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INFRASTRUCTURE ASSET MANAGEMENT IN THE GAMBIA

EMPOWERING GAMBIAN CITIES TO BUILD AND MANAGE RESILIENT INFRASTRUCTURE IN SUPPORT OF THE SDGs

Columbia School of International and Public Affairs
Research Report for The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA)

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Project Overview

The Gambia's infrastructure is under increasing pressure from climate risks, fiscal constraints and rapid urbanization. While national initiatives such as the Infrastructure Asset Management (IAM) Enabling Environment Roadmap and localized Asset Management Action Plans represent a shift toward sustainable infrastructure governance, implementation remains fragmented. This report, developed in collaboration with UNDESA and UNOPS, explores the disconnect between national strategies and local realities through fieldwork and interviews across key institutions.

Findings reveal that local governments face significant challenges in translating policy into practice. Strategic planning is often sidelined in favor of crisis response, and unclear institutional mandates have led to duplicated efforts and accountability gaps. Financial disbursements are unreliable, leaving councils without the funds needed for preventive maintenance, while technical skills and asset data systems remain underdeveloped.

To address these gaps, the report recommends a clearer definition of institutional responsibilities, more predictable and autonomous financing for local governments, expanded training programs linked to youth service schemes, and investments in digital asset tracking. These actions, if implemented, would strengthen infrastructure longevity and resilience, with measurable progress toward SDGs 9, 11, and 13 through improved service delivery, cost efficiency and climate adaptation.

Disclaimer: This report was prepared by students of Columbia University as part of an academic exercise. It is not endorsed by the UN DESA and does not necessarily reflect the views of UN DESA.

Introduction

Across low- and middle-income countries, the long-term viability of infrastructure is increasingly compromised by weak systems for managing public assets after they're built. In The Gambia, local governments are primarily responsible for operating and maintaining regional public infrastructure assets, yet they face persistent challenges related to policy clarity, financial resources and technical capacity. Despite support from national authorities and development partners, Infrastructure Asset Management (IAM) remains fragmented and reactive. This research examines the institutional, financial, and operational conditions that shape IAM in The Gambia to identify governance and capacity issues. The study aims to provide recommendations that are grounded in primary research to support evidence-based recommendations for strengthening local capacity and promoting more sustainable infrastructure governance, **particularly in the context of recent decentralization reforms.**

Effective IAM is critical for The Gambia, where fiscal constraints, rapid urbanization and climate vulnerabilities place added pressure on public infrastructure. In 2022, severe flooding in Greater Banjul caused over USD 3 million in damage to roads and other essential assets (UNDAC, 2022)**.** Many essential services, such as feeder roads, waste collection and sanitation, depend on aging assets that are frequently under-resourced or even undocumented. These deficiencies not only elevate long-term costs but also undermine public trust and operational resilience. Recognizing this, **the Recovery Focused National Development Plan (RF-NDP) 2023-2027 emphasizes IAM as essential to sustainable economic growth and climate resilience (Republic of The Gambia, 2023)**. However, implementation lags without coherent systems, actionable guidance and capacity at the local level.

This report aims to assess **the current state of IAM practices in The The Gambia by examining how national infrastructure planning frameworks align with local asset management strategies to prioritize actions and reflect ground realities.** Through a comparative analysis of field-based insights and two internationally recognized frameworks, The Gambia Infrastructure Asset Management Enabling Environment (EE) Roadmap developed by UNOPS (UNOPS, 2024) and the Asset Management Action Planning (AMAP) framework applied by local governments including the Banjul City Council (BCC, 2023), he study explores how IAM systems can be strengthened to better serve local needs.

The analysis is guided by **three core questions**:

1. How effectively do The Gambia's national infrastructure asset management frameworks translate into local implementation practices?
2. What institutional, financial, and technical factors create alignment gaps between policy intentions and operational realities?
3. How do these alignment gaps affect The Gambia's progress toward achieving infrastructure-related Sustainable Development Goals?

This report examines the challenges associated with infrastructure asset management (IAM) in selected local government areas in The Gambia, with a particular focus on urban infrastructure and the delivery of essential municipal services. The geographic scope covers fieldwork in Greater Banjul and key regional councils such as Masakonko, where local authorities oversee the operation and maintenance of public assets. The analysis centers on two critical asset categories: 1) waste and water management infrastructure (e.g., boreholes, waste collection trucks) and 2) urban transport related assets (e.g., feeder roads and car parks). These sectors were chosen based on their relevance to service delivery, visibility in local governance, and vulnerability to deterioration in the absence of structured asset management.

This report was developed for the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) as part of its ongoing support for IAM in The Gambia, **under the broader Sustainable Infrastructure Initiative for West Africa.** The

fieldwork was conducted in March 2025, with facilitation and logistical support from the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), in collaboration with national and local stakeholders. While UNDESA provides strategic guidance, capacity development, and policy support for embedding IAM within national planning frameworks, UNOPS plays a complementary role by offering on-the-ground implementation support. Together, these agencies contribute to strengthening national and local capacities for sustainable and inclusive infrastructure management.

The report is structured as follows:
Section 2 presents the methodology, including the frameworks used and the approach to fieldwork and stakeholder interviews. Section 3 offers a contextual analysis, outlining the national development context, the state of infrastructure systems, the role of development partners, and key institutional constraints. Section 4 discusses the main findings from the research, highlighting the disconnects between strategic frameworks and local operational realities. Section 5 sets out practical recommendations to bridge these gaps and strengthen infrastructure asset management systems. Finally, Section 6 provides concluding remarks on the implications for sustainable infrastructure governance and long-term development outcomes in The Gambia.

Methodology

2.1. Research Design

This study examines the implementation gap between policy frameworks and operational realities in infrastructure asset management (IAM) in The Gambia.This study employs a qualitative case study approach focused on the governance of infrastructure asset management (IAM) by combining field-based stakeholder interviews with a targeted review of literature and policy documents. This approach intends to uncover institutional dynamics, implementation challenges and alignment gaps that are not easily captured through quantitative data alone. Rather than focusing on outputs or coverage, it examines how asset management frameworks are interpreted and implemented across governance levels.

This analysis integrates two levels of analysis: national frameworks (IAM EE Roadmap) and local implementation (AMAPs), and examines the alignment across vertical (national-local), horizontal (institutional coordination), and resource dimensions This multidimensional framework helps assess how strategic priorities translate into operational outcomes.These cases were selected for their institutional relevance, their recent publication, and practical role in translating national policy into impactful local IAM.

By comparing field-based stakeholder interviews with a targeted literature and policy analysis, this research explores how infrastructure strategies evolve through administrative processes, coordination mechanisms, and resource allocation. The qualitative design supports the identification of both structural and adaptive challenges within The Gambia's infrastructure governance system.

This study addresses **three core research questions:**

1. How effectively do The Gambia's national infrastructure asset management frameworks translate into local implementation practices?
2. What institutional, financial, and technical factors create alignment gaps between policy intentions and operational realities?
3. How do these alignment gaps affect The Gambia's progress toward achieving infrastructure-related Sustainable Development Goals?

2.2. Data Sources and Collection Methods

This research relies on two primary data sources: literature and policy analysis and semi-structured stakeholder interviews. These sources were selected to triangulate between the formal policy intent and the ground-level implementation experiences, offering both strategic and operational perspectives on infrastructure asset management in the country.

2.2.1. Literature and Policy Review

A targeted review of academic literature, government policy frameworks, and sectoral reports was conducted to frame the research questions, contextualize findings, and triangulate interview insights to situate The Gambia's IAM efforts within broader governance and development debates.

These **two documents were selected for analysis because they represent the most current and comprehensive policy frameworks for IAM in The Gambia**. The IAM EE Roadmap provides the national strategic vision, while the AMAP demonstrates local-level interpretation and implementation. While other sectoral policies exist, these documents explicitly focus on infrastructure asset management across the entire lifecycle and have direct relevance to municipal service delivery. Additionally, as newly developed frameworks (both within the past 18 months), they reflect current institutional priorities and governance approaches.

