

## **THE HOUSE RESUMES**

### **AFTERNOON SESSION**

#### **DEPUTY SPEAKER [HON. MOMODOU LK. SANNEH IN THE CHAIR]**

**HON. ALHAGIE S. DARBO [BRIKAMA NORTH]:** It has been said that the deficit of the budget is D6 billion and the FPAC is trying to recommend that we try as much as possible to do cuttings in order to address that. That is the move [that is the desire]. However, it may be difficult for certain committees to actually do the cuttings as recommended by FPAC. Honestly, we intend to do it but it is rather difficult for us in some of the committees. I want to commend the FPAC for the job well done. In its report, they have fully captured what the Select Committees on Tourism, Arts, Culture, Youth and Sports submitted. As far as the tourism sector is concerned, I do not need to go over that. Perhaps, the only omission or observation that I have made [I have recorded that and given to Honourable Member for Upper Saloum as an addendum] I would like to share that with this House.

That portion of the Select Committee regarding Youth and Sports was left out. I think it was an omission when they were doing the compilation of the report. For the Ministry of Youth and Sports [the budget overview], the Ministry's total allocation for 2019 was D107,209,000 and for 2020 it was D113,398,000. The 2021 estimate is D113,930,000 [0.32%]. Out of that,

the development budget aspect is D16,526,000 for 2019 and D27,716,000 for 2020.

The 2021 estimate is D18 million [15.8%] and recurrent was D90.6 million in 2019. The 2020 estimate was D85.6 million and 2021 estimate is D95.9 million i.e., 84.2%. That is for the budget overview of the Ministry.

What was left out [additional] is the development aspect of the budget. The report of the FPAC is only limited to the recurrent aspect of the budget and now we have sent this as an addendum. The development aspect of the Ministry was allocated [as I said earlier] as D18 million and out of this D18 million, D1 million is for the Ministry and that is stationery and the other one is for the Gambia Shanghai Initiative [D17 million]. The committee has decided to maintain the said amounts for both the Ministry and the Gambia Songhai Initiative. Remember, it is only D18 million that is allocated for the Ministry in terms of development. Out of that, only D1 million is for the Ministry and D17 million is for the Gambia Songhai Initiative.

It could be recalled during the previous sessions that, we have been making emphasis on the Gambia Shanghai Initiatives; that the initiative should be replicated to other regions and we noted that the initiative [the project] is to phase out. In fact, by the end of next month, the project will be phasing out. Now it is going to be financed by the government. If we have gone this far and then enough fund is not invested in that project, it means we will have the project started, only to see it collapsed and this is exactly what we are trying to avoid. Let us allow the fund [D17 million]

not to be discretionary. The Ministry should come up with tangible programmes that should be invested in this project not only to continue but also to sustain the project.

As I said earlier, I requested them to replicate projects in other parts of the country. The then Honourable Minister gave an example of the Kundang Youth Camp that they are trying to replicate. Now there is going to be development work taking place at Kundang Youth Camp which is featured out from this budget. That is why the committee saw the need to maintain the allocation. That was why we could not cut down any part of the allocation. As I said, the other areas were properly presented by FPAC and we want to commend them.

On the other part, somebody made mentioned that, the committee is trying to increase the allocation for travels in the name of attending competitions on international events. The committee recommended for the allocation of travels to be increased for the Ministry of Youth and Sports, which was necessitated by the fact that this or next year, The Gambia is expected to take part in the Olympic Games. Our team is qualified to take part in the Olympic Games and funds are needed to give that support. We can do our local sports, we need the local infrastructure in order to promote our sports but where our athletes are qualified to partake in international events, they also deserve that moral or financial support that is needed to do so. That warrants the committee to request for augmentation of the travels in that particular area. We all know very well that currently, The Gambia is doing very well in the African Cup of Nations.

We are very hopeful that for first time, The Gambia may qualify to partake in the African Cup of Nations and that also requires travels. The country can only celebrate medals when we are investing. I do not think we can wait to be celebrating when we are not investing, that is why we are encouraging the government to spend in order for our athletes and sports organizations to be encouraged to bring home the medals that we have been yearning for and that is why the committee recommended that.

Of course, we have been urging the Ministry to be development-oriented because sports cannot be developed when we do not have the infrastructure. We only have one stadium i.e.; the Independence Stadium and part of the stadium is even dilapidated. We are encouraging the Ministry to come up with projects so that at least every year, we would be inaugurating a stadium at any part of the regions. By the end of five years, we will have been having five stadiums. This is the belief of the committee but in that aspect, the Ministry is not doing what the committee is anticipating.

