and investment, economic diplomacy remains deeply aid-centric. This is not because of choice but a reflection of capacity and uneven international economic cooperation.

This systematic analysis highlights the disparity between stated goals and actual practices in Gambian economic diplomacy. This is due to the country's economic diplomacy largely constrained to managing development cooperation, perpetuating dependency and external conditionality. Finding reveals that such an outcome is not a result of political choices or leadership preferences, but from the interplay of small-state vulnerabilities, institutional fragmentation, and donor-driven development structures.

The study findings highlight the need for policymakers to recalibrate economic diplomacy by strengthening trade negotiation capacity, investing in export diversification, and improving inter-ministerial coordination. Establishing a central economic diplomacy coordination mechanism might improve policy coherence and minimise duplication. The Gambia case highlights how development cooperation fails to generate sustainable economic linkages when detached from trade and investment. The study underscores the importance of analytical frameworks that account for power asymmetries and institutional constraints in small states.

Our study has contributed to the literature on the subject by providing the first comprehensive, longitudinal document analysis of The Gambia's economic diplomacy ecosystem, thereby filling a critical gap. It is suggested that future research prioritises the generation of primary data from practitioners and policy makers to better understand decision-making processes and constraints. Furthermore, comparative studies within the subregion could deepen our understanding of the role of structural factors that shape economic diplomacy within the subregion.

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