Primary documents analysed were:

- **The The Gambia's Infrastructure Asset Management Enabling Environment (IAM EE) Roadmap (2024)**

This national framework document was created through collaboration between various UN entities, including UNOPS, UN DESA, and UNCDF, and the MoTWI. Our analysis mapped eight enabling environment indicators to assess policy-level coherence with The Gambia's Recovery-Focused National Development Plan (RF-NDP). These indicators include: (1) Policies, Laws, and Regulations; (2) Institutional Arrangements; (3) Processes; (4) Funding and Financial Management; (5) Knowledge, Technical Capacities, and Resources; (6) Data Management; (7) Stakeholder Engagement; and (8) Monitoring and Reporting.

The IAM EE Roadmap presents a vision for integrated, resilient, and sustainable infrastructure management at the highest policy level. It includes recommendations for immediate actions (1-3 years), medium-term reforms (3-5 years), and long-term transformations (5-10 years).

- **Banjul City Council Asset Management Action Plan (BCC AMAP) (2023)**

This municipal-level implementation document addresses the management of waste collection trucks and equipment, providing a targeted response to immediate service delivery challenges. Developed by eight Area Councils with technical support from UN DESA, these localized planning instruments translate national policy priorities into actions at the municipal level. **The AMAP follows a standardized structure covering:**

  - Determining priority assets
  - Identifying key stakeholders
  - Conducting performance assessments
  - Establishing methods and action plans
  - Evaluating resource requirements
  - Addressing capacity gaps and financial needs

These complementary documents allow us to examine the translation of policy into practice and identify implementation barriers across governance levels.

The documents were chosen for their representativeness of institutions, their relevance within a 12-month timeframe, and their thematic alignment with infrastructure asset management. We focused on waste management assets due to their critical significance for public health (related to Sustainable Development Goal 3), urban governance (Sustainable Development Goal 11), and environmental protection (Sustainable Development Goals 12 and 13).

Additional sources included academic literature on infrastructure governance and policy implementation, and relevant reports from development partners working in The Gambia.

2.2.2. Stakeholder Mapping and Interviews

Through consultations with representatives from UNOPS and UN DESA, we developed a strategic stakeholder map that identifies key institutions based on their impact and interest in infrastructure asset management. **This process involved mapping stakeholders along two dimensions: their influence over IAM processes and their level of interest/involvement in asset management reforms.** We prioritized high-influence/high-interest institutions while ensuring representation across governance levels and sectors**.** Through this approach, **we identified 17 key institutional representatives,** including:

- 9 national ministry representatives[1]
- 4 local government officials (from Banjul City Council and other Area Councils)[2]
- 4 technical service providers (utility companies)[3]

This targeted sampling strategy ensured representation across:

- Governance levels: National ministries, regional authorities, and municipal councils
- Sectoral focus: Transport, water, energy, telecommunications, and waste management
- Functional roles: Policy development, regulation, implementation, and technical support

Interviews were recorded and transcribed with the consent of the interviewees but anonymized. In all cases, detailed field notes were maintained. This qualitative data was used to complement document analysis, giving insight into how policy objectives are understood, contested, or reinterpreted in practice.

Interview data was analyzed using a thematic content analysis approach. Audio recordings and transcripts were reviewed multiple times to identify recurring themes, challenges, and perspectives. We employed an iterative coding process, first developing preliminary codes based on our analytical framework, then refining these codes as patterns emerged from the data. Key quotes and insights were categorized according to our three alignment dimensions (vertical, horizontal, resource) and cross-referenced with document analysis findings. Contradictions between interviewee perspectives were treated as data points revealing institutional tensions rather than inconsistencies to be resolved. While we did not use specialized software for

[1] Ministry of Public Service; Ministry of Communications and Digital Economy; Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs; Ministry of Transport, Works, and Infrastructure; Ministry of Agriculture; National Disaster Management Agency; Ministry of Lands, Regional Governments and Religious Affairs; Ministry of Environment, Climate Change & Natural Resources; The Gambia Standards Bureau.
[2] Mansakonko Area Council; Rural Development Institute; The Gambia Association of Local Government; University of The Gambia.
[3] National Road Authority; The Gambia Chamber of Commerce and Industry; The Gambia Agency for Management of Public Works; The Gambia Transport Service Company.

coding, we maintained a systematic database of quotes and observations organized by theme, institution type, and governance level to facilitate comparative analysis.

2.2.3 Field Research and Primary Data Collection

The fieldwork phase aligned with a critical milestone in The Gambia's IAM reform process: the official launch of the Infrastructure Asset Management Enabling Environment (IAM EE) Roadmap on March 17, 2025. Hosted by UNOPS in partnership with the Ministry of Transport, Works and Infrastructure (MoTWI), the event provided a valuable opportunity to observe stakeholder engagement in real time and to gather early impressions on the framework's perceived feasibility, institutional fit, and implementation demands.

The interview protocol was designed to ensure comparability and analytical consistency across responses. It consisted of 27 core questions, grouped into five thematic areas:

- Governance and institutional coordination
- Technical capacity and human resource constraints
- Financial architecture and resource flows
- Data systems and decision-making tools

Stakeholders consultations were guided by a semi-structured interview guide tailored to each participant's institutional role. Key themes included:

- Implementation challenges and local adaptation
- Coordination mechanisms across agencies and government levels
- Alignment of financial, technical, and human resources with institutional mandates
- Perceptions of policy effectiveness, clarity, and operational bottlenecks

The interview guide was refined through internal review sessions to minimize interviewer bias and to ensure alignment with the research's broader analytical dimensions. Interviews were conducted in person or online, lasted 30 to 60 minutes, and were recorded and transcribed with participant consent. In cases where responses raised ambiguities or data gaps, we conducted targeted follow-up inquiries to faithfully reflect interviewees' perspectives and ensure the integrity of the qualitative analysis.

2.3 Methodological & Analytical Process

The analytical process began with a structured desk review of the two core documents: the **IAM Enabling Environment (IAM EE) Roadmap** and selected **Asset Management Action Plans (AMAPs)**. These documents were analyzed for their theoretical foundations, strategic goals, and implementation mechanisms, forming the basis of the research.

The three core alignment lenses are:

1. **Vertical alignmen**t: Assesses consistency between national policy objectives and local government implementation, considering both formal and informal practices.
2. **Horizontal alignment**: Evaluates coordination across ministries and agencies regarding the distribution and communication of planning, budgeting, and implementation responsibilities.
3. **Resource alignment**: Examines the relationship between institutional mandates and the actual technical, financial and human capacities available to meet those mandates, highlighting tensions between policy goals and operational capacity.

The vertical, horizontal, and resource alignment dimensions build upon established governance frameworks. Vertical alignment draws from Pressman and Wildavsky's[4] implementation theory, which emphasizes how policy intentions transform as they move through administrative layers. Horizontal alignment builds on Fritz Scharpf's[5] work on interorganizational coordination. Resource alignment connects to Stone's[6] theory of policy capacity, highlighting the gap between mandates and capabilities.

These three alignment dimensions structured our entire analytical process. In **Phase 1** (Dimensional Analysis), we examined how each dimension manifested across the five functional areas. **Phase 2** (Comparative Assessment) then evaluated the degree of alignment/misalignment within each dimension using the convergence/divergence framework. **Phase 3** (SDG Impact Mapping) assessed how these alignment patterns affect sustainable development outcomes, while **Phase 4** (Synthesis) integrated all dimensions to identify systemic patterns and interdependencies.

Phase 1: Dimensional Analysis

Each document was examined across five functional dimensions:

- Articulation of objectives and strategic definitions
- Institutional roles and coordination responsibilities
- Implementation tools and operational processes
- Resource mobilization and allocation mechanisms
- Stakeholder engagement and communication strategies

This phase allowed for disaggregation of each policy instrument into operational components, facilitating comparison across governance levels.