Now we have what is called the Sport Development Levy. Before, the Ministry could not do any projection of the fund that is going to be realized. Now we have seen something like D27 Million that is projected to be realised from the Sport Development Levy. We recommended for that particular fund to be allocated to the Ministry but this one should be meaningfully utilised for infrastructural development. Others where we do not cut, we expect the Ministry to use that fund in order to develop. These were the observations made.

Besides, it is my personal observation regarding the roads that, if we recall during the supplementary appropriation, there were certain road projects that were approved and one of them is the Brikama-Mandinaring road and the other one is the Brikama-Kassa Kunda-Gunjur road. I have not seen anywhere how these roads are factored in. I want the Honourable Minister to explain the fate of those roads that were reflected in the supplementary appropriations because part of the money has been allocated. I have observed that there were some roads that were reflected in the supplementary appropriations but again they are benefiting again from the main budget. What is the fate of the other roads that were part of the supplementary appropriations and nothing has been said about them as far as this budget is concern?

The other one is Brikama market, for which D10 million was allocated and now I have seen D20 million. I want to ask about the fate of that D10 million that was allocated in the supplementary appropriations and what is this D20 million, is it an addition? I could recall, in the supplementary appropriations, Basse was allocated D40 Million. In this budget, they have allocated an extra D60 million, meaning 100 million. I could say Brikama market should now be about D30 million i.e., the supplementary appropriations plus this D20 million, I want clarification from the Ministry and the fate of Brikama-Mandinaring road.

**THE SPEAKER:** Thank you very much Honourable Member, your time is up.

**HON. OUSMAN TOURAY [SABACH SANJAL]:** Honourable Speaker, I think I have less to talk here because most of my points are dealt with by some speakers who spoke before me. I just want to make short overview and draw our attention to what we are trying to address and I think most speakers have highlighted that. If you look at the revenue and grants, the revenues we are expecting to generate and what we want to spend, actually there is a big gap and that is the gap we are trying to address here. That was why some committees were trying to cut and have savings to address the deficit.

Specifically, I will deal with the FPAC report. The interest I have is, by looking at the objective of this scrutiny, I think when we make savings, we should keep it aside to address the deficit. What I see is that, some committees cut and reallocate in the same Ministry. Some committees cut and save it but if you go to the table on page 2 of the FPAC report regarding [the Ombudsman], their approved estimate was D20 million in 2020. In 2021, they estimated D21 million but FPAC added another D4 million on top of that. I was wondering when I saw this because we said they were going to make savings to address the deficit. I do not know the reason for that additional D4million on that budget line.

The other issue I will raise about the report is the Education Sector. Obviously, we know that currently, we are dealing with COVID and some schools are restricted from opening for the whole period or some students

are attending a particular number of days and this will also affect the attendance of teachers in those schools.

If you look at this, we are anticipating that the COVID will go any time before the end of the year. Once that happens, we will need some other manpower in that sector. In the report, it is anticipated that some teachers will be recruited and I do not see where it is catered for in this budget. I think it is very important to take note of that because once COVID is gone we will go back to our normal schooling system and that would require other teachers to come in. If you do not factor that, it will be a problem.

Honourable Speaker, if you look at the youths, I am very happy that the committee did a very good job there because they did a lot for them when I looked at the budget. The Minister stood here answering some parliamentary questions regarding some constituencies and regional stadiums. The promise was that, come this budget, something will be allocated for some areas to at least make a start. I do not see anything coming under that Ministry. I do not know whether it is still a priority or not.

However, under the Ministry of Works, we all appreciate the fact that our country now needs a good road infrastructure because of that, I think everybody is really yearning to get good road in his/her area. Now the Ministry is doing very well but what I saw considering the deficit is that, we are trying to handle what the committee recommended regarding some additional allocation to some areas. I do not know how this came about but my problem is, if we are talking about the deficit and according to the

Minister's report, the debt is not sustainable because we are having high debt interest payment and there is no debt relief for The Gambia. We are just given a space to breath and that is just this year. If you accumulate that to next year, our next budget will really be high with debt interest rate. So, looking at that, I do not think it is sound enough to put additional allocation to some of those areas. That is my understanding regarding that.

So, we can only address this through increasing the tax or to reduce our expenditure and in doing that, I think we have to take a robust position. I do not think adding something to a budget line under any Ministry now will help us. My problem is the high deficit that we are trying to address and I have no problem in some of these things.

