Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

Agrifood value chains with a potential for responsible investment in the Gambia

An analytical overview

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ACRONYMS

AfDB	African Development Bank
CBPP	contagious bovine pleuropneumonia
CCSI	Columbia Center on Sustainable Investment
CFS-RAI Principles	Principles for Responsible Investment in Agriculture and Food Systems
CGIAR	Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research
CIRAD	French Agricultural Research Centre for International Development
DLS	Department of Livestock Services (the Gambia)
DoFish	Department of Fisheries (the Gambia)
DOCs	Day-Old Chicks
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FAOSTAT	Corporate Database for Substantive Statistical Data
GBoS	Gambia Bureau of Statistics
GCAV	Gambia College of Agriculture and Vocational Training
GIEPA	Gambia Investment & Export Promotion Agency
GIRAV	Gambia Inclusive and Resilient Agricultural Value Chain Development
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (German Agency For International Cooperation)
GMD	Gambian dalasi
HACCP	hazard analysis and critical control points
ICT	information and communications technology
ICT4D	Information and Communication Technology for Development
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IITA	International Institute of Tropical Agriculture
ILO	International Labour Organization
ILRI	International Livestock Research Institute
ITC	International Trade Centre
MSMEs	micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises
NARI	National Agricultural Research Institute

NEDI	National Enterprise Development Initiative
Nema	National Agricultural Land and Water Management Development Project
NERICA	New Rice for Africa
RF-NDP	Recovery-Focused National Development Plan (2023–2027)
ROOTS	Resilience of Organizations for Transformative Smallholder Agriculture Project
RVCP	Rice Value Chain Transformation Programme
SPS	sanitary and phytosanitary measures
UN	United Nations International Trade Statistics Database
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organization
USD	United States dollar
YEP	Youth Empowerment Project

INTRODUCTION

The Agri-accelerator project in the Gambia supports agricultural investment by young people. This report examines selected sub-sectors within the agrifood system to inform enterprise development and guide strategic decision-making. It is intended for youth, business coaches, mentors, and programme teams seeking to align business planning with market conditions, resource levels, and national development goals.

The analysis is based on several inputs, including a literature review, a youth agribusiness survey conducted between December 2024 and February 2025, a strategic planning workshop held in January 2025, and follow-up consultations through focus groups, informal interviews, and field visits in April 2025. These sources provide insight into how young people engage with agriculture, the constraints they face, and the factors shaping their business choices. Although niche products such as dried mango, goat milk, or cassava flour may have potential, limited processing capacity and the prevalence of small-scale production reduce the number of young people who can engage in specialized value chains. In addition, changing market conditions, climate-related risks and fluctuating input costs require flexibility in planning. Based on these considerations, the report focuses on broad sub-sectors with high potential, namely vegetables, poultry, and fruit and tree crops. These sub-sectors align with national priorities and support a range of entry points depending on land access, available capital and technical skills. They also reflect the preferences reported by survey participants, who most frequently cited vegetables, livestock and fruit crops as their primary areas of activity.

Vegetables emerged as the most popular sub-sector among youth who participated in the survey. The vegetable sector is a practical option for young people, especially those with limited capital. They can start small, for example, with home gardens, and gradually expand to more commercial operations.

Young people can participate in different stages of vegetable value chains. Many focus on production, while others also engage in processing, marketing or input supply.

Many vegetables have short growing cycles and can be harvested and sold quickly. Vegetables are in demand in the Gambia and contribute to diverse and nutritious diets. With access to irrigation, they can be grown throughout the year, providing a steady source of income.

Producers need knowledge of good farming practices, including crop management and post-harvest handling. They also need skills in marketing and price management. Access to reliable inputs such as seeds, tools and pest control, along with functioning markets, can help ensure success.

Young people who participated in focus group discussions emphasized that planting schedules and proper seed selection can reduce losses and improve yields. Many young producers lack access to hybrid seed varieties but explained that using free or low-cost local varieties can help reduce reliance on expensive external inputs. However, they also noted that this approach is labour-intensive and requires specific knowledge to be successful.

This sub-sector is accessible to young people with different resource levels, including those with limited capital, and provides opportunities to scale up over time.

Poultry was the second most common sub-sector among survey respondents, and many workshop and focus-group participants reported practical experience with poultry production. Youth are drawn to poultry because of market opportunities driven by strong domestic demand for meat and eggs. Policies to reduce reliance on imported products were also mentioned by participants as potentially creating opportunities for youth investment. Poultry enterprises are structured around backyard flocks, semi-intensive systems or larger commercial models. With proper guidance, young farmers can adopt biosecure practices that consider animal health and welfare, including low-density housing and access to outdoor space.

Poultry farming offers relatively fast returns and supports food security and nutrition. Integration with crop production through manure use and on-site feed production can lower costs, diversify income streams and increase resilience.

Fruits and tree crops were the third most common area of interest. Crops like mango, citrus and cashews grow in many parts of the Gambia and offer long-term income potential through processing and export. While start-up costs and delayed returns can be barriers, these crops are well-suited for youth with access to land or group production schemes. External support, such as grants, technical assistance or cooperative investment, could help them to scale up gradually.

Tree crops also provide environmental benefits by improving soil structure, enhancing biodiversity and contributing to climate resilience. Intercropping with vegetables or other short-cycle crops can optimize land use and generate income from fast-growing crops while trees mature. Youth not directly involved in production can purchase raw fruit and specialize in basic processing, such as drying or juicing, using simple household equipment.

Youth with more resources can scale up further by investing in improved storage, preservation and aggregation strategies to access larger markets. However, successful engagement requires understanding post-harvest handling, quality control and market standards.

Risks include delayed cash flow, pest damage, weather shocks and oversupply in peak seasons. Targeted training, reliable infrastructure and up-to-date market information can help reduce these risks and make fruit and tree crops viable for youth enterprises.

Factors youth should consider when selecting value chains

Selecting the value chain that suits one's circumstances and interests is critical to building a sustainable business. Potential profits can't be the sole consideration when making a decision. Other factors need to be taken into account, including available resources, the length of production cycles, the entrepreneur's willingness to wait for returns and their ability to adapt to market and environmental risks. By assessing their circumstances, youth can identify opportunities that align with their goals and capabilities, whether that's starting small or aiming big. As exemplified below, youth should evaluate several factors to determine suitable value chains.

Table 1. Key factors for value chain selection

Sub-sector / Value chain	Capital need	Time to return	Market access	Key risks	Land need	Skill level
Vegetables	Low	2–4 months	High (local)	Pests, drought, market saturation	Small	Basic
Poultry (basic)	Low–moderate	6–12 months	Medium (urban/local)	Disease, feed costs	Moderate	Moderate
Aquaculture	Low (small-scale or inland) - High (larger-scale or maritime)	6–8 months	Medium (urban/export)	Water quality, input costs	Moderate	Advanced
Groundnuts	Moderate	6–8 months	High (local/export)	Aflatoxin, drought	Moderate	Moderate
Fruit and tree crops (mango, cashew)	High	3–5 years	High (urban/export)	Slow returns, spoilage	Moderate-large	Advanced
Fonio or millet	Low	3–5 months	Medium (local)	Drought, limited demand	Small	Basic
Rice	Moderate	6–8 months	High (local)	Water stress, low yield	Moderate	Moderate
Cassava	Moderate	6–12 months	Medium (local)	Spoilage, low processing	Moderate	Moderate
Goats and sheep	Moderate	12–18 months	Medium (local)	Disease, feed access	Moderate	Moderate
Cattle	High	2–3 years	Medium (local/festive)	Low productivity, high cost	Large	Advanced
Dairy	High	1–2 years, then monthly	Growing (urban)	Spoilage, feed, vet care	Moderate	Advanced

Source: See References.

Capital requirements: Value chains vary in resource needs. Vegetables and field crops like fonio and millet require lower capital for seeds and basic tools, making them accessible to youth with few savings. Scavenging poultry also demands low investment. Youth with the right skills and relatively low capital may also provide services like pest control. Value chains like sustainable, small-scale poultry, rice, cassava, groundnuts, small-scale and inland aquaculture, as well as sheep or goats, need moderate capital for inputs like feed, fertilizers, or breeding stock. Entrepreneurs may be able to access capital through cooperatives or loans. High-capital options require substantial investments, such as medium-scale free-range poultry, fruits or large-scale and maritime aquaculture production, or service provision like tractor rentals.

Time to return: Short-term ventures may appeal to youth who need quick revenue to meet immediate needs. Vegetables yield in 2–4 months, offering rapid cash flow. Rice growth cycles are around 4–6 months, and fonio and millet take 3–5 months, but they may need more land preparation than vegetables. Medium-term options, such as poultry, cassava, groundnuts, sheep or goats, and aquaculture, generate returns in 6–18 months. Long-term ventures like fruit and other tree crops can target premium markets and offer processing potential but require patience and sustained investment, suiting youth with stable resources or already established farms.

Market access: Local informal markets readily absorb vegetables, rice, eggs, groundnuts, fonio, and millet, providing reliable but low-margin sales channels. Meat from chicken, sheep and goats can also serve local demand, particularly during festive periods like Tobaski. Free-range poultry, dried fruits, groundnut oil, and aquaculture products may target niche urban or export markets, offering higher margins. However, access to high-value markets requires quality and compliance with sanitary and phytosanitary measures (SPS), which few producers in the Gambia meet. Digital platforms can enhance market reach and are an emerging option for youth in the Gambia and across Africa.

Risks: Agricultural investments are high-risk ventures. Post-harvest losses caused by climate change impacts and poor infrastructure illustrate just one type of risk. Vegetables can suffer 30–60 percent yield losses from drought, pests, or erratic rainfall, compounded by input shortages such as certified seeds. Fruits also experience high losses due to their perishable nature and limited cold storage. Rice yields can drop from drought or flooding. Cassava and groundnuts are vulnerable to pests and aflatoxin contamination. Fonio and millet face drought risks and low consumer awareness, limiting market uptake.

Poultry mortality is high, exacerbated by scarce vaccines and feed shortages. Sheep and goats risk disease, theft, and feed scarcity during dry seasons, requiring robust management. Aquaculture contends with water quality issues and high feed costs, reducing profitability. Seasonal price swings can also affect producers with limited capacity to process raw products to extend shelf life, add value and sell during the off-season. This calls for better harvesting planning, development of the processing sector and public infrastructure investment.