Phase 2: Comparative Assessment

This phase applied a convergence/divergence framework to systematically assess alignment patterns. For each dimension, we evaluated evidence from documents and interviews against specific criteria:

- Full convergence: Consistent terminology, matching priorities, compatible timelines, and aligned resource allocations between national frameworks and local implementation.
- Partial convergence: Shared overall objectives but differences in implementation approaches, timing expectations, or resource commitments.
- Divergence: Fundamentally different assumptions, incompatible processes, contradictory mandates, or significant resource-responsibility mismatches.

Each assessment was based on explicit textual evidence from documents and corroborating interview data rather than subjective interpretation.

Phase 3: SDG Impact Mapping

[4] Steven J Balla, Martin Lodge, and Edward Page, The Oxford Handbook of Classics in Public Policy and Administr*ation* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2015).
[5] Kenneth Hanf and Fritz Wilhelm Scharpf, *Interorganizational Policy Making : Limits to Coordination and Central Control*, *SAGE Publications EBooks* (SAGE Publishing, 1978).
[6] Clarence N. Stone, "Urban Regimes and the Capacity to Govern: A Political Economy Approach," *Journal of Urban Affairs* 15, no. 1 (March 1993): 1–28, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9906.1993.tb00300.x.

The third phase assessed the developmental significance of observed misalignments, linking them to potential risks or delays in SDG-related outcomes. The analysis mapped institutional gaps against relevant SDGs, including:

- SDGs 9, 11, and 13 – infrastructure resilience and climate adaptation
- SDG 16 – governance performance and institutional effectiveness
- SDGs 8 and 12 – resource efficiency and fiscal sustainability
- SDGs 1, 5, and 10 – equitable service provision and social inclusion

Analytical Dimensions and Their SDG Relevance

The five analytical dimensions used in the SDG mapping, Strategic Asset Management Planning (SAMP), Asset Information Management Systems (AIMS), Infrastructure Planning Data Integration, Project Preparation, and Operations & Maintenance Planning, represent critical stages in the infrastructure lifecycle, and their inclusion was based on both their relevance to sustainable development goals and their recurrence across The Gambia's IAM Enabling Environment Roadmap and AMAPs. They provided a structured basis for linking technical capacity gaps to broader development outcomes, enabling the analysis to move from policy misalignments to SDG risk implications in a systematic way.

Analytical Dimension	Key SDG Alignment	Relevance to Sustainable Development
Strategic Asset Management Planning (SAMP)	SDG 9 (Infrastructure), SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities), SDG 16 (Institutions)	Provides the governance foundation for sustainable infrastructure development and equitable access to services
Asset Information Management Systems (AIMS)	SDG 9 (Infrastructure), SDG 16 (Institutions), SDG 17 (Partnerships)	Enables data-driven decision-making and transparency in resource allocation across social and environmental priorities
Infrastructure Planning Data Integration	SDG 9 (Infrastructure), SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities), SDG 13 (Climate Action)	Facilitates climate-adaptive planning and resilient infrastructure development in vulnerable communities
Project Preparation	SDG 9 (Infrastructure), SDG 17 (Partnerships), SDG 1 (No Poverty)	Enhances financial sustainability and investment quality for long-term development impacts
Operations & Maintenance Planning	SDG 9 (Infrastructure), SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities), SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption)	Ensures infrastructure longevity, service reliability, and resource efficiency, particularly for marginalised communities

Table 1: Analytical Dimensions and Their SDG Relevance, Columbia University, SIPA 2025

Phase 4: Synthesis and Interpretation

The final stage synthesized findings across documents and interviews, highlighting patterns of institutional misalignment, emerging governance tensions and areas of latent capacity. Rather than isolating technical deficits alone, the analysis aims to

surface underlying institutional dynamics—including power structures, capacity asymmetries, and procedural ambiguity—that influence how infrastructure asset management evolves in practice.

This multi-phase process enabled the research to move beyond compliance-based evaluation and toward a deeper understanding of the structural and behavioral factors shaping infrastructure governance in The Gambia.

2.4 Limitations

This research is subject to several limitations that shape the scope of the analysis as well as the interpretation of the findings in the following ways:

- Scope **Constraints**: The fieldwork was focused on limited institutions and documents (EE Roadmap and AMAP). While these offer insight into the national strategy and local implementation, they may not fully represent variations across the Area Councils or infrastructure sectors. Therefore, the finding should be seen as illustrative rather than exhaustive.
- **Access and Representational Bias**: While the study engaged a diverse set of stakeholders, some high-level officials were unavailable for interviews. As a result, the dataset may be weighted toward mid-level perspectives and technical actors,potentially underrepresenting strategic or political perspectives that influence infrastructure governance.The stakeholder sample was constructed in collaboration with UN DESA and UNOPS, which improved institutional relevance but may have introduced selection bias toward institutions that already engaged with the IAM initiative.
- **Analytical Subjectivity**: Even though thematic coding and comparative analysis were applied systematically, all qualitative interpretation involves some degree of researcher bias. The iterative coding process aimed to minimize the individual judgement, and findings were triangulated with policy documents and peer debriefing. However, informal practices and unwritten norms, which often play a critical role in implementation, were not captured through the methods used.
- **Temporal Limitations**: Both the IAM EE Roadmap and AMAPs are relatively recent documents and the fieldwork took place shortly after the roadmap's official launch, limiting the opportunities to observe mid and long term implementation progress and the ability to assess institutional adaptation or policy uptake.

2.5 Ethical Considerations

The analysis centers on public documents and institutional processes, not individual actions and the research is limited to information pertaining to official roles and responsibilities.

The study was undertaken with a commitment to maintaining a neutral and balanced perspective. Rather than judging institutions by external standards, the analysis recognizes that many of the IAM challenges stem from resource constraints and the inherent complexity of the operating environment. The objective is to provide a clear understanding of how infrastructure policies are implemented, with the aim of informing future improvements rather than offering criticism.

Contextual Analysis

3.1. National Development Context

The Gambia, often referred to as the 'Smiling Coast of Africa', is the smallest country on the African mainland, stretching 11,300 km² along the Gambia River. With a population of 2.5 million, the country plays a key role in the West African sub-region, leveraging its cultural cohesion, and strategic coastal position.

The Gambia's economy is diverse but heavily reliant on a few key sectors: agriculture contributes around 20% of GDP, tourism accounts for 15%, and the services sector is steadily growing. The government is actively advancing a democratic transition and pursuing reforms in governance, decentralization and human capital development.

Following the end of 22 years of authoritarian rule in 2016, The Gambia has embarked on a path of democratic reform and institutional renewal. However, the country continues to grapple with deep-rooted structural challenges that undermine its development ambitions. While decentralization efforts and policy reforms are underway, infrastructure systems remain fragile, constrained with limited fiscal space, weak institutional capacity and increasing climate vulnerability. These tensions underscore a persistent misalignment between national strategies and local implementation capabilities, setting the stage for the systemic analysis that follows.

Nonetheless, like many low-income countries, The Gambia faces considerable infrastructure challenges due to fiscal constraints, climate risks and institutional capacity gaps. Climate-related pressures such as coastal erosion, flooding, and rising temperatures disproportionately affect core infrastructure like roads, sanitation systems and boreholes. This creates an urgent need for long-term, resilient and inclusive infrastructure planning.

3.2. State of Infrastructure and Local Implementation

Infrastructure in The Gambia reflects both encouraging progress and persistent systemic challenges. Local councils, ranging from urban centers like Banjul to rural areas such as Basse, Janjanbureh, and Kuntaur, are actively working to improve asset management through the development of AMAPs. These AMAPs serve as a diagnostic tool to assess existing practices and identify areas in need of improvement. This is a promising step forward, as each council faces unique infrastructure challenges. For instance, AMAPs developed by BCC, Basse, Kerewan and Mansakonko highlighted the urgent need to procure waste management trucks as a top infrastructure priority, while Janjanbureh and Kuntaur emphasized the importance of rehabilitating boreholes.