When you go to the Health Ministry as well, I had queried with my colleagues here because the committee also looked at the drugs and dressing. The committee is also of the view that our health facilities need to be well stocked with drugs and dressing at all times and would support any increment in this budget line item. In addition to the request of the Ministry for an amount of D200 Million, I want to relate it to what is currently happening. I do not know whether we suffer from serious drug and dressing materials in some of the hospitals in the country but my problem with this is, if you look at all these public hospitals, you have doctors, nurses who are running parallel pharmacies in these areas. I am thinking in my mind as to how these people are furnishing their stores/pharmacies and operating individually without running out of stock, and are working in the public health sector where the hospital is always

running out of stock. I think the monitoring on that aspect needs to be really strengthen.

I do not have any evidence to say that some of these materials/drugs are taken from the hospitals, but I am really sceptical that we need to look into that issue. So, basically, Honourable Speaker, all what I want to say for people to understand is that, everybody needs development but we have to cut our coat according to the limit of our economy. If you look at the economic effects of this deficit, it will increase borrowing and we all know the debt level we have. The high interest rate will also be affected and it can also influence inflation. So, these are some of the risks that we will face when we do not address this deficit. I am really afraid of this and I want us to look at this critically even if we are going to cut let us not put it in the budget again; let us cut and add it to the deficit to off-set it, that is my recommendation. Other than that Mr Speaker, I am really happy with what FPAC have done and all committees because it was a very hectic exercise and ministries will come with lot of evidence to justify their request of that particular amount of money.

It is not that the Parliament do not want to give out but it is the resource envelope we have. So, if you cannot have what is requested, you can offer what you produce and when you look at the whole economy, what we can produce is far less than what we want to spend. So, on that note Mr Speaker, let me take my seat.

**HON. MOMODOU S. CEESAY [JANJANBUREH]:** Thank you Honourable Speaker for giving me the floor. I also want to join my Honourable colleagues in telling FPAC bravo.

I have a feeling that the preparation of this budget should have been geared towards giving those departments and ministries that contribute highly to the GDP, for example Agriculture, Tourism, Health and Education. But like I had always been saying, Agriculture had always been left behind and again this year, we are informed that during the budgetary cycle, we were told that their budget ceiling was D433 Million and they prepared their budget according to that D433 Million. Apparently, what was given to them was D402 Million which led to a deficit of D33 Million, probably, the Ministry can tell us why that happened.

The second thing is, if you look at the Ministry of Agriculture, there are some activities that need to be put into consideration. Honourable members, I have been appealing that the Ministry of Agriculture is one agency that should be prioritized simply because it is only Agriculture that we may depend on post COVID. We had been informed here that we spent \$800 Million to bring rice into this country and we can stop that, if we put our efforts together. If we prioritize Agriculture, but are we doing that? No, we are not. In Agriculture, we have all been saying here since we came that, it is the backbone of this country but since from the First Republic to date, we only live with projects.

If you look at last year, Agriculture was given D2.5 billion but do not be fooled by that, the D2.5 billion because only D300 million was from the

government coffers, the rest are all project funds. This year D1.6 billion, again how much is coming from government coffers? D400million and out of this D400 Million, D200 Million is going into recurrent and only D200 Million is for development.

Is this the way we want to continue? Speakers before me have said it here that, it is high time we try to look into areas that would make us sustainable. This borrowing and begging cannot continue, there is no country that can live on this. Therefore, I would have loved to see Agriculture being prioritized. When they prepared their budget for D433million, some of the activities were left out and I would have loved to see the Ministry and us to sit down and look at those activities and assess how important they are and how they should be given allocation. D433million is such a small amount for the Ministry of Agriculture particularly the only D200 Million going into development.

Again, we have been informed that Agriculture this year alone was contributing D1.9 million. Before, we are all informed that Agriculture provides 20% to the GDP, it is reducing because of what, there is no serious investment without Agriculture. I would agree with you that there are lots of projects. I would agree with you that some of them need serious oversight. I entirely agree with you but Agriculture is the way forward for this country and if we try to ignore it, I do not think we will make any headway. So, I would recommend that Honourable Minister sit together with us and look at those activities. For example, if you look at important activities like Agricultural inputs, in fact, there are two other sub-

headings that were zeroed by your Ministry, probably, I am made to understand that there are no sub-headings that are in your accounting system. I can understand that but important issues like procurement of indigestion equipment.

We are all the time talking about Jahally Pacharr, it cannot function properly today because the canals are not properly functioning. Even the canals alone will consume lot of money if you want to revive it. I would have thought by now that, you are going to gear the funds in trying to make The Gambia sustainable in rice production but if we are heading into different direction, this can never happen. I agree a lot of people have dissatisfaction with Agriculture, I am dissatisfied also. I am a Gambian, a farmer and a rural person, a son of a farmer. The way Agriculture is going and any time we have meeting with them, this is what I tell them, Agriculture needs revival. We cannot leave it to die, if we do, we can never survive as a nation. A nation whose bread basket is in China or Thailand, I do not think we will be able to because heaven knows what is going to happen in post COVID. Probably very soon we will come to the end of COVID when the injections are available.