Many products, including rice, chicken and fish, face stiff competition from cheap imports. Although many consumers prefer locally produced products, limited purchasing power makes them difficult to access for most people. As in most of the agricultural sector, climate change, input price volatility and labour constraints during peak seasons further elevate risks, necessitating adaptive strategies (Cf. FAO, 2023b; Cf. Jatta and Baldeh, 2023).

Land access: Lack of land access is an obstacle for many youths, especially for women and those living in urban areas. Providing services like veterinary care or pest control can be interesting options for youth who cannot access land. Processing and transport can also be viable ventures. Micro-scale gardening using aquaponics and vertical structures can also offer opportunities for land-poor youth. Micro-plots

of 0.1–0.5 hectares and smaller plots from 0.5 hectares, like free or low-cost village or family land in rural areas, suit vegetables, fonio, millet, and family poultry. Rice, cassava, groundnuts, sheep/goats, aquaculture, free-range poultry, fruits and tree crops require moderate land. Leasing is common but adds to running costs. Larger-scale production naturally needs larger plots.

Skills and training: Basic skills suffice for vegetables, scavenging poultry, fonio, and millet, enabling entry for novices, even though more agronomic knowledge and business skills help reduce risk and increase profits. Rice, cassava, groundnuts, and sheep/goats require moderate crop or livestock management expertise, which may be difficult to access due to limited extension services and other training opportunities. Advanced skills for free-range poultry, aquaculture, processing, or veterinary services involve biosecurity, water management, or hygiene training.

However, few youths in the Gambia can access such training. The Agri-accelerator survey (Dec 2024–Jan 2025) found that while over half of youth respondents applied for government agricultural support, only 14 percent of those who applied benefitted, with most rating programmes as ineffective. Only 23 percent of the respondents were able to invest in skills development, often due to high costs, urban concentration of services and lack of widespread access to targeted training. Financially stronger youth-led businesses were more likely to secure support, leaving the most vulnerable at a disadvantage. Gender inequality is also affecting access to training. Women respondents to the Agri-accelerator survey applied to support initiatives at similar rates as men but benefitted less.

Infrastructure: Irrigation can boost rice yields but remains scarce. Cold storage is limited, increasing post-harvest loss of fruits and aquaculture products. Transport infrastructure is moderately available but hampered by poor rural roads and increasing costs. High-infrastructure needs, such as poultry feed supply chains, aquaculture systems, and tractor rentals, pose barriers for resource-constrained youth (FAO, 2023a).

Tailoring choices to resources

As outlined in Table 2, youth should align value chain choices not only with their resource levels but also with their skills and education to ensure viability and growth. Some ventures require minimal capital but demand advanced training or technical expertise (e.g. veterinary services), while others rely more on substantial financial and land resources but less specialized knowledge (e.g. basic crop production). Importantly, some pathways can be entered with either limited resources or training, but are far more viable when youth combine both (e.g. vegetable production or pest control). At the other end of the spectrum, certain options require both significant resources and strong technical expertise – such as aquaculture or advanced processing – where failing to meet either condition greatly increases risk. Recognizing these intersections can help youth select realistic entry points and tailor growth strategies to their profiles.

Table 2. Value chain options by resource level

Resource level	Value chain options	Key characteristics	Capital & time to returns	Education/ skills required	Viability
Limited resources	Vegetables, scavenging poultry, fonio, millet	Low capital, short to medium-term returns, small or no land	2–5 months (vegetables, fonio, millet), 6–12 months (poultry)	Basic agronomic/ household skills; minimal formal training	Can start with little of either training or resources, but stronger with both
Limited resources + higher education	Pest control, veterinary services	Low capital, service-based, knowledge-intensive	Ongoing (service provision)	Diploma/ degree in agriculture, animal health or specialized training	Requires training more than financial resources or land
Moderate resources	Rice, cassava, groundnuts, family poultry, sheep/goats, small-scale inland aquaculture, basic processing	Moderate capital, medium-term returns, moderate land	4–18 months	Intermediate crop/livestock management; training useful	Viability improves with moderate capital and skills
Significant resources	Free-range poultry, fruits, maritime or larger-scale aquaculture, tractor rentals, advanced processing	High capital, medium to long-term returns, larger land base	6 months–3 years	Advanced training in for example biosecurity, water management or processing hygiene	Requires both extensive resources and expertise

Source: Author's own elaboration drawing on insights from focus group discussions.

Limited resources: Youth with minimal savings or no access to financial support or loans should prioritize low-capital, quick-return ventures. Vegetables like tomatoes and onions yield in 2–4 months, requiring small plots (0.1–0.5 ha) and basic inputs, ideal for local markets. Fonio and millet, yielding in 3–5 months, suit arid regions and require minimal inputs, tapping into niche health-food markets. Scavenging poultry, needing low capital, generates returns in 6–12 months through egg and meat sales, though disease risks require basic health management. Pest control and veterinary services, moderately capital-intensive, offer ongoing income without land, suiting urban youth or those with limited land access. Cooperatives and associations can help enhance input and market access.

Moderate resources: Youth with some savings or support can pursue medium-term ventures. Rice yields in 4–6 months, thriving in irrigated areas but requiring water management. Cassava and groundnuts yield in 6–12 months, support crop rotation and meet local demand, with potential for basic processing like drying. Family poultry ventures break even in 6–12 months, leveraging scavenging for low input costs, while sheep/goats return in 6–18 months, targeting high meat demand around

holidays. These ventures require moderate capital and land (0.5–2 ha). Cooperatives, associations and government programmes like the National Agricultural Land and Water Management Development Project (Nema) can facilitate access to inputs and training (FAO, 2023b; IFAD, 2024).

Significant resources: Youth with extensive savings, financial backing, and ambition to grow can explore high-capital, longer-term options. Free-range poultry yields in 12–24 months, targeting urban niche markets with organic products, requiring robust biosecurity and certification. Fruits like mangoes or cashews, yielding in 1–3 years, offer potential sales to structured buyers like hotels and supermarkets or export markets, but demand high inputs for saplings and fertilizers. Aquaculture returns in 6–8 months, with processing like smoking adding value. Services like tractor or irrigation equipment rentals, requiring significant equipment investment, can provide steady incomes in rural areas. Advanced processing can target tourism and export markets but needs sanitary and phytosanitary certification, training, and equipment to access high-value markets (FAO, 2023a; ITC, 2022).

Diversification and integration can reduce risks and increase profits

Agrifood value chains comprise several interconnected stages, including input supply, production, processing, packaging, storage, transportation, and distribution to local or export markets. Engaging across multiple value chains, stages, or sales channels can strengthen financial resilience, reduce risk and support more sustainable livelihoods. Participating in a combination of activities, such as combining crop production with processing or working with different commodities, can help manage seasonal income variations, climate disruptions and price fluctuations. Balancing short-term income-generating efforts with longer-term investments can contribute to stable earnings and asset growth.

Although production is a common entry point, other segments of the value chain may offer potential. The Agri-accelerator hub survey engaged 74 young agribusiness owners (15–35 years old) as the target group, along with some additional respondents who were either outside the youth age bracket or not currently involved in agriculture. Among the 74 youth in agribusiness, 54 were active in production. Many of them participated in more than one stage of the value chain. Apart from production, other activities included processing (23), distribution (20), packaging (13), input supply (12), transport (6), storage (6), and export (4). Because some youth were active in more than one stage, the totals across value chain activities exceed 74. Engaging in different segments such as combining production with processing or distribution may help spread risk and open additional revenue streams.

However, diversification is not always an option. Many young women and men face limited access to financing, land, infrastructure, market information and networks. Financial constraints are especially significant. Most enterprises surveyed rely heavily on small personal savings to begin and maintain operations. This limits their ability to invest in technology, expand business activities, or transition into higher-value segments like processing or packaging.

Financial limitations also affect their ability to hire workers and provide fair wages. Findings from the Agri-accelerator hub survey are consistent with other research. Only 35 percent of respondents indicated they earn enough to support themselves and their families, and just 24 percent reported being able to pay fair wages to employees. This illustrates the structural barriers in the sector.

Patterns of diversification may also reflect gender-based differences. Many survey respondents were women who concentrated their efforts within a single value chain, often combining vegetable cultivation with simple processing. The male respondents were more often engaged across different value chains and used a variety of marketing channels. These results are related to land access, time, mobility and financial resource disparities.

Integrated production systems that connect related activities can improve productivity and reduce exposure to external shocks. Several models show how diversified systems contribute to a more stable income. The following are just three possible examples:

Rice, aquaculture and vegetables

In this model, fish waste improves soil fertility in rice paddies, while vegetables provide quicker financial returns. This model typically requires one to two hectares of land and moderate input levels. The system generates multiple income streams and reduces reliance on a single product or market, lowering vulnerability to climate and market-related risks (FAO, 2022).

Poultry, crops and manure management

This model combines family poultry with crops such as millet. Poultry manure can reduce fertilizer costs by 15 to 20 percent and may also be sold. Poultry that forage for food helps lower input costs. The system involves low investment and offers medium-term returns. Vaccination is necessary to maintain flock health (FAO, 2014).

Cassava, groundnuts and small ruminants

Rotating cassava and groundnuts helps maintain soil fertility. Goats and sheep provide meat and milk for sale in local markets. Processing activities such as producing groundnut paste add further value. This system suits areas with access to grazing land and responds well to seasonal market demand, including during festive periods (FAO, 2023a).

Moving into downstream value chain stages can unlock further opportunities. Engaging in processing, packaging and distribution allows producers to add value and access more markets. Examples include drying vegetables to extend shelf life, pressing groundnuts for oil, and preparing packaged meat for sale in urban or tourism markets. These activities require investment in equipment and facilities and knowledge in hygiene, quality control and business management. With the proper support, it is possible to participate in these higher-value segments even with limited access to land.

Success in processing and distribution depends on access to financing, machinery, market information, and business development services. Without these, many small and micro enterprises struggle with low or negative margins and limited growth potential. This is particularly true for those with fewer resources and weaker market connections.

Despite these challenges, enterprises across various value chain stages contribute meaningfully to employment, income generation and stronger rural-to-urban market linkages. Still, they often face financial instability, especially during shocks such as rising input prices, adverse weather events, or drops in demand (FAO, 2021). With appropriate support, these businesses can move beyond subsistence levels and become active contributors to local food system transformation.