These variations reflect the diversity of infrastructure conditions, mandates and operational capacities across councils. Urban municipalities face mounting pressure from population growth, densification and rising service demands, while rural councils contend with sparse networks, logistical challenges and limited human resources. Despite decentralization reforms, many councils remain under-equipped to deliver core services consistently, constrained by unclear mandates, staffing shortages, and outdated or incomplete asset records. This uneven institutional terrain makes it difficult to implement uniform standards or centralized IAM systems without adequate adaptation to local context.

Furthermore, a reactive maintenance culture continues to dominate across the regional councils, shaped by decades of underinvestment in infrastructure lifecycle planning. Public assets-such as waste collection vehicles, boreholes, and feeder roads-are generally maintained using a reactive approach, with repairs undertaken primarily after asset malfunction. Preventive maintenance and structured service schedules are limited, resulting in deferred maintenance and increased lifecycle costs. These operational practices are not merely technical shortcomings; they are symptoms of deeper, systematic constraints, including fragmented financing, weak coordination mechanisms, and limited access to technical expertise. Embedding a proactive, lifecycle-based approach to infrastructure will require both institutional reform and sustained capacity-building efforts tailored to local realities.

3.3. Role of Development and Investment Partners

Development partners have played a critical role in supporting The Gambia's infrastructure and service delivery, both through financing and technical assistance. Key partners include the African Development Bank (AfDB), which has been active in The Gambia since 1974 and has committed over UA 322 million (approximately $456 million) to public sector projects spanning agriculture, energy, water and sanitation, transport, and social infrastructure, including education and health.[7] The World Bank has similarly supported a broad spectrum of sectors, with current portfolios focused on energy and water access, health system strengthening, agriculture, digital transformation and tourism.[8] Its upcoming 2025 program will emphasize livelihood support and climate resilience, particularly through grant-based interventions.

While many donor-funded programs target social sectors, several high-impact infrastructure initiatives have emerged. One notable example is the Senegambia Bridge, a 1.9 km trans-Gambia corridor crossing that has significantly improved regional trade and mobility. The bridge project, now under the operational management of Africa50, was launched as part of a $100 million Asset Recycling partnership with The Gambian government.[9] Its success was in part due to its strategic cross-border relevance, linking northern and southern Senegal, which garnered strong bilateral and regional support under the ECOWAS integration agenda. However, such flagship projects remain the exception rather than the norm.

Despite the positive impact of the development assistance provided, most investments remain project-based and fragmented, often driven by donor priorities rather than long-term IAM strategies. Coordination between development partners, national agencies, and local councils is frequently limited, leading to challenges in ownership, sustainability, and data integration. As IAM reform advances, leveraging development partner support will require a shift from isolated project implementation toward systematic investments in local capacity, maintenance funding, and data systems that provide accurate, actionable information aligned with national and local priorities.

3.4. Institutional Roles and Governance Structure

In principle, IAM in The Gambia should be guided by the national development vision articulated in the **RF-NDP 2023–2027**, led by the **Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs (MoFEA)**. As the central coordinating body for national planning and budgeting, MoFEA is expected to provide overarching policy direction, fiscal alignment and monitoring mechanisms. However, in practice, the institutional architecture remains **fragmented and marked by unclear role distribution** across levels of government. Many national agencies operate in silos, with **limited coordination** or structured engagement with local authorities on infrastructure-related mandates.

At the local level, **GALGA** (The Gambia Association of Local Government Authorities) plays an important representative and advocacy role, while the **Rural Development Institute (RDI)** is primarily responsible for delivering capacity-building training to local officials. However, both institutions are **limited in mandate and resources**, and their roles remain focused on implementation support rather than strategic planning or intergovernmental coordination. Local governments are responsible for a growing share of infrastructure maintenance operations, particularly in waste management and water access. The decentralization policy has expanded their mandates, though many councils still operate with limited administrative and financial autonomy.

This institutional misalignment results in ambiguities in governance, with unclear boundaries regarding the responsibilities of national ministries and local councils for the long-term planning, funding, and maintenance of infrastructure. Without a

[7] African Development Bank, "Gambia," African Development Bank - Building today, a better Africa tomorrow, March 27, 2019, https://www.afdb.org/en/countries/west-africa/gambia.
[8] World Bank, "Gambia Overview," World Bank, n.d., https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/gambia/overview#3.
[9] Africa50, "Africa50 Completes Historic $100 Million Asset Recycling Programme with the Gambia," Africa50.com, October 15, 2024, https://www.africa50.com/news-insights/news/article/africa50-completes-historic-100-million-asset-recycling-programme-with-the-gambia/.

clear framework that delineates **who is responsible for what**, IAM efforts risk remaining ad hoc and reactive. Strengthening the governance structure may require clarifying land rights, formalizing institutional roles and mandates, and improving coordination between different levels of government. It is also important to ensure that both national and local actors have the necessary resources and are held accountable for managing the infrastructure systems under their responsibility.

Figure 1 below presents a simplified stakeholder map of The Gambia's IAM ecosystem, highlighting national-level ministries, local councils, utilities, and development partners, and the relationships that structure coordination and control

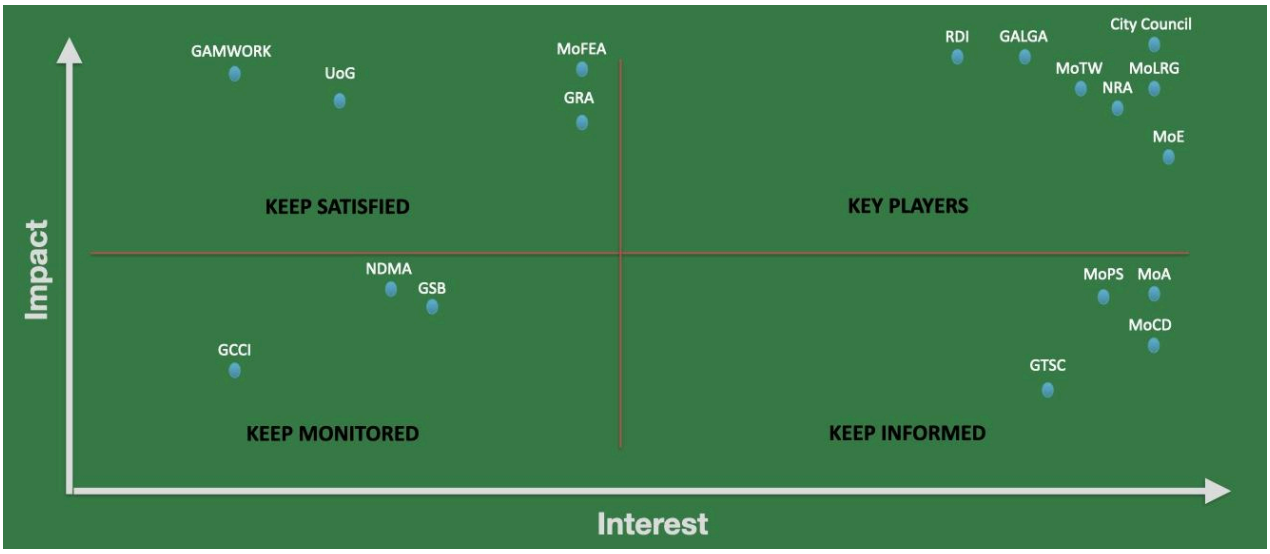

Figure 1: Stakeholder Map of The Gambia's IAM Ecosystem, Columbia University, SIPA 2025[10]

To assess the institutional landscape of IAM in The Gambia, a structured stakeholder mapping exercise was undertaken, informed by qualitative analysis of interviews conducted during fieldwork in March 2025. Interviews with more than 17 stakeholders, including representatives from national ministries, local government councils, public agencies, and development partners were conducted using a semi-structured format. The discussions examined formal mandates, operational responsibilities, inter-agency coordination mechanisms, and stakeholder perceptions of existing challenges within the IAM framework.

Each stakeholder was assessed using a two-axis matrix: **interest**, representing the degree of active involvement or commitment to IAM, and **impact**, indicating their ability to influence outcomes through authority, resources, or technical expertise. Based on this, stakeholders were categorized into four groups: Key Players, Keep Satisfied, Keep Informed, and Keep Monitored.

The stakeholder mapping exercise revealed the complex web of institutional involvement in IAM, in The Gambia. Key players, those with both high interest and high influence, include local councils and select national agencies, such as the Ministry of Lands, Regional Government and Religious Affairs (MoLRG), and the National Roads Authority (NRA), which are directly engaged in implementation and oversight. These actors should be prioritized for close coordination and targeted capacity-building efforts. Institutions such as the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs (MoFEA), The Gambia

[10] Ministry of Lands, Regional Governments and Religious Affairs (MoLRG); National Road Authority (NRA); Ministry of Transport, Works and Infrastructure (MoTWI); Gambia Association of Local Government (GALGA); Ministry of Environment, Climate Change & Natural Ressources (MoE); Rural Development Institute (RDI); Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs (MoFEA); The Gambia Revenue Authority (GRA); University of The Gambia (UoG); The Gambia Agency for Management of Public Works (GAMWORKS); Ministry of Agriculture (MoA); Ministry of Public Service (MoPS); Ministry of Communications and Digital Economy (MoCDE); The Gambia Transport Service Company (GTSC); National Disaster Management Agency (NDMA); The Gambia Standards Bureau (GSB); The Gambia Chamber of Commerce and Industry (GCCI).

Revenue Authority (GRA), and development partners, though less operationally involved, wield significant systemic influence and thus fall into the "Keep Satisfied" category, requiring periodic strategic engagement.

Other actors, such as sectoral ministries and service providers like the Ministry of Agriculture or The Gambia Transport Service Company (GTSC), demonstrate high interest but limited influence. These are best "Kept Informed" to maintain alignment and support. Finally, entities with relatively low current engagement or influence, such as The Gambia Standards Bureau (GSB) or the National Disaster Management Agency (NDMA), are categorized as "Keep Monitored" for future relevance as the IAM landscape evolves.

This mapping process highlights the need for **tailored engagement strategies** that reflect institutional mandates, incentives, and capacities. It provides a foundational tool for identifying who needs to be at the table, at what frequency, and with what form of coordination to move from fragmented management to a more integrated, sustainable IAM system in The Gambia.

3.5. Systemic Constraints in Implementation

As local governments continue their efforts to strengthen infrastructure governance through Asset Management Action Plans (AMAPs), institutional task forces and digitization initiatives, it is important to situate these actions within a broader operational environment acknowledging the systemic constraints shaping the day-to-day realities of asset management and service delivery in The Gambia.

These constraints do not indicate a lack of commitment; rather, they reflect the structural conditions within which efforts to make progress are taking place.

3.5.1. Financial Planning and Predictability

Local councils operate within constrained fiscal environments. Delays in national subvention transfers, limited generation of local revenue, and reliance on manual revenue collection methods create budgeting challenges that affect both the timing and scale of infrastructure investments. Budget approvals are sometimes finalized late in the year, which can delay the start of planned maintenance, procurement, and capital projects.

3.5.2. Human Resource and Technical Capacity

Many councils are in the early stages of building internal capacity to manage assets systematically.While focal persons and task forces have been established in several jurisdictions, there are still gaps in staffing qualified with the technical skills required for routine maintenance and experience with digital asset management systems. Existing personnel are often tasked with multiple portfolios, limiting the time and resources available for specialized asset-related maintenance.

3.5.3. Asset Data Quality and Systems Integration

Asset registers have improved in recent years, but many councils continue to face difficulties in capturing comprehensive data, especially for older infrastructure. Key details, such as maintenance histories, condition assessments, and asset valuations, are not consistently recorded. While efforts to digitize records are ongoing, most councils operate parallel paper and digital systems, and comprehensive asset information platforms are still under development.

3.5.4. Environmental Vulnerability

Across both urban and rural areas, infrastructure systems are exposed to seasonal and climate-related stressors. Flooding, erosion, and poor drainage contribute to road degradation, service interruptions and higher maintenance needs. Despite this exposure, many AMAPs are yet to fully integrate climate resilience measures or adaptation planning into asset life-cycle strategies.

3.5.5. Intergovernmental and Cross-Sector Coordination

Councils report that coordination between national and local levels, while improving, remains a work in progress. Overlapping responsibilities, limited vertical communication, and unpredictable access to technical support can delay implementation and create uncertainty. At the same time, opportunities for horizontal coordination between councils currently remain underutilized, with limited peer learning platforms or inter-council exchange mechanisms.

These structural realities provide context for understanding the implementation limits explored in the following section. Addressing these constraints through sustained partnerships, strengthened institutional frameworks, normative practices and dedicated support mechanisms will be essential to building an enabling environment for long-term, resilient infrastructure management.

Institutional Analysis: Bridging National Vision and Local Implementation

IAM in The Gambia is shaped by a tension between strong national-level ambition and fragmented local implementation. Strategic frameworks such as the RF-NDP 2023-2027, The Gambia's IAM EE Roadmap, and AMAP framework outline a forward-looking vision for sustainable infrastructure governance. However, translating this vision into practice remains a challenge for local governments, who often lack the clarity, resources and capacity to operationalize these plans. Based on field observations and stakeholder input, the following analysis explores six core dimensions of this implementation gap: the disconnect between strategic vision and operational reality; policy and mandate gaps; financial misalignment and resource constraints; capacity and technical limitations; systemic interdependencies; and implications for reform. Taken together, these themes illustrate the institutional friction that must be addressed to build a more resilient and effective IAM system in The Gambia.

4.1. Strategic Vision vs. Operational Reality

Fault Line	**What It Blocks**	**Example Consequence**
Strategic Vision vs. Tactical Survival	Long-term planning, lifecycle costing	Preventive maintenance deferred in favor of urgent truck repairs
Data Systems vs. Human Chain	Real-time monitoring, cross-department coordination	Issues reported verbally by mechanics, not logged in AIMS
Evidence-Based Decision-Making vs. Political Interference	Professionalized decision-making	Maintenance requires mayoral sign-off
Proactive Asset Planning vs. Emergency Response	Sequenced infrastructure investment	Waste asset upgrades triggered by complaint
Sustainable Budgeting vs. Funding Volatility	Fiscal discipline, Medium Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) integration	No ring-fenced O&M budgets; repairs depend on ad hoc grants

Figure 2: Strategic Vision vs. Operational Reality, Columbia University, SIPA 2025

The RF-NDP 2023-2027 of The Gambia represents the government's renewed commitment to building a resilient, inclusive and sustainable future in the aftermath of overlapping crises. This plan places notable emphasis on the importance of IAM as a foundational element for sustainable service delivery, particularly at the local level. Across Pillar I and Chapters 4, 6, 8, and 10, the plan highlights the need to improve the sustainability of public assets and services through enhanced planning, coordination, and resource allocation. This includes commitments to strengthen institutional capacity for maintaining

infrastructure, establish robust asset registers, and embed maintenance planning into broader development strategies. By integrating asset management into its development agenda, the RF-NDP underscores that ensuring the longevity and functionality of infrastructure such as roads, waste trucks, and water systems, is essential for achieving resilience and inclusive growth, especially in underserved and rural communities.

Meanwhile, The Gambia's IAM EE Roadmap envisions a comprehensive, data-driven approach to managing the infrastructure lifecycle. However, local governments operate within a fundamentally different reality characterized by resource constraints and immediate service delivery pressures. While national frameworks emphasize long-term planning aligned with SDGs and climate resilience objectives, local councils focus on maintaining basic service continuity, often through informal, relationship-based approaches.

Although The Gambia's IAM EE Roadmap outlines **comprehensive digital asset tracking** as one of its key strategic goals for infrastructure governance, fieldwork findings reveal a significant gap in prioritization and implementation at the operational level. Among all interviews conducted, **only one ministry respondent** explicitly identified digital asset tracking as a critical issue. This highlights a limited cross-institutional awareness of the importance of digitalization as a foundational element for integrated and sustainable infrastructure management. Without consistent institutional buy-in, such strategic initiatives risk remaining aspirational rather than actionable.