Through its work across key segments of the agrifood value chain, the Agri-accelerator hub promotes informed and responsible investment decisions grounded in economic, environmental, and social sustainability. The Agri-accelerator concept is designed to support individuals at different stages of their entrepreneurial development. It does not necessarily prescribe diversification or specialization as fixed approaches. Instead, each person's context can be evaluated, including available resources, risk preferences, and market dynamics. Based on this assessment, tailored guidance can be provided to help pursue realistic and sustainable strategies.

ANALYSIS OF POPULAR VALUE CHAINS

This section presents an overview of selected agrifood value chains with high potential for youth investment. Each sub-sector is assessed based on production characteristics, market conditions, risks, entry requirements, and opportunities for value addition. The analysis draws on national statistics, survey findings, stakeholder interviews, and field observations.

The sub-sectors included are:

- vegetables (onion, tomato);
- fruits and tree crops (mango, cashew);
- field crops (groundnuts, rice, cassava); and
- livestock and aquaculture (poultry, goats and sheep, cattle, dairy, aquaculture).

These sectors vary in capital intensity, technical complexity, and time to return, but all play important roles in local markets and offer opportunities for youth entrepreneurship.

Vegetables with onion and tomato as examples

Strengths

- Short production cycle
- Strong local demand and daily turnover
- Low land requirement
- Scalable with reinvestment

Weaknesses

- High post-harvest losses
- Expensive and limited inputs
- Low irrigation use and climate vulnerability
- Low margins and little processing

Opportunities

- Small-scale drip irrigation
- Improved storage and basic processing
- Cooperative marketing and aggregation
- Diversifying outlets to urban buyers

Threats

- Import competition
- Price volatility from oversupply
- Rising input costs
- Weak policy support and pesticide regulation
- Climate change risks
- Poor transport and market access

The vegetable sub-sector faces challenges, including large yield and post-harvest losses, a lack of infrastructure, irregular weather, and low access to seeds and irrigation. These issues can be addressed through practical interventions that create youth entry points. Drip irrigation can extend production periods and reduce losses. Low-input sustainable farming methods require specific skills but can lower production costs. Training in pest control and practices like mulching can improve productivity and resource use.

Growing urban demand for fresh produce, combined with the short growth cycles of many vegetables, allows for quicker returns and multiple harvests per year. To benefit from these dynamics, youth must conduct market analysis, choose crops based on demand trends, and plan harvest times to avoid oversupply and price drops. Selling to urban markets and using basic processing methods such as drying or juicing can further expand market options. Intercropping vegetables with tree crops can reduce risk and support a more consistent income.

Onion

Onion production spans 2 000 hectares, yielding 20 000 tonnes and meeting 70 percent of domestic demand (FAO, 2022). Women manage 80 percent of subsistence plots, but pests and storage losses limit income (GBoS, 2023).

Input supply: Imported Red Creole onion seeds, which cost approximately GMD 5 000 per hectare in 2019, may produce yields of 15–20 tonnes per hectare. In contrast, most small-scale producers rely on saved seeds, which may yield 5–8 tonnes per hectare (Egyir et al., 2019). Figures for all products are regional or may reflect trends in Senegal, potentially overestimating Gambian yields, which are likely lower due to low input use and lower overall productivity. While organic compost has the potential to reduce reliance on chemical fertilizers, its adoption remains low (FAO, 2022). During focus group discussions in April 2025, participants frequently identified compost as a viable, low-cost and more sustainable alternative to expensive conventional fertilizers. Some youth also expressed support for using local seeds, which are zero or low-cost, though they stated that specialized knowledge and skills are needed to achieve good productivity.

Production: Pests cause losses, and climate variability reduces dry-year yields (FAO, 2023b). Drip irrigation could increase output and extend the growing season, but only 3 percent of farmers use it (FAO, 2022). During focus group sessions, many youths recommended investing in drip irrigation for those with access to water and capital.

Processing and packaging: Most onions are sold fresh, with drying limited to 2 percent (GIEPA, 2021). Basic home-made or solar dryers could reduce losses, but adoption is low. Participants in focus group sessions recommended that youth explore basic, low-cost processing of various horticultural produce.

Storage and transportation: Open sheds cause significant losses. Onions do not require cold storage, but ventilated sheds could reduce losses (FAO, 2022).

Marketing: Informal markets dominate. Urban wholesalers may offer 30 percent higher prices than local markets for producers who can access them. The domestic market provides the most opportunities, but there are a small number of exports to Senegal, amounting to about 500 tonnes / 2.5 percent of total production (ITC, 2023; UN Comtrade, 2025).

Consumption: Domestic production meets 70 percent of demand, with imports filling gaps off-season (FAO, 2022).

Tomato

Tomato production covers 1 500 hectares, yielding 15 000 tonnes and meeting 55 percent of demand (FAO, 2022). Women manage 70 percent of subsistence plots. Bacterial wilt and spoilage constrain growth (GBoS, 2023).

Input supply: Imported seeds may yield 15-25 tonnes per hectare for commercial farmers, while small-scale producers using local seeds may yield 5-10 tonnes (FAO, 2022). Sustainable practices, widely recommended during focus-group sessions in April 2025, such as organic mulching, could reduce chemical use and improve productivity. However, adoption is low, likely due to knowledge gaps (Cf. FAO, 2023b).

Production: Bacterial wilt causes losses and climate variability reduces yields in wet years (FAO, 2022). Drip irrigation could boost output, but few producers use it (FAO, 2023a).

Processing and packaging: Over 99 percent of tomatoes are sold fresh, with juicing limited to 1 or a few percent. Processed tomato products are imported (FAO, 2023a). Manual or solar-driven juicers could reduce losses and add value.

Storage and transportation: Lack of cold storage causes large post-harvest losses (World Bank, 2024). Cooling storage could reduce losses, but uptake is low (FAO, 2022).

Marketing: Informal markets account for around 65 percent of sales and yield GMD 20-60 per kg, with supermarkets offering higher returns despite higher quality requirements. Exports to Senegal (officially 300 tonnes) face competition (ITC, 2023).

Consumption: Domestic production meets over half of demand, with imports dominating urban markets (FAO, 2022).

Enabling environment: Duty exemptions reportedly support growth, but weak pesticide regulations hinder progress (GIEPA, 2021). Tax exemptions often require larger investments than youth typically make. Additionally, many youths are operating informally and would therefore not be eligible even if thresholds were lowered. Moreover, tax exemptions alone are ineffective for youth, who need skills, market access and access to financing.

Fruit and tree crops with mango and cashew as examples

Strengths

- Export and processing potential
- Environmental and soil benefits
- Intercropping and agroforestry options
- Demand in local and export markets

Weaknesses

- Long time to generate returns
- High post-harvest losses
- High setup and input costs
- Limited access to land and financing for youth

Opportunities

- Value addition (juicing, roasting, drying)
- Agroforestry and intercropping
- Tourism and urban market demand
- Cooperative investments and training access

Threats

- Climate variability and pests
- Market gluts and losses
- Infrastructure and standards barriers
- Insecure land tenure for youth

Fruits and tree crops like cashews are highlighted in national export and agroprocessing strategies. They offer potential for value addition, contribute to environmental management through agroforestry, and provide access to high-value domestic and international markets.

Despite this potential, the sub-sector poses several constraints for young people. One key challenge is the delayed return on investment. Mango and cashew trees often take three to five years to reach full productivity. This extended maturation period can discourage youth who require more immediate income. Establishing orchards requires considerable capital for land preparation, seedlings, fencing and equipment. Even after trees mature, significant post-harvest losses occur due to pests, poor handling practices and the lack of storage and processing facilities.

Targeted interventions can help unlock opportunities for youth. Investments in small-scale equipment such as juicers, roasters, and solar dryers can reduce post-harvest losses and increase the market value of harvested crops. Training in soil management, composting and intercropping can support productivity while lowering input costs. During the non-productive years of tree crops, vegetables or legumes can be cultivated between trees to generate interim income and improve soil health. These practices also enhance resilience to climate variability, as tree crops tend to be more tolerant to drought than annual crops.

Market access remains challenging, especially for young producers with limited networks or infrastructure. However, cooperative models can improve access to financing, input and buyers. Shared investments in storage and transportation can also increase efficiency and reduce costs. Urban and tourism markets present additional opportunities for selling differentiated products, including processed fruits, roasted nuts and organic snacks. These markets often offer better prices but require compliance with food safety and quality standards, which can be difficult for youth enterprises to meet without support.

Fruit and tree crops present investment opportunities, but they are also highly vulnerable to risks that can undermine profitability and discourage participation. These risks arise from both structural barriers, such as insecure land tenure, financing constraints and weak infrastructure, and cyclical pressures, including climate variability and market fluctuations. Dry spells and irregular rainfall can sharply reduce yields during flowering and fruiting stages, while market saturation at harvest often drives down prices and leads to large losses, particularly where cold storage and processing facilities are lacking. High transportation costs further restrict access to markets for rural producers. Understanding these challenges is essential for developing strategies that make youth engagement in this sub-sector viable and resilient.

Despite these challenges, fruit and tree crops remain promising areas for youth investment. The mango value chain has strong domestic demand for fresh, canned, and juiced products, while cashew, which is already a significant export crop, offers scope for further growth with sustainable production and processing. With sustainable production practices, both crops also contribute to soil conservation and can support the production of vegetables and field crops. With adequate training, improved infrastructure and support for collective action, youth can engage across production, processing, and marketing. Enabling policies and targeted support will be essential to reduce risks and ensure that young people can benefit from and contribute to growth in this sub-sector.

Mango

Mango production spans 1 000 hectares, yielding 1 500-8 000 tonnes (FAO, 2022), but fruit flies and losses limit potential (GBoS, 2023). Men manage 80 percent of commercial orchards.

Input supply: Imported seedlings may yield 15-20 tonnes per hectare for commercial orchards, while local varieties may yield 5-10 tonnes (FAO, 2022). Organic compost could reduce chemical use and increase productivity, but adoption is low (FAO, 2023b).

Production: Fruit flies, poor post-harvest handling and oversupply during harvest periods cause significant losses. Yields are lower in dry years (FAO, 2022). Intercropping could increase incomes (FAO, 2023a).

Processing and packaging: Most fruit is sold fresh, and processing is mainly limited to associations (GIEPA, 2021). Solar juicers or low-cost processing could reduce losses.

Storage and transportation: Lack of cold storage causes large losses (World Bank, 2024). Cold chains could reduce losses, but uptake is negligible (FAO, 2022). High transport costs and poor roads limit rural-urban transport.