Another example of the disconnect between strategic vision and operational reality is evident in the waste collection challenges faced by the **Mansakonko** area council, as highlighted in its **AMAP**. Despite growing demand due to rapid urbanization, Mansakonko has too few functioning waste collection trucks to serve the city effectively. The immediate stakeholders affected are local residents, who face deteriorating sanitation conditions as a result. While the council recognizes the need to repair or procure additional trucks, its ability to do so is constrained by **limited access to funding**. During field interviews, officials noted that while Mansakonko collects taxes, **a significant portion is absorbed by the national government**, leaving local councils with insufficient resources to maintain or upgrade critical infrastructure. This dynamic exemplifies the disconnect between national-level aspirations and the local fiscal realities that shape everyday service delivery.

Three paradigmatic divides illustrate this disconnect:

1. **Strategic Vision vs. Tactical Survival**: National frameworks emphasize long-term planning horizons and strategic alignment with development goals, while local governments operate in a perpetual state of crisis management focused on immediate service delivery needs.
2. **Data Systems vs. Human Chains**: The roadmap envisions standardized data systems with digital flows and audit trails, while local implementation relies heavily on verbal reporting through supervisory relationships. For instance, mechanics verbally report issues up the chain of command rather than entering data into management systems.
3. **Evidence-Based Decision-Making vs. Political Interference**: National systems aim to empower technical experts with decision-making authority, while local systems often require mayoral or executive approval even for basic maintenance activities, reflecting a more personalized governance approach.

These divides manifest across four key domains of infrastructure management:

- Asset Planning: National frameworks call for structured risk assessments and climate vulnerability analyses, while local priorities are primarily driven by community complaints and visible service failures.
- Information Management: The roadmap envisions Geographic Information System (GIS) dashboards and integrated data systems, but local practice relies on logbooks, phone calls, and interpersonal communications.

- Project Preparation: While national guidance emphasizes feasibility studies and structured planning, local implementation must navigate bottlenecked approval chains and political considerations.
- Maintenance: The ideal of scheduled preventive care stands in stark contrast to the reality of post-failure repairs that characterize most local maintenance activities.

The Gambia Transport Service Company (GTSC) exemplifies these divisions in practice. While national frameworks envision dedicated bus lanes and integrated transit planning, GTSC faces a daily reality of managing routes through congested roadways without transit-specific infrastructure. The company has developed its own internal asset tracking systems using Tamu cards and digital route monitoring as a practical workaround to the absence of national-level transit infrastructure planning. This showcases how operational entities must often create parallel systems to deliver services within infrastructure gaps.

This gap between strategic aspirations and operational realities highlights the importance of aligning high-level policy frameworks with the on-the-ground capacities and constraints of local governments. While the RF-NDP 2023-2027, The Gambia's IAM EE Roadmap, and AMAPs provide essential direction and long-term vision, their successful implementation hinges on mechanisms that bridge these paradigmatic divides through targeted capacity building, resource devolution, simplified planning tools, and adaptive governance structures that reflect local contexts. Without such adjustments, the risk remains that national strategies will continue to operate in isolation from the service delivery systems they are intended to strengthen. Recognizing and addressing this disconnect is not only critical for the sustainability of infrastructure investments but also for ensuring that development outcomes reach the communities most in need.

4.2. Policy and Mandate Gaps

A central issue identified across stakeholder interviews and field observations is the absence of a comprehensive national policy framework for infrastructure asset management. Without clear policy directives, local governments lack both the mandate and operational guidance to implement structured IAM practices. This policy vacuum creates uncertainty over roles and responsibilities, leading to fragmented approaches and inconsistent service delivery outcomes.

Despite decentralization being a formal goal in national strategies, field interviews suggest that the **national government often constrains local government autonomy**, particularly in asset management. Several councils reported that their efforts to manage or generate revenue from infrastructure assets-such as collecting local taxes or securing maintenance funding-were often blocked or tightly regulated by central authorities.This creates a mandate-authority mismatch policy contradiction: while local governments are held responsible for service delivery and asset upkeep, **they lack the legal and financial authority to do so effectively**. Such constraints not only hinder operational efficiency but also discourage local initiative and accountability, reinforcing dependence on a central system that struggles to meet diverse local needs.

The Gambia Standards Bureau (GSB) reports significant challenges related to inadequate testing and conformity infrastructure, resulting in delays and weakened enforcement of quality standards. Meanwhile, the National Disaster Management Agency (NDMA) highlights not just the absence of data but a fundamental lack of trust in third-party assessments due to the **absence of standardized verification mechanisms.** Without clear authority to verify compliance or standards, these agencies face severely limited ability to enforce existing regulations.

Compounding this challenge is the **lack of clearly defined scope of responsibilities between national and local governments.** While local authorities are the primary operators of infrastructure, ranging from roads and boreholes to waste collection vehicles, responsibility for investment, planning, and technical support often falls within the purview of national ministries. However, in practice, this division of responsibilities remains ambiguous. This ambiguity leads to duplicated efforts, gaps in service delivery, and a general reluctance to take ownership of asset failures.

For example, a borehole in a rural community might fall into disrepair because local officials assume the national government will intervene, while national officials expect the local council to manage the issue. This "responsibility gap" results in delayed maintenance and accelerated asset deterioration, ultimately compromising service delivery to communities.

The absence of role clarity also undermines long-term planning and accountability. Staff at both levels of government express uncertainty about their mandates and decision-making authority. As a result, infrastructure management tends to be reactive, centered on emergency repairs rather than preventive maintenance or long-term asset renewal.

4.3. Financial Misalignment and Resource Constraints

The current financial architecture supporting infrastructure asset management in The Gambia is not fully aligned with the country's long-term development goals. While local governments are responsible for the day-to-day operation and maintenance of most public assets, they do not have access to the financial resources to meet these responsibilities. At the heart of this issue is a disconnect between fiscal policy commitments and actual disbursement practices.

According to national policy, 25% of the national development budget should be allocated to local governments in the form of subventions. However, stakeholder interviews indicated that this funding rarely materializes. The discrepancy between funds theoretically available and those disbursed creates persistent confusion and frustration at the local level. Despite clear budgeting expectations, local governments are often left to operate with inadequate financial support from the central government.

This funding gap is exacerbated by a fragmented financial governance structure. While the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs (MoFEA) ultimately controls budget allocation and release, local councils must also coordinate with the Ministry of Lands, Regional Government and Religious Affairs (MoLRG) for administrative approvals, and with The Gambia Revenue Authority (GRA) for revenue collection. This multi-agency arrangement dilutes accountability, slows disbursement processes, and makes it difficult for councils to fulfill their mandate, managing regional assets.

Field interviews with local councils revealed the practical consequences of this arrangement. While councils are mandated to collect local revenue from sources such as car parks, markets, and business licenses, the central government, primarily through national revenue authorities, retains control over many of these streams. Several respondents noted that this creates a perverse incentive: councils have little motivation to improve revenue collection when they cannot retain and reinvest those funds in local infrastructure priorities.

To navigate these constraints, many councils attempt to generate alternative income through market fees, small licenses, and local taxation. Yet even in these instances, significant portions of the revenue must be funneled through national systems or shared with the central government. This not only demoralizes local officials but also disincentivizes improvements in revenue administration. Without the autonomy to retain and reinvest locally generated funds, councils remain chronically underfunded.

Most critically, there are no dedicated maintenance budgets or ring-fenced funding mechanisms for infrastructure assets at either the national or local level. As a result, public infrastructure often deteriorates faster than expected, leading to service disruptions and escalating repair costs. This is particularly evident in sectors such as water and sanitation, where poorly maintained boreholes or drainage systems pose direct risks to public health.

These financial constraints create a vicious cycle: inadequate maintenance accelerates asset deterioration, which leads to higher repair or replacement costs, further straining already limited budgets. Breaking this cycle requires not just increased

funding, but a fundamental restructuring of how infrastructure resources are allocated, managed, and retained at the local level.

Some institutions have adopted innovative approaches to circumvent these challenges. For example, The Gambia Transport Service Company (GTSC) operates a self-managed sinking fund to finance bus fleet renewal on a multi-year basis, shielding operations from government funding shortfalls. Similarly, the National Roads Authority has proposed a dedicated Road Fund sourced from tolls, levies, and insurance contributions. These models demonstrate how coordinated financial planning and ring-fenced mechanisms can promote resilience. However, such cases remain the exception. In most instances, infrastructure assets are managed independently by under-resourced institutions, highlighting the urgent need for a more coherent and empowered financial framework for local infrastructure management.

4.4. Capacity and Technical Constraints

The fourth critical challenge in advancing IAM in The Gambia is the limited technical and managerial capacity within local government institutions. A robust human capital pipeline is essential to ensuring sustainable IAM practices, but current training systems remain insufficient.

Interviews with municipal staff revealed major gaps in formal training on IAM principles, including lifecycle costing, condition assessments, asset valuation, the use of digital asset management tools, and practical repair skills.

Without foundational knowledge in these areas, even the most committed local governments struggle to implement basic asset management practices effectively.

Current capacity-building efforts are primarily channeled through the RDI, the national agency tasked with supporting local government development. RDI has recently partnered with UN DESA on IAM initiatives, including a five-day intensive training held in Kanilai. Building on this, RDI is developing a formal IAM curriculum to be embedded in its standard course offerings. This is a promising step toward institutionalizing IAM knowledge and reducing dependency on short-term project-based training.

However, these challenges also present clear opportunities. While RDI's reach is currently limited by resource constraints and most existing programs remain short-term and largely theoretical, there is significant potential to expand practical, local hands-on training and to scale up successful initiatives. By leveraging partnerships, increasing investment, and focusing on applied learning, RDI can broaden its impact and help build a more skilled and resilient workforce for the future.

Local governments consistently express the need for more hands-on, practical training that addresses their real-world operational challenges. In this regard, GTSC's in-house technical training and apprenticeship model may offer a scalable example of capacity-building grounded in actual fieldwork and problem-solving.

To bridge these gaps further, local vocational schools are underutilized partners. These institutions already train students in disciplines such as construction, mechanics, IT, and surveying-skills that are directly applicable to infrastructure management. By integrating IAM fieldwork, internships, or project collaborations into vocational programs, vocational school students could support tasks such as infrastructure inventorying, maintenance logging, and digital data entry while gaining practical experience. This would provide an affordable, mutually beneficial way to strengthen IAM capacity while creating jobs..

In addition to training, the availability and use of appropriate tools-particularly digital systems-represent a significant area of opportunity. While asset data across most ministries and local councils is currently fragmented, outdated, or absent,

transitioning from manual record-keeping to integrated digital asset management systems could greatly enhance real-time analysis, strategic forecasting, and preventive maintenance planning. Both the Ministry of Finance and NDMA recognize that improving data quality and accessibility would strengthen decision-making at both the national and local levels, opening the door to more proactive and effective infrastructure management.

The Ministry of Agriculture's experience highlights a broader challenge of project dependency: when donor-funded initiatives end, the digital systems developed under those projects often collapse due to weak handover mechanisms and the absence of institutional ownership. However, this also presents a significant opportunity. By strengthening transition planning and building institutional capacity for digital system management, ministries can safeguard valuable data, preserve institutional memory, and enhance long-term efficiency. The NDMA, for example, points to the current lack of post-disaster economic impact data as a barrier to assessing infrastructure vulnerabilities and prioritizing resilience investments. Establishing robust data stewardship practices and ensuring local ownership of digital systems would enable institutions to break the cycle of data loss and reinvention, ultimately supporting more informed decision-making and resilient infrastructure planning.

Most councils still lack modern asset databases that capture essential information such as asset condition, location, and maintenance history. As highlighted in The Gambia's IAM EE Roadmap, there is growing awareness of the value of digital asset tracking, and institutions are well-positioned to make progress in this area. By investing in comprehensive digital asset management systems, councils can improve real-time monitoring, enhance preventive maintenance, and support more informed decision-making. Notably, during fieldwork, one official from the MoCDE identified digital asset tracking as a priority area for reform, signaling a readiness to champion this shift and paving the way for broader adoption across institutions.

Attracting and retaining technical talent also presents an opportunity for strengthening infrastructure asset management. While public sector salaries are often seen as less competitive-leading to the outflow of trained personnel to higher-paying private sector positions-this challenge also highlights the potential for reform. Both MoFEA and NDMA have noted the impact of this "brain drain," where local governments invest in staff training only to lose skilled employees soon after. By developing improved career pathways and more competitive remuneration structures, the public sector can not only retain talent but also ensure that investments in training translate into long-term capacity and sustainability.

Coordination across institutions could strengthen integrated infrastructure asset management. While there is a clear vertical structure linking national policy with local implementation, horizontal collaboration among key ministries-such as those responsible for finance, planning, roads, water, and public works-remains limited. By enhancing collaboration and information-sharing across these ministries, the government can improve integrated infrastructure planning and service delivery. Furthermore, although RDI plays a central role in training, aligning its efforts more closely with the broader ecosystem of ministries involved in asset management would maximize the impact of capacity-building initiatives and support more cohesive, effective management of public assets.

Ultimately, effective IAM requires not only vertical policy coherence but also horizontal coordination, a skilled and retained workforce, and access to reliable data and tools. The long-term sustainability of IAM in The Gambia depends on scaling up and institutionalizing training, bridging the digital divide, tapping into vocational talent pipelines, improving working conditions, and fostering inter-ministerial collaboration.

4.5. Systemic Interdependencies

These challenges do not exist in isolation but form a mutually reinforcing system that perpetuates fragmented, reactive approaches to infrastructure management. Policy ambiguity leads to funding uncertainties; funding constraints limit capacity development; and capacity gaps make it difficult to implement even well-defined policies or effectively utilize available resources.

The resulting institutional disconnects are not merely a matter of implementation failure but reflect rational adaptations to existing constraints. Local governments have developed informal systems and relationship-based approaches that allow them to maintain basic service delivery despite these structural challenges. While these adaptations may not align with international best practices, they represent pragmatic responses to the operational realities local officials face.

The reliance on verbal reporting and interpersonal relationships in asset management is not simply a technical deficiency but a rational adaptation to environments where formal documentation systems are either unavailable or insufficient to address urgent service delivery needs. Likewise, the concentration of decision-making authority in political leaders rather than technical professionals reflects the persistence of a system in which political considerations are prioritized, and the importance of effectively incorporating local operational perspectives into resource mobilization processes has yet to be fully recognized.

These coordination challenges manifest both vertically between national and local governments and horizontally across agencies. MoTWI highlighted uncoordinated procurement practices by other ministries that undermine standardization efforts. GALGA, representing all local councils, revealed that councils often prioritize directives from the central government over their coordinating body, limiting harmonized implementation even when local governments are willing to collaborate. The absence of enforcement mechanisms or incentives for integration further entrenches this fragmentation.

These adaptations create a parallel system of infrastructure governance that operates alongside formal structures. Recognizing and understanding these informal systems is essential for designing reforms that can effectively bridge the gap between national aspirations and local realities.

Scaling What Works: Opportunities for IAM Implementation

Addressing these challenges requires a nuanced approach that acknowledges both the aspirational vision of the national roadmap and the operational realities of local implementation. Rather than viewing local practices as deficient versions of an ideal system, effective reforms should recognize them as adaptations to existing constraints and build upon their strengths while addressing genuine capacity gaps.

This suggests the need for contextually appropriate IAM approaches that:

1. Leverage youth training schemes to build local capacity

To bridge technical skill gaps at the local level, the government should collaborate with vocational institutions such as The Gambia University thereby expanding the use of The Gambia National Youth Service Scheme. This program, which already places recent graduates in practical fieldwork roles, can be tailored to support infrastructure asset management. Deploying youth trainees to local councils to support infrastructure asset management would not only give students valuable hands-on experience directly related to their studies, but also provide essential technical support to local governments facing human resource constraints.