Marketing: Informal markets, which account for around 60 percent of sales, yield low prices, especially during harvest season. EU exports offer higher returns but require compliance with SPS requirements (ITC, 2023). Informal trade with Senegal may be underreported.

Consumption: Domestic production meets 90 percent of demand, with minimal off-season fresh imports (FAO, 2022). Imported processed mango products can be found in urban supermarkets.

Cashew

Cashew production spans around 2 000 hectares and yield often surpasses groundnut production and exports (ITC, 2022). Men manage 90 percent of commercial orchards. Weevils and raw exports limit value addition (GBoS, 2023).

Input supply: At full maturation, imported seedlings may yield 3-5 tonnes per hectare, while local variety trees may yield 1-2 tonnes (FAO, 2022). Organic compost could reduce chemical use, but adoption is low (FAO, 2023b).

Production: Weevils cause significant losses, and climate variability reduces dry-year yields (FAO, 2022). Intercropping with legumes could increase income (FAO, 2023a). Subsistence output is likely underreported, skewing national estimates (GBoS, 2022).

Processing and packaging: Over 99 percent of the products are reportedly sold raw, with roasting, conducted by associations, is limited to 1 percent (GIEPA, 2021). Roasting could improve quality and add value.

Storage and transportation: Open sacks cause spoilage (World Bank, 2024). Hermetic bags could reduce losses, but uptake is low (FAO, 2022).

Marketing: Informal markets reportedly sell at GMD 40-60 per kg, with exports offering higher returns (ITC, 2023). Informal trade with Senegal may be underreported.

Consumption: Domestic production meets most demand with minimal imports (FAO, 2022). Data gaps may underestimate urban consumption (GBoS, 2023).

Field crops with groundnuts, rice and cassava as examples

Strengths

- Widely grown and locally understood
- Processing and employment potential
- Policy support for youth growing rice
- Contribution to food security

Weaknesses

- Low yields and limited inputs
- Labour-intensive cultivation
- Post-harvest losses and aflatoxin (groundnut)
- Limited access to financing and training
- Food safety and certification barriers

Opportunities

- Processing and packaging (e.g. gari, oil)
- Improved seed varieties and irrigation
- Institutional and regional markets
- By-product valorization and cooperatives

Threats

- Climate shocks and drought
- Cheap imports (especially rice)
- Infrastructure gaps and weak delivery

National strategies prioritize youth engagement in field crop value chains, including rice and groundnuts. Rice, groundnuts, and cassava are widely cultivated nationwide and play an important role in food security and rural livelihoods. They are locally understood and embedded in community knowledge systems, which may reduce entry barriers for young people.

The rice sector benefits from structured policy attention through the Rice Value Chain Transformation Programme. This programme targets youth involvement in input supply, production, processing and marketing. However, similar frameworks are less developed for groundnut and cassava, and both crops also present opportunities for value addition, employment and enterprise development.

Several constraints continue to limit youth participation. Access to land is a big challenge. Many young producers face barriers to financing, equipment and training. Cultivation and processing remain largely manual and physically demanding, especially for groundnuts and cassava. Input systems are inconsistent and post-harvest infrastructure is underdeveloped.

All three crops experience low yields. This is mainly due to the limited use of improved seeds, declining soil fertility, and minimal adoption of mechanization. Groundnut production is also constrained by aflatoxin contamination, which reduces export potential and market value.

Cassava deteriorates quickly after harvest, leading to spores when processing is delayed. Rice faces competition from low-cost imports, limiting the local production market.

Despite these challenges, there are opportunities for youth-led innovation. Processing and packaging activities such as rice milling, groundnut paste, oil production, and cassava gari can increase value and generate off-farm employment. By-products such as rice husks, cassava peels and groundnut shells may be used for livestock feed or small-scale energy production.

Improved productivity is possible through drought-tolerant seed varieties and water-saving technologies such as drip irrigation. Groundnut and cassava are relatively tolerant to drought and may benefit from intercropping to improve soil health. Production could be expanded with small-scale irrigation. If supported by cooperatives or service providers, these options may be more accessible to youth.

Institutional buyers, including school feeding programmes, could create a stable demand for local produce. However, current procurement levels may not be able to support youth-led businesses at scale. Regional trade via Senegal may offer further opportunities for groundnut and cassava, though neighbours also produce these crops.

Imported rice continues to dominate urban markets and affects the competitiveness of local production. Climate risks, including drought and rainfall variability, affect all crops. Salinity is a concern for rice production in coastal areas. Poor rural infrastructure and limited access to cold or dry storage raise costs and reduce marketable volumes. While policy frameworks exist, delays and weak delivery systems continue to pose barriers.

In summary, the field crop sector offers meaningful potential for youth participation in production, processing and trade. Achieving this potential may depend on addressing systemic constraints, improving support services and ensuring that youth have fair and consistent access to land, capital and training.

Groundnut

Groundnut is a cornerstone of the Gambia's economy, supporting over 150 000 farmers across 30 000 hectares and producing about 109 780 tonnes annually (Baldeh and Jatta, 2023; UN Comtrade, 2023). As a key export crop, it has historically generated foreign exchange earnings, though export values have declined in recent years due in part to aflatoxin contamination, which restricts access to high-value markets (IITA, 2019). Women manage an estimated 60 percent of small-scale plots, while men dominate larger-scale production. Across the sector, many producers face insecure land tenure, which discourages long-term investment (GIEPA, 2021).

Input supply: Most farmers use saved seeds, yielding less than the certified varieties adopted by 10 percent of commercial farmers (IITA, 2019). Fertilizer shortages raise costs due to the uneven distribution of fertilizer subsidies (FAO, 2023a). Organic compost could reduce aflatoxin and chemical use, but adoption is low (FAO, 2022).

Production: Commercial farms may yield 2–3 tonnes per hectare, while smaller-scale plots produce 1–1.5 tonnes, limited by rudimentary practices and drought (FAO, 2022). Aflatoxin affects around 20 percent of output, cutting export value. Drought reduces profitability in dry years (IITA, 2019). Intercropping with legumes could enhance soil fertility and reduce

erosion, but due to knowledge gaps, only 5 percent of farmers have adopted the practice (FAO, 2023b). Women's subsistence production is likely underreported (GBoS, 2022).

Processing and packaging: Over 95 percent of groundnuts are sold unshelled, with a tiny share processed into butter or oil manually, limiting value addition (GIEPA, 2021). The Denton Bridge groundnut mill, the only industrial facility, operates below capacity due to outdated equipment (FAO, 2023a). Dryers could reduce aflatoxin and improve quality, but adoption is low due to cost and awareness barriers. Groundnut cake, used as livestock feed, lacks standardization, reducing market potential.

Storage and transportation: Open sheds cause spoilage from humidity and pests (World Bank, 2024). Hermetic bags could cut losses, but few producers use them due to upfront costs (FAO, 2022). Poor feeder roads and high fuel prices increase transport costs, isolating rural producers.

Marketing: Informal markets handle 60 percent of sales at GMD 20–40 per kg, while exports to ECOWAS (officially 10 000 tonnes) and China face quality barriers due to aflatoxin (ITC, 2023). EU exports, fetching 30 percent higher returns, are limited due to strict SPS standards (IITA, 2019). Organic branding could yield a price premium, but certification costs deter smallholders (FAO, 2021). Informal cross-border trade may be underreported.

Consumption: Domestic production meets 90 percent of demand, with minimal imports, supporting food security (FAO, 2022). Urban consumption may be underestimated (GBoS, 2023).

Rice

Rice is the main staple food in the Gambia. However, domestic production meets less than 25 percent of national demand (FAO, 2022). To fill the gap, the country relies heavily on imports. This dependence pressures foreign exchange reserves and increases exposure to external supply risks (AfDB, 2021).

Production and potential: Rice is cultivated in both upland and lowland areas. In 2020, around 6 000 hectares were planted with rice. Of this area, 4 000 hectares were in upland systems and 13 000 hectares in lowland environments, including rainfed, irrigated and tidal fields (Ministry of Agriculture, 2021).

Despite the area planted, average annual production takes place on about 20 000 hectares, yielding approximately 30 000 tonnes of paddy rice (Ministry of Agriculture, 2022a). The difference between planted and harvested areas may reflect crop loss, input shortages, or adverse weather conditions that prevent complete harvest.

Rainfed systems dominate production. These typically yield between 1 and 1.5 tonnes per hectare. Irrigated plots can produce between 2 and 3 tonnes per hectare but make up only a small share of total cultivation (Ministry of Agriculture, 2022a). Coastal lowlands are particularly affected by salinity, pests and unpredictable rainfall, which reduce yields (FAO, 2023a). Although drip irrigation could improve productivity and water efficiency, its use remains limited due to financial and infrastructure constraints (FAO, 2022).

Women manage most subsistence-oriented rice plots, especially in rainfed areas. Men generally control irrigated systems. The amount women produce under subsistence systems may be under-reported (FAO, 2023a; GBoS, 2022).

There is considerable potential to expand rice production in the Gambia. According to an old estimate from 2005, around 555 000 hectares of land are suitable for cultivation, including approximately 339 000 hectares of upland and 216 000 hectares of lowland. Of the lowlands, about 81 000 hectares are considered suitable for irrigation (FAO, 2005). As this estimate is now 20 years old, some of this land may no longer be suitable for agriculture due to other uses or environmental challenges. Some of the land suitable for agriculture is also likely already allocated to crops other than rice. Nevertheless, substantial areas remain available that could support expanded rice cultivation, depending on community preferences, land tenure arrangements, and national development priorities.

Input supply: About 15 percent of producers use commercial seed varieties such as NERICA. These seeds have the potential to yield 2 to 3 tonnes per hectare. However, their availability is often inconsistent, and prices are high (FAO, 2022). Most fertilizer is imported from Senegal and represents a large share of input costs. Organic compost is an alternative input but remains limited in supply and adoption (FAO, 2023b).

Processing and packaging: Rice processing is largely informal. Manual milling is common and leads to high levels of grain breakage and lower quality. The only industrial rice mill in the country is located in Kuntaur, though its operation has not been consistent (FAO, 2023a).