2. Align financial responsibilities with fiscal authority

Sustainable infrastructure maintenance depends on aligning financial resources with the responsibilities assigned to local governments. To support this, the national government can play a key role by ensuring that dedicated funding for maintenance is reliably available and by strengthening the capacity of local authorities to generate their own revenues-whether through enhanced local taxation powers or other context-appropriate revenue mechanisms. Increasing fiscal autonomy at the local level would enable councils to more effectively prioritize and address critical maintenance needs, reducing reliance on delayed or unpredictable central transfers and supporting the government's broader goals for resilient, well-managed infrastructure systems.

3. Clarify institutional roles and responsibilities across governance levels

A clearly defined allocation of responsibilities between national and local governments offers a critical opportunity to enhance infrastructure asset management. By clarifying which level of government is accountable for key IAM functions-such as asset planning, funding, maintenance, and data management-institutions can reduce duplication, improve coordination, and ensure that infrastructure is managed more efficiently and sustainably across its lifecycle.

By developing contextually appropriate approaches that acknowledge and build upon existing practices while gradually introducing more structured systems, The Gambia can create an enabling environment for infrastructure asset management that is both aspirational and operational, supporting sustainable infrastructure development that truly serves the needs of citizens at all levels.

Way Forward for Capacity Development for Strengthening Infrastructure Asset Management in The Gambia

Bridging the persistent gap between national infrastructure planning frameworks and local asset management realities in The Gambia will require a coordinated, strategic, and inclusive approach to capacity development. While national IAM strategies

such as the UNOPS Roadmap and RF-NDP lay out clear aspirations, their effectiveness hinges on local governments' ability to translate these frameworks into operational practices. Fieldwork conducted for this study reaffirms that the disconnect is not due to a lack of commitment, but rather institutional ambiguity, constrained resources, insufficient technical capacity, and fragmented data systems.

To move from vision to execution, the way forward must focus on building systems that are both contextually grounded and institutionally coherent. Below are key capacity development priorities, along with a proposed implementation approach for UN DESA and partners to consider:

UN DESA's Capacity Building Role for Consideration:

5.1 Clarifying National Policy with Institutional Alignment at the National and Local Councils Level

- Review and refine IAM policies to clearly assign planning, maintenance, and funding responsibilities across government levels.
- Facilitate national-local dialogues and stakeholder workshops to build shared understanding and mutual accountability.
- Align IAM mandates with fiscal authority to avoid overlapping functions and institutional confusion.

5.2 Mobilizing Resources for Local IAM

- Assist governments in establishing ring-fenced maintenance budgets at the local level through technical guidance and pilot initiatives.
- Provide training on revenue generation strategies, financial management aligned with the fiscal cycle for sustainable funding of IAM throughout the life cycle of assets.
- Support national-level reforms to ensure predictable and timely fiscal transfers enabling local IAM mandates.

5.3 Building Technical and Managerial Capacity through Workforce Engagement

- Develop and facilitate the deployment of micro- certification IAM training programs certified by government entities aligned with their long-term national development policy goals, in partnership with public and private vocational schools and universities developing through hands-on experiences, the maintenance skills required to maintain infrastructure assets.
- Introduce micro-certification programs in IAM, e.g.: leverage The Gambia National Youth Service Scheme to place trained youth in local councils, providing practical support in maintenance, planning, and digital mapping.
- Develop and facilitate the creation of micro-certification programs in IAM that are officially recognized by government entities and aligned with long-term national development policy goals. Partner with public and private vocational schools and universities to deliver these programs, emphasizing hands-on experiences that build the maintenance skills necessary for managing infrastructure assets. Note that the development of these micro-certification programs can leverage existing workforce development initiatives, apprenticeship and mentorship models, accelerating both impact and reducing cost.

5.4 Strengthen Digital Asset Management Systems

- Facilitate: the transition from manual record-keeping to integrated digital IAM systems through technical assistance; training and ongoing support data stewardship best practices and the provision of software/hardware resources.

5.5 Enhancing Inter-Ministerial Synergy Framework for IAM

- Establish a platform for regular dialogue and coordination between ministries responsible for finance, planning and maintenance of roads, water, and public works.
- Organize workshops and trainings to strengthen horizontal and vertical collaboration, aligning national strategies with local operational practices.

Phased Implementation Approach

Adopt a phased implementation strategy for any or all the initiatives 5.1 through 5.5, beginning with the deployment of pilot initiatives in specific regions or infrastructure asset classes, such as water, roads, and energy. Monitor, evaluate, and adapt IAM practices to ensure they are responsive to local conditions and the quality of public services delivered.

Based on this stakeholder field research, additional efforts to develop tailored capacity-building initiatives can enable sustainable and efficient infrastructure asset service delivery, reconciling both national strategies and local operational realities. International support and local engagement can achieve synergies, deploying a pragmatic and sustainable pathway forward to improve infrastructure governance and service delivery for the citizens of The Gambia.

Concluding Remarks

So, how can The Gambia national infrastructure planning frameworks align with local asset management strategies to effectively prioritize actions and ground realities?

This study sought to answer that central question by examining how national IAM frameworks are (or are not) translated into local practice, what institutional, financial, and technical barriers drive these gaps, and how such misalignments hinder progress toward infrastructure-related SDGs. The findings point to a clear conclusion: **the problem is not the absence of vision, but the lack of practical pathways to bridge national frameworks with local implementation.**

Despite ambitious policies and growing support from development partners, local governments, responsible for the daily operation and maintenance of most public assets, continue to face challenges such as unclear mandates, insufficient funding, fragmented data systems, and a highly motivated workforce requiring sustained capacity development in IAM. These constraints have contributed to an implementation gap, where strategic frameworks have yet to fully translate into effective operational outcomes.

One promising opportunity lies in **leveraging youth engagement and workforce development** to address technical and institutional capacity constraints, by serving as a bridge between high-level planning and local implementation. UNDESA can take a leading role in designing and mobilizing support for a youth IAM fellowship or training program. By embedding young professionals into local councils to support planning, digital mapping, and routine asset maintenance, this initiative

would respond directly to one of the most binding constraints identified in this study, while building a long-term pipeline of IAM talent rooted in local contexts.

This approach aligns with the ongoing Training of Trainers (ToT) programme currently being implemented in The Gambia by UNDESA in collaboration with the Rural Development Institute (RDI). Together, they are co-designing a new national curriculum on IAM. This effort has the potential to catalyze systemic change by equipping local governments with the skills and support needed to sustain infrastructure more effectively.

Ultimately, closing the gap between national frameworks and local realities is essential to realizing The Gambia's infrastructure ambitions. With targeted investments in human capital, stronger intergovernmental collaboration, and an emphasis on operationalizing policy, The Gambia can strengthen not only its physical infrastructure but also the institutional foundations that ensure its long-term resilience. UNDESA's continued leadership, especially in convening stakeholders, aligning technical support, and investing in the next generation, can help turn this potential into lasting progress.

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Appendix

The list of 17 key institutions across various sectors

1. Ministry of Public Service, Administrative Reform, Policy Coordination & Delivery
2. Ministry of Communications and Digital Economy
3. Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs
4. National Water and Electricity Company
5. Ministry of Transport, Works and Infrastructure
6. The Gambia Standards Bureau
7. Ministry of Agriculture
8. National Disaster Management Agency
9. The Gambia Transport Service Company (GTSC)
10. Ministry of Lands, Regional Governments and Religious Affairs
11. University of The Gambia
12. The Gambia Agency for Management of Public Works (GAMWORKS)
13. The Gambia Chamber of Commerce and Industry
14. Mansakonko Area Council; Rural Development Institute (RDI)
15. The Gambia Local Government Association (GALGA)
16. National Roads Authority
17. Ministry of Environment, Climate Change and Natural Resources