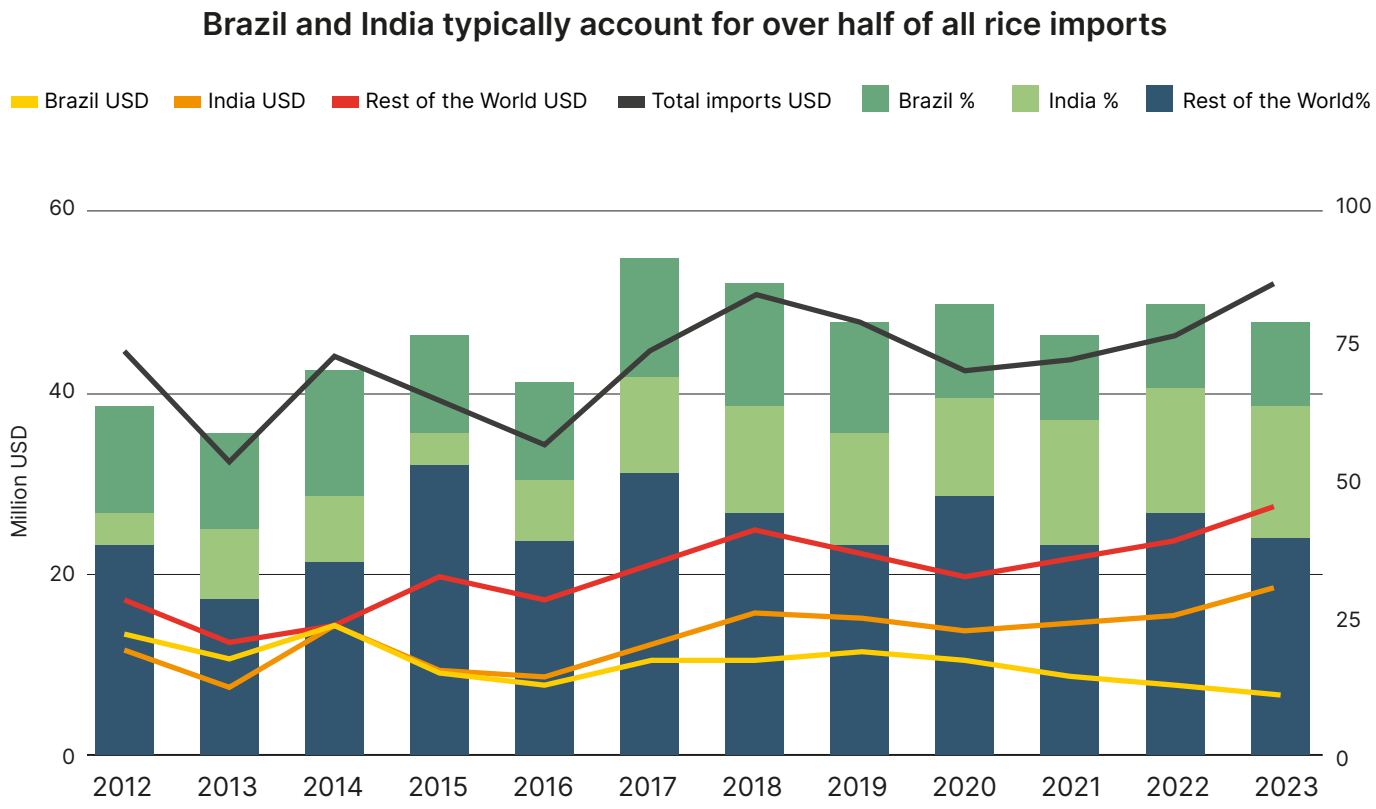
Storage and transportation: Post-harvest losses are a persistent issue. Rice is often stored in open sheds, making it vulnerable to humidity and pests (World Bank, 2024). Hermetic storage bags, which could reduce spoilage, are not widely used (FAO, 2022). Poor road conditions in rural areas increase transportation costs and limit market access (UNIDO, 2023).

Marketing: About 70 percent of rice is sold through informal markets. Some farmers sell to institutional buyers, such as school feeding programmes, which offer more predictable demand and better prices (ITC, 2023). Formal exports remain low due to scale, quality and certification limitations. Although informal cross-border trade with neighbouring countries likely occurs, it is not captured in official records (FAO, 2022).

Consumption: Urban markets rely heavily on imports. Domestic rice production cannot meet national consumption needs. Between 2013 and 2023, annual rice imports ranged from 130 000 to 936 000 tonnes, with values between USD 31 million and 76 million (UN Comtrade, 2024). The highest volume was recorded in 2015, which may reflect unusual conditions or data inconsistencies.

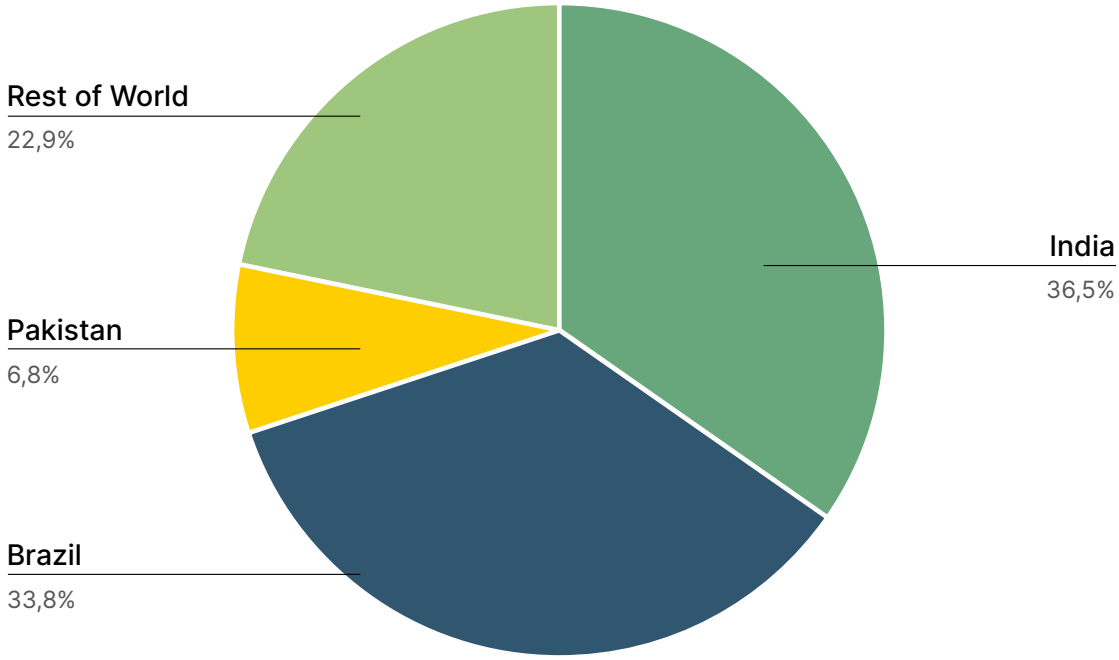
India and Brazil are the dominant sources of rice imports to the Gambia, accounting for more than half of total imports in most (but not all) years. Pakistan is typically the third largest supplier, and its exports are included within the "Rest of World" category in Chart 1 . This combined category varies in size over time. It is modest in some years, but occasionally accounting for a substantial share of total imports. However, the concentration of imports to a few countries increases the Gambia's exposure to external risks, including global price fluctuations, export restrictions, and climate-related supply disruptions in exporting countries.

Figure 1. Rice imports to the Gambia



Source: UN Comtrade data compiled by the author.

Figure 2. Share of rice import volume by suppliers in 2023



Source: UN Comtrade data compiled by the author

Rice exports and re-exports are small relative to imports. The combined export and re-export volume in 2014, amounted to under 800 tonnes and was valued at around USD 200 000.

Policies: The National Rice Development Strategy II was implemented in 2021 and will continue to shape the rice sector through 2030. The strategy seeks to increase domestic production, raise productivity and strengthen value chain performance (Ministry of Agriculture, 2022a). It is coordinated by the Ministry of Agriculture and supported by national research and seed institutions.

One of its key components is the Rice Value Chain Transformation Programme (RVCP), financed by the African Development Bank. The programme aims to move rice production toward more commercial models by improving access to inputs, enhancing processing, strengthening marketing, and supporting income generation, especially for women and youth (AfDB, 2022; AfDB, 2023). The programme's second phase intends to expand irrigation and seed systems and improve institutional coordination (AfDB, 2023).

The National Rice Seed Development Strategy, introduced in 2023, addresses seed availability, quality, and certification gaps. It encourages coordination between public and private actors and supports reforms in the seed sector (Ministry of Agriculture, 2023).

Despite these policy frameworks, implementation remains uneven. Reports highlight challenges such as delays in programme delivery, weak supply chains, limited mechanization, and inadequate market integration (Gomez et al., 2022). Past studies also note ongoing limitations in irrigation infrastructure and institutional capacity (Carney, 2008). The slow uptake of irrigation indicates that these problems are not yet resolved (FAO, 2022). Policy effectiveness will depend on resolving these barriers and delivering support promptly and consistently.

Youth engagement and investment: National rice policies focus on youth engagement. Programmes such as RVCP aim to create opportunities for young people across the value chain, including in input supply, mechanization services, post-harvest processing, and marketing. While institutional buyers such as school feeding programmes have the potential to provide stable demand, current procurement levels are likely insufficient to support youth-led enterprises on a massive scale.

Other challenges also remain. Youth often lack access to land, especially under customary tenure systems. Limited access to financing, technical training, and equipment also constrains participation. The dominance of cheap imports further reduces market space for domestic producers. The rice sector could offer viable paths for responsible youth investment if these structural challenges are addressed.

Cassava

The Gambia produces 12 000 tonnes of cassava per year across 5 000 hectares, supporting food security as a complementary crop for 30 percent of rural households (GBoS, 2023). Women manage 80 per cent of subsistence plots, but limited processing restricts income potential (FAO, 2022). Its drought tolerance and sturdiness before harvest enhance climate resilience, but pests, storage losses and lack of processing limit growth (FAO, 2023b).

Input supply: Local cuttings dominate, with other varieties used by a few producers. (FAO, 2022). Organic compost could reduce soil erosion and substitute chemical inputs, but adoption is below 3 percent due to extension gaps (FAO, 2023a).

Production: Small-scale plots may yield 6–8 tonnes per hectare, but pests constrain them and farmers lack knowledge of sustainable and productive practices. A few producers using more productive varieties and techniques yield 10–12 tonnes per hectare (FAO, 2022). Intercropping with maize could improve soil fertility, but few producers adopt the practice (FAO, 2023b). Women's output is likely underreported (GBoS, 2022).

Processing and packaging: Most cassava is sold fresh, with gari production limited to around 5 percent, constrained by the predominance of manual units (GIEPA, 2021).

Storage and transportation: Lack of storage causes large losses (World Bank, 2024). Ventilated sheds could reduce losses, but uptake is low (FAO, 2022). Poor roads increase transport costs and isolate producers (UNIDO, 2023).

Marketing: Informal markets account for most sales, with regional exports to Senegal (officially 500 tonnes offering higher returns (ITC, 2023). Processed products like gari could fetch a premium, but the scale is limited (FAO, 2021).

Consumption: Domestic production meets 90 percent of demand, with minimal imports, supporting rural diets (FAO, 2022). Urban consumption may be underestimated (GBoS, 2023).

Poultry, livestock and aquaculture

Strengths

- High demand for animal protein, especially fish, poultry and small ruminants
- Relatively short production cycles in poultry and aquaculture, accessible for youth
- Strong domestic supply for small ruminants and cattle, supporting local market entry
- Women's involvement in subsistence poultry and small ruminants offers a foundation for female-led MSMEs

Weaknesses

- High import dependency for poultry, dairy, and eggs limits competitiveness
- Low domestic production of poultry and aquaculture and low yields from small ruminants constrain scale
- Limited access to feed, veterinary services and cold storage increases costs and losses

Opportunities

- Niche markets such as premium eggs, processed meat, organic dairy, and smoked fish for urban and tourist demand
- Seasonal demand peaks for small ruminants, cattle and poultry
- Integrated farming to reduce costs and risks
- Underdeveloped aquaculture offers strong growth potential

Threats

- High input costs and reliance on imported inputs
- Disease risks with limited veterinary access
- Infrastructure deficits in cold storage and transport causing spoilage and higher costs
- Competition from low-cost poultry imports and informal trade with Senegal

Animal value chains in the Gambia are important for nutrition, rural livelihoods and economic activity. They supply high-protein foods to meet growing demand, generate employment for women and youth, and provide entry points for young agri-entrepreneurs due to their accessibility and short production cycles, especially in poultry and fish farming. Yet these systems also face structural constraints like high input and veterinary costs, recurrent disease outbreaks, limited access to land and labour and a lack of cold-chain infrastructure, contributing to losses and reduced competitiveness against imports.

Despite these challenges, opportunities remain. Local feed production, veterinary service delivery, and cooperative marketing can strengthen domestic supply chains. Value addition through processing of meat, milk and fish can capture higher returns in urban and tourism markets, while seasonal demand during festive periods creates lucrative sales peaks.

Integrated farming models also present pathways for resilience and sustainability. Manure can be used for crop production. In turn, crop residues can be processed into feed for animals. Aquaculture integration with rice or vegetable production can help diversify income and boost food security. Integrated models can also mitigate risks from climate variability and market fluctuations and stabilize cash flows. Niche markets such as premium eggs, processed meat for tourism, organic dairy products and smoked fish may offer higher returns for youth with access to training and infrastructure.

While each value chain has unique needs (e.g. water management in aquaculture, crossbreeding in dairy), the shared challenges of infrastructure deficits, disease risks and import competition underscore cross-cutting solutions like improved storage, cooperative models and digital market platforms.

Estimations of animal protein consumption in the Gambia

Total meat supply in the Gambia can be estimated in the range between 27 000 and 40 500 tonnes annually, based on an assumed per capita availability of 10–15 kg (FAO, 2020; World Bank, 2023). This estimate relies on regional averages for sub-Saharan Africa, as specific data on total meat consumption in the Gambia are not available. Based on this estimate, domestic production covers 23–35 percent of the supply. Small ruminants contribute 4 000 tonnes, meeting up to 95 percent of goat and sheep meat demand, though the estimated yield is low (GBoS, 2023; FAO, 2022). Cattle production adds 4 000 tonnes, satisfying up to 90 percent of beef demand (FAO, 2022). Poultry is import-dependent, with over 90 percent of supply imported (UN Comtrade, 2023; FAO, 2023c). Poultry supply estimates suggest a per capita availability of 14.7 kg in 2023 (31 750–33 750 tonnes), but actual consumption may be 6–8 kg (16 200–21 600 tonnes), if it aligns with West African averages (Molina-Flores et al., 2020; ITC, 2023; World Bank, 2024).

Fish dominates the national animal protein basket, with per capita consumption of 25–30 kg, equivalent to 67 500–81 000 tonnes annually (FAO, 2022). This exceeds the total meat supply and positions fisheries, dominated by artisanal catches, as a cornerstone of Gambian diets. Aquaculture contributes to less than 5 percent (GBoS, 2023). Poultry ranks second among animal protein sources, followed by small ruminants and cattle (FAO, 2022).

Total animal protein consumption can be estimated at 110 700–140 400 tonnes annually, based on assumptions from regional dietary patterns and available production data. Fish accounts for 60–70 percent (67 500–81 000 tonnes), meat 25–30 percent (27 000–40 500 tonnes), dairy 10 percent (13 500 tonnes, assuming 1 litre is roughly 1 kg), and eggs 2–4 percent (2 700–5 400 tonnes) (FAO, 2022; Molina-Flores et al., 2020).

These shares are approximations, as official statistics on total animal protein consumption are limited. Domestic supply likely covers 30–40 percent, with artisanal fisheries, small ruminants, and cattle as key contributors, while poultry, dairy (less than 50 percent domestic), and eggs rely heavily on imports (FAO, 2022; UN Comtrade, 2023). Small ruminants and cattle are critical for cultural and seasonal demand, particularly during Tobaski, but are secondary to fish and poultry in overall animal protein supply (ITC, 2023). The Gambia's reliance on imports for poultry, dairy and eggs highlights structural vulnerabilities, while artisanal fisheries and traditional livestock systems remain the strongest domestic contributors to protein security (FAO, 2022; GBoS, 2023).

Poultry

The poultry sector in the Gambia contributes to food security, employment and income generation, with involvement from women and youth. Chickens are raised in both commercial and traditional systems for meat and egg production (Bahta et al., 2022). Domestic production supplies less than 10 percent of national demand, with the majority covered through imports of eggs and frozen chicken meat (UN Comtrade, 2023). Women represent around 60 percent of traditional poultry producers, but their participation in commercial systems remains low (Baldeh and Jatta, 2023), indicating a gap in access to commercial production opportunities.

Input supply: Commercial poultry production in the Gambia depends on imported feed and day-old chicks (DOCs), with feed accounting for 60–63 percent of broiler production costs and about 20 percent of egg production costs (Baldeh and Jatta, 2023; YEP, 2017; Cf. UN Comtrade, 2023). Rural producers have limited access to pullets and veterinary services, whereas urban producers benefit from more established supply networks (YEP, 2017). Newcastle disease, which causes mortality rates sometimes exceeding 60 percent, is aggravated by limited vaccine availability (Baldeh and Jatta, 2023; CGIAR, 2021). While local feed production using maize and groundnut cake has the potential to reduce costs, only one feed mill exists and is currently underutilized (Baldeh and Jatta, 2023; YEP, 2017). This suggests a potential area for youth-led investment. Three hatcheries are operational but function below capacity, leading to continued reliance on imported DOCs for conventional intensive production (ILRI, 2019). The Youth Empowerment Project's (YEP) poultry sector assessment and other sources have recommended the establishment of additional local hatcheries.

Meanwhile, participants in focus group discussions held in April 2025 expressed support for systems prioritizing sustainability, and animal health and welfare and avoiding early separation of chicks from hens. Integrating poultry, crop and organic manure production could reduce input needs by reinforcing poultry feed with in-house feed production from residues. At the same time, organic manure from the birds can be used for crop production.

Production: Poultry production contributes to food security and employment in the Gambia through traditional (90 percent) and commercial (10 percent) systems (Bahta et al., 2022; Baldeh and Jatta, 2023). Traditional poultry systems in the Gambia, primarily consisting of free-range indigenous chickens, produce an estimated 900–960 tonnes of poultry meat annually from approximately 1.33 million birds, with an average live weight of 1.5–1.7 kg per bird (Gambia Bureau of Statistics, 2016; Ministry of Agriculture, 2022b). These figures reflect the dominance of backyard scavenging systems, which account for 90–95% of the national poultry population, with production largely for household consumption and informal markets (FAO, 2021; Ministry of Agriculture, 2022b). The estimates are derived from national livestock censuses and projections, adjusted for underreporting common in traditional systems (FAO, 2021).

Commercial systems contribute around 180 tonnes from 106 000 birds (allAfrica.com, 2021; FAOSTAT, 2023c). Women account for 60 percent of traditional producers but less than 2 percent of commercial producers (Baldeh and Jatta, 2023).

Due to limited local layer production, most eggs are imported (Baldeh and Jatta, 2023). Commercial farms operate below capacity, hindered by recurrent outbreaks of Newcastle disease and high feed costs (Baldeh and Jatta, 2023; DLS, 2016). The Gambia has a per capita poultry population of fewer than 0.5 birds, compared to over five in Senegal (Bahta et al., 2022). According to YEP (2017), a minimum of 500 broilers is required to support one full-time job, while 10 000 birds can generate approximately 9.5 jobs in broiler production or 11 in layer production. Participants in focus group discussions held in April 2025 estimated that a minimum of 300 birds would be needed to sustain one full-time equivalent job in a specialized commercial poultry farm, with fewer birds required in integrated poultry and crop systems.

Processing and packaging: Over 95 percent of poultry is sold live due to limited cold storage and processing infrastructure, with two plants operating below capacity (Baldeh and Jatta, 2023). Locally processed frozen birds are uncompetitive against imports delivered duty-paid in Banjul (YEP, 2017). Emerging portioning and roasting activities rely on imports, indicating untapped potential (FAO, 2020). Urban areas have slight infrastructure advantages. Senegal has a more robust processing sector that could be replicated in the Gambia (FAO, 2020; Molina-Flores et al., 2020).

Storage and transportation: Inappropriate transportation, such as overcrowded or poorly ventilated vehicles, causes losses (Baldeh & Jatta, 2023). Evaporative cooling systems could mitigate losses, but adoption is limited (World Bank, 2024). Poor feeder roads restrict market access for rural producers, exacerbating supply chain inefficiencies (UNIDO, 2023). Focus-group discussions in April 2025 highlighted that investments in transport and distribution could yield viable returns and strengthen linkages between rural producers and urban consumers.

Marketing: Informal markets dominate, with 60 percent of poultry sold locally and 40 percent to supermarkets or hotels (Baldeh & Jatta, 2023). Live broilers fetched GMD 225–275 per bird in 2021, rising to approximately GMD 350 by April 2025, with urban wholesalers offering higher returns (FAO, 2021; focus-group discussions, 2025). Imported poultry, priced at USD 1.18/kg in 2023, undercuts local prices driven by low-cost supplies from Latin America and Europe (Baldeh and Jatta, 2023; Cf. UN Comtrade, 2023). Local eggs command a 10 percent premium for quality but limited scale constraints competitiveness (YEP, 2017; Reich, 2021). Export potential to Senegal is limited by production capacity, though informal trade may be

underreported (ITC, 2023). Holiday periods like Tobaski offer lucrative market opportunities (FAO, 2020; Molina-Flores et al., 2020).

Consumption, imports, and domestic production: Poultry is the second most significant source of animal protein in the Gambia, following fish. Adjusted supply estimates, which account for a 20 percent reduction due to losses, show per capita poultry supply rising from 9.8 kg in 2020 to 14.7 kg in 2023, based on population estimates from the Gambia Bureau of Statistics.

Imports constitute 94–98 percent of the poultry supply (UN Comtrade, 2023; FAO, 2023c). Domestic production has increased in recent decades but has not followed population growth. Between 2020 and 2023, we estimate an annual production of 1 100–1 500 tonnes, with 900–960 tonnes from traditional systems and 180 tonnes from commercial farms. The per capita supply peaked at 15.5 kg in 2022 (UN Comtrade, 2023; FAO, 2023c).

Key poultry suppliers to the Gambia include the United States, Brazil and, until 2022, Ukraine, whose poultry exports were curtailed by Russia's full-scale invasion. Between 2019 and 2023, import prices increased by 37 percent (from USD 0.86/kg to USD 1.18/kg), inflating the poultry import bill by 153 percent, from USD 22.49 million to USD 56.94 million. Import volumes also grew by 85 percent (UN Comtrade, 2023).

Although supply data adjusted for 20 percent losses suggest a per capita figure of 14.7 kg in 2023, actual consumption might be much lower, likely aligning with Senegal (8 kg in 2021) and the West African average (6–7 kg) (Molina-Flores et al., 2020). Higher losses than known, as well as consumption by tourists, may inflate apparent consumption. Though no re-export is recorded (UN Comtrade, 2023), informal re-export through Senegal is also possible.

Goat and sheep

The goat and sheep value chains meet 95 percent of small ruminant meat demand, with

548 000 animals producing 4 000 tonnes annually (GBoS, 2023). Women manage 70 percent of subsistence flocks, supporting rural livelihoods, while men dominate commercial systems (FAO, 2022). Demand peaks during Tobaski and tourism seasons, driving up prices (ITC, 2023).

Input supply: Local breeds dominate, with commercial breeds used by five percent of commercial farmers, yielding 10 percent higher weights (FAO, 2022). Vaccines for Peste des Petits Ruminants are limited, causing high mortality (ILRI, 2019). Fodder crops could improve nutrition, but adoption is minimal (FAO, 2023b).

Production: Subsistence small ruminant flocks in the Gambia typically consist of approximately 4–6 sheep and 5–8 goats per household, with average carcass weights of about 11–14 kg (ILRI, 2020). While improved or commercial flocks with better nutrition and management can achieve higher carcass weights, these are rare in the Gambia (Rich, Bahta, Wane, Wanyoike, and Baltenweck, 2020.).

Diseases cause high mortality, and dry season feed shortages reduce output (ILRI, 2019).

Processing and packaging: Meat is mostly sold fresh, and animals are slaughtered on open-air slabs (FAO, 2020).

Storage and transportation: Lack of cold storage causes spoilage. Portable coolers could reduce losses, but uptake is low due to cost (FAO, 2022). Poor feeder roads increase transport costs (UNIDO, 2023).

Marketing: Informal markets dominate, with exports to Senegal offering 20 percent higher returns (ITC, 2023). Cross-border trade is significant but informal and potentially underreported (FAO, 2022). Processed products could fetch a premium, but scale is limited (FAO, 2021).

Consumption: Domestic production meets most of the demand, with minimal imports for high-end markets (FAO, 2022). Import estimates may be understated due to informal trade with Senegal.

Cattle

Cattle provide beef, milk and draught power, with 296 000 heads producing 4 000 tonnes of meat annually (FAO, 2022). Men, often from the Fulani ethnic group, manage herds, while youth engage in semi-intensive fattening near urban areas (ILRI, 2019). Demand peaks during Tobaski and tourism seasons (ITC, 2023).

Input supply: N'Dama breeds dominate, with Zebu crossbreeds used by very few producers, yielding higher weights (ILRI, 2019). Feed relies on natural grazing, with 5 percent of producers using groundnut cake supplements, raising costs but also yields (FAO, 2022). Vaccines for contagious bovine pleuropneumonia are limited, causing high mortality (ILRI, 2019). Fodder crops could improve nutrition, but adoption is insignificant (FAO, 2023b).

Production: Extensive systems dominate with herds of 10–30 head grazing communal lands, often via transhumance (FAO, 2022). N'Dama cattle (250–300 kg mature weight) take 4-5 years to reach slaughter, yielding 100-130 kg carcasses. Calf mortality and two-year calving intervals limit output (ILRI, 2019). Semi-intensive fattening by using crop residues can help increase weights, but adoption is limited (FAO, 2022). Artificial insemination could improve yields, but infrastructure is lacking (ILRI, 2019). Production data may be underreported due to informal systems (GBoS, 2022).

Processing and packaging: Meat is mostly sold fresh and slaughtered on open-air slabs (FAO, 2020). No formal processing exists, but chillers and processing could add value through chilled cuts (GIZ, 2020). Hides are sold to artisans, but quality is inconsistent (FAO, 2023a).

Storage and transportation: Lack of cold storage causes 15–25 percent spoilage, costing GMD 3 000 per tonne (World Bank, 2024). Portable coolers (USD 50) could reduce losses by 15 percent, but uptake is low (FAO, 2022). Poor feeder roads increase transport costs by 20 percent (UNIDO, 2023). Loss estimates may be overstated, reflecting regional averages.

Marketing: Informal markets (70 percent) sell at GMD 200–300 per kg, with urban butchers offering 20 percent higher returns (ITC, 2023). Cross-border trade with Senegal is significant but informal and potentially underreported (FAO, 2022). Processed products could fetch a 10 percent premium, but scale is limited (FAO, 2021).

Consumption: Domestic production meets 90 percent of demand, with imports for high-end markets (FAO, 2022). Import estimates may be understated due to informal trade (ITC, 2023).

Dairy

Dairy produces 20 million litres annually. Women often manage milking in traditional systems, while at least one commercial diary with Holstein/Jersey cows targets urban markets (Darboe, Secka, A. and Sanyang, 2012). Import dependency is a strain on foreign exchange (Cf. UN Comtrade, 2023).

Input supply: Local West African breeds dominate, yielding 1–2 litres daily, with Holstein/Jersey breeds at Kombo Dairy Farms producing 10–15 litres (Darboe, Secka and Sanyang, 2012). Feed relies on grazing, with fodder crops used by a few producers (FAO, 2022). Lack of disease treatments causes yield losses (ILRI, 2019). Fodder banks could improve yields.

Production: Traditional systems produce 15–18 million litres annually, with calves consuming most milk (FAO, 2022). Dry season feed shortages cause yield drops. Crossbreeding could increase output, but infrastructure is lacking (FAO, 2022). Women's production is likely underreported, skewing estimates (GBoS, 2022).

Processing and packaging: Modern processing is rare. Traditional processing includes women's use of sour milk and ghee. One case, the Kombo Dairy pasteurizes milk and produces yoghurt, but imported milk powder dominates urban processing (Darboe, Secka and Sanyang, 2012).

Storage and transportation: Lack of cold storage causes spoilage. Cooling tanks could reduce losses. Poor feeder roads increase transport costs.

Marketing: Most milk is sold locally in informal markets. At least one commercial dairy producer targets supermarkets, but imports dominate in urban areas (Darboe, Secka and Sanyang, 2012).

Consumption: Domestic production meets less than 50 percent of demand, with imports dominating urban markets (Cf. UN Comtrade, 2023).

Aquaculture

Aquaculture in the Gambia is still at an early stage and contributes less than five percent of national fish demand. Current output is about 500 tonnes on roughly 50 hectares, mainly from small-scale ponds and community initiatives, including along the Gambia River (GBoS, 2023). Inland pond farming focuses on tilapia and catfish, engaging both men and women. These systems require relatively little land, offer short production cycles and can be combined with crop farming, which makes them well suited for youth-led micro and small enterprises. Growth is constrained by high input costs and disease risks while access to fingerlings, affordable feed, and extension services remains critical (FAO, 2022).

On the coast and in the estuary, mangrove-associated shellfish farming, especially oysters and cockles, has evolved from traditional wild harvesting into more structured pilot systems such as rack culture. These activities are largely led by women's collectives, who organize harvesting, culture, and management (FAO, 2023b). Young agri-entrepreneurs may engage in processing steps such as cleaning and purifying shellfish in clean water (depuration), shucking, and improving food safety and packaging. Success relies on secure site access and effective water-quality monitoring.

Fish and seafood remain the dominant source of animal protein in Gambian diets. Nearly all of this supply still comes from artisanal capture fisheries and imports rather than aquaculture. This situation highlights aquaculture's future potential and the opportunities for youth to invest responsibly in the sub-sector.

Marine and inland aquaculture for young agri-entrepreneurs

Dimension	Inland ponds (tilapia/catfish)	Coastal/estuarine (oyster/cockle)
Entry cost	Low to moderate (pond rehab, seed, feed)	Low for co-managed harvest; moderate to high for rack culture and depuration
Cycle length	Short to medium; good cash flow	Seasonal; staggered with rack culture
Technical needs	Water quality, biosecurity, feed management	Hygiene, depuration, site stewardship
Gender/youth fit	Strong for youth with limited capital; suits integration with crop production	Strong for women's groups; youth may invest in value-added and logistics segments
Market access	Fresh fillet/whole fish for urban markets	Hospitality, retail, street food; premiums with certification
Key risks	Disease, feed cost, water quality	Flooding, contamination, salinity swings

Input supply: Limited hatchery capacity and local fingerling supply drive reliance on imported fingerlings and feed, increasing costs and exposure to currency fluctuations (FAO, 2022). Micro and small-scale producers face capital constraints for feed, water-quality kits and biosecurity inputs. Shellfish seed is mostly wild-harvested, with emerging community-based management and culture systems (FAO, 2023a; Self Help Africa, 2024).

Youth may consider investing in local feed production using rice bran, groundnut cake and other agricultural by-products to reduce import dependence (FAO, 2022). Small-scale hatcheries for tilapia and catfish could lower mortality and stabilize costs (FAO, 2022). Collective action, such as group buying for inputs, can help reduce costs for aquaculture producers.

Production

- **Inland ponds.** Small earthen ponds dominate but face disease, low dissolved oxygen, and water-quality issues. Basic aeration, water monitoring, and rice–fish or vegetable–fish systems can boost survival, feed conversion ratios, and nutrient cycling (FAO, 2022; FAO, 2023b). Yields vary and reliable national benchmarks are lacking. A relatively small investment in better management is likely to increase productivity (FAO, 2022).

- **Marine and coastal shellfish.** Women-led groups manage around 15–18 rack culture systems. These reportedly enhance sustainability and incomes compared to wild harvesting. Rack culture reduces pressure on mangroves and improves product quality, though risks like flooding, salinity shifts, and pollution remain, (FAO, 2023a; Self Help Africa, 2024).

Processing and packaging: Most aquaculture output is sold fresh, with minimal processing (FAO, 2020). Fish smoking and filleting are underdeveloped and may offer promising investment opportunities for young agri-entrepreneurs. For oysters and cockles, depuration, shucking, and hygienic packaging can raise margins and help meet the standards of the tourism sector and high-value markets (FAO, 2020; FAO, 2023a).

Processing such as kiln smoking, vacuum-packing and basic compliance with hazard analysis and critical control points (HACCP) may be viable for micro and small enterprises if equipment and facilities are pooled. Compliance with hygiene standards can help the sub-sector target tourism and supermarket channels (FAO, 2020). High post-harvest losses are caused by limited cold chain infrastructure and long feeder-road travel times. Community chillers, ice plants and insulated boxes could significantly reduce losses (FAO, 2020). Shellfish require both cold chain management and depuration for safety. Without these, markets will remain largely informal (FAO, 2023a). Small-scale last-mile cold chain services, such as ice delivery, may suit young investors and could also support poultry and meat value chains.

Marketing: Informal markets dominate, but urban nodes and cross-border trade with Senegal offer better prices when consistent quality and supply are available. Restaurants and hotels demand uniform size, hygiene and packaging, which youth-led enterprises could help provide by engaging collectively and increasing compliance with various standards. Fresh, local and safe branding for tilapia and catfish, as well as certified and depurated oysters, could command price premiums. Digital pre-orders, for example using WhatsApp, could be feasible in urban and peri-urban areas.

Consumption, imports and domestic production: Fish dominates animal-protein consumption, but aquaculture supplies less than five percent of this demand, with artisanal capture fisheries and imports dominating (FAO, 2018; DoFish, 2023; GBoS, 2023). Scaling aquaculture could create investment opportunities for youth while helping to diversify diets and reduce reliance on imported frozen fillets, provided that cold chain and quality standards are strengthened (FAO, 2022).

Enabling environment and policy: National fisheries-related policies prioritize food security, sustainable fisheries and aquaculture, loss reduction and infrastructure investment (Government of the Gambia, 2018b). Turning these policies into action could help develop the aquaculture sector. Initiatives by government and development partners have supported training on feed, fingerlings, fish health, and record-keeping (FAO, 2022; FAO, 2023b).

Along with broader efforts to strengthen the enabling environment, including public infrastructure investment, it is critical to improve site and water access and business development services tied to quality standards and offtake agreements.

Risks and compliance

- **Biosecurity and disease:** Pond pathogens and shellfish food safety risks require standardization, testing and depuration.

- **Climate and water risk:** Floods and salinity shifts demand careful site selection, raised dykes, drainage, and early-warning systems.

- **Market risk:** Price volatility and import competition require cooperative aggregation, hospitality contracts and value-add initiatives.

Potential opportunities for young agri-entrepreneurs

1. **Seed and feed:** Develop micro-hatcheries for tilapia and catfish and local feed hubs using agro-industrial by-products, paired with youth training.

2. **Pond management:** Introduce aeration, water-quality monitoring and stocking protocols; pilot rice–fish and vegetable–fish models.

3. **Shellfish safety and value add:** Expand depuration units, rack culture, and food safety training for women's groups; develop ready-to-cook packs.

4. **Cold chain and logistics:** Establish community chillers, ice plants and insulated transport serving multiple value chains.

5. **Market linkages:** Secure contracts with urban retailers and hospitality outlets, promote cooperative branding and leverage digital marketing.

ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN THE GAMBIA'S AGRIFOOD VALUE CHAINS

The enabling environment in the Gambia shapes youth engagement in agrifood value chains through policies, incentives, programmes, institutional support, and structural constraints, offering opportunities but requiring reforms to enhance inclusivity and effectiveness. Supportive policies, including the Recovery-Focused National Development Plan (2023–2027), National Youth Policy (2019–2028), and Second-Generation National Agricultural Investment Plan (2019–2026), prioritize food security, youth entrepreneurship, and import substitution, aligning with goals to reduce poverty, impacting 53.4 percent of the population and food insecurity faced by 60.2 percent of the population (Government of the Gambia, 2023, 2019; GBoS, 2023). The National Rice Development Strategy (2022–2030) and Livestock Master Plan (2022-2027) promote infrastructure and input access for rice, poultry and livestock, while fiscal incentives, such as tax exemptions and duty waivers, aim to boost investment (Ministry of Agriculture, 2022b; GIEPA, 2021). However, fiscal incentives often require investments over USD 100 000, excluding youth-led MSMEs. Other forms of support, including grants, input subsidies and extension services through the National Agricultural Research Institute and Gambia College of Agriculture and Vocational Training, are designed to provide access to resources and foster capacity development, though limited funding and rural reach restrict impact (IFAD, 2024; FAO and CCSI, 2021).

Programmes like ROOTS, GIRAV, and Nema, coordinated by the Ministry of Agriculture, provide inputs, training, and market linkages, but survey respondents and focus groups reported uneven distribution and bureaucratic hurdles in accessing government or donor-funded support (Agri-accelerator hub, 2025; Cf. World Bank, 2023). Organizations such as Gambia Tech, Sabab-Lou, and MyFarm offer high-quality and hands-on training in various fields, including sustainable production and business development, yet scalability is constrained by funding gaps.

Regulatory challenges, including weak seed certification for vegetables, phytosanitary controls for fruits, aflatoxin management for groundnuts, and biosecurity for poultry and aquaculture, limit market access and quality compliance (IITA, 2019; ILRI, 2019). Underfunded veterinary and extension services hinder technology adoption, while limited aquaculture regulations further restrict growth (FAO, 2022; Government of the Gambia, 2018b).

Land tenure constraints affect youth, particularly women, with only 1.1% holding secure tenure, which likely discourages long-term investments like tree crops (FAO, 2012; GBoS, 2023). Infrastructure deficits, including limited irrigation, cold storage, electricity, and poor rural roads, increase post-harvest losses and transport costs, exacerbating competition from imports (UNIDO, 2023; World Bank, 2024; UN Comtrade, 2023). The Gambia's trade deficit (USD 860 million in 2022 according to UN Comtrade data) arguably underscores the need for enhanced market linkages and value addition, as emphasized in the National Export Strategy (2021–2025) (Government of the Gambia, 2021).

Barriers to youth investment include limited access to financing and adequate training, land tenure issues and climate change impacts, with women particularly disadvantaged from constraints in land tenure, mobility, and ability to scale commercial operations (World Bank, 2022; FAO, 2022). The ICT for Development Policy (2018–2028) supports digital platforms to improve market access, but adoption remains low due to connectivity gaps (Government of the Gambia, 2018). Strengthening stakeholder cooperation, including youth representation via the National Youth Council, and aligning with the CFS-RAI Principles can enhance policy implementation and foster inclusive, resilient agrifood systems.

CONCLUSION

This value chain analysis identifies vegetables, poultry, fruits and tree crops as viable subsectors for youth-led responsible investment in the Gambia. These sub-sectors align with national priorities outlined in the Recovery-Focused National Development Plan (2023–2027), which emphasizes food security, import substitution, youth empowerment and climate resilience.

Drawing on literature review, survey data, stakeholder consultations and field visits, the analysis confirms that these sub-sectors offer diverse entry points for youth with varying resources and capacities.

Vegetables are a strong entry point due to low start-up costs, quick turnover and consistent demand. Poultry presents a strategic opportunity to respond to high domestic consumption and reduce dependence on imports while also creating linkages in feed production and integrated farming systems. Fruits and tree crops offer long-term potential for youth with access to land and capital, including in areas such as processing, value addition and linkages to high-value domestic and export markets.

Despite their promise, these subsectors face several structural and operational barriers common to the Gambia's agriculture and food systems in general. These must be addressed to fully realize youth-led investment potential. High input costs, limited access to financing, insecure land tenure, and underdeveloped infrastructure constrain youth investment. Climate-related risks further affect production systems and planning horizons. In addition, gender disparities persist, limiting young women's ability to engage equitably in agribusiness and benefit from public and private support mechanisms.

There is room to strengthen the enabling environment for youth-led agribusiness. Access to financing can be expanded through transparent and streamlined provision of low-interest loans, matching grants, and grants, using existing platforms such as the Social Development Fund and the National Enterprise Development Initiative (NEDI). Investment in infrastructure, including irrigation systems, storage facilities and rural roads, is critical to support production, reduce post-harvest losses and connect producers to markets. Young producers can be strengthened by improving seed certification, veterinary and biosecurity services, and extension systems' reach and quality. Young agri-entrepreneurs must have the knowledge and skills to operate viable agribusinesses through training focused on sustainable agricultural practices, processing, business planning, market analysis, marketing and innovation. Policy and programmatic frameworks should actively engage youth in decision-making to ensure that interventions are responsive to their needs, ambitions and lived experiences.

In summary, vegetables, poultry, fruits, and tree crops represent high-potential sub-sectors for young investors to develop thriving businesses and lead agrifood system transformation in the Gambia. While there are challenges, these areas also offer practical opportunities for engagement and development. With coordinated support from the government, development partners, and the private sector, youth investment in promising sub-sectors can strengthen the country's food system and contribute to sustainable development.

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