What is going to happen to those countries that rely on exporting rice to us? what is going to happen to them? We do not know and we all know that the rice they will be giving us will be the ones they kept for a long time before bringing them here. How about improving rice cultivation and livestock? Thanks to the D100 million that was given by the National Assembly last year that have improved Agricultural production. On that,

we have prepared a report and is going to come out very soon. That is the way I think we are going to go forward. From now on, at least every year we try to give a measure. Probably, we cannot meet the Maputo Declaration of 10%, you may not be able to do that but at least half of that should be possible if we prioritize.

If we give priority to other institutions, what may happen is that, we all have to suffer. So, on that note Mr Speaker I want the help of my colleagues here to understand that Agriculture is not about me, but about every one of us here. If Agriculture develops, we develop, if Agriculture fails, we are responsible because we are the people who provide money for Agriculture to be developed and very soon within the next one year, we shall all be running behind those farmers that we do not want to develop. So, I am appealing again, do not take it from me alone, look at the poor farmers in the rural areas that need the survival and put food on the family table at the end of the day. It cannot happen overnight but gradually we should be able to get there.

Finally, Mr Speaker, I had the chairperson of FPAC saying where are we going to get it from? But I am saying this is our bread and knife, if we prioritize Agriculture, we can be able to make it. It is not the Ministry of Finance. The Ministry of Finance did what they think they can do. If it is convenient for us, we can pass it.

**HON. OUSMAN SILLAH [BANJUL NORTH]:** Thank you very much Honourable Speaker, we are confronted with task that is dealing with three to four issues at the same time with only 10 minutes limited time that is

given to us. I will agree with the position that we need to change the approach that we should have started the process long time ago because the three issues that are before us are: we have the draft estimate which needs our thorough reflection, to review and also to comment, the other one is, we have the Minister's statement which is the position of the Executive in terms of the budget and also the consolidated FPAC report vis-a-vis the individual report of the committees all at the same time. So, I will agree that definitely we should change the approach if we have to treat the budget very well.

Honourable Speaker, I want to start by saying that we are also not engaged in mechanical exercise in terms of what we are facing. I understand the trust is to ensure that the deficit is reduce, that is to balance the budget deficit. There are two ways of going about that either to reduce spending, to balance it or to increase productivity, generate revenue to compensate for that. What is the approach before us? Of course, should we reduce spending considering the needs of the administration and the need of the population? I said no but how do we finance the deficit. As had been indicated that we are not here to engage in a mechanical exercise to doing the arithmetic, subtraction or addition here and there, but how do we ensure that this budget impacts positively on

the lives of the population, the people and also the development of the country.

I think the Honourable Minister for Finance was spot on in terms of the presentation of the economic climate of the country, of course against the backdrop of COVID pandemic. In paragraph six of his statement, he states that the 2021 Budget is designed to effectively respond and serve as both a mitigation and adaptation tool with emphasis on accelerating the pace of economic growth in The Gambia. In addition to promoting economic diversification, the 2021 Budget also places emphasis early on enterprise recovery, competitiveness, harnessing the opportunity arising from the Covid-19 and ultimately ensuring inclusive growth where no one is left behind. Of course, I will not agree more with this position but I have not seen this approach taken in terms of the draft estimate that is presented before us.

The Honourable Minister also in his statement in paragraph 8, states that the primary analysis of the micro-economic impact of the pandemic on The Gambia economy indicates that there is a significant slowdown in GDP which of course, the previous speakers have alluded to. In GDP growth, a decline in tax revenues and increase in health expenditures as well as multiple stressors on the 2020 budget arising from inter-alia, relief support for vulnerable individuals and an economic stimulus packages for business. Of course, there is a relief package in terms of support to vulnerable individuals but what is absent is economic stimulus package, a comprehensive one. There is one for those in the tourism sector, but there are small scale operators in the economy in the informal sector that need support. I have not seen it reflected in the budget, particularly the outlay for the Minister of Trade and I was expecting this.

The Honourable Minister in paragraph 23, of his statement indicate that 2021 Budget will place emphasis on social service delivery. These will include additional expenditure on priority areas such as drugs and medical supplies for our hospitals across the country, vaccines for instance and the rehabilitation of major health centres across the country. This too, I have not seen it reflected in the Draft Estimates and I think I will agree with this posture that this is what the government should be doing but if you look at health, in fact, I will come to the consolidation report of FPAC, by the way, they have done a good job within the short period of time. Equally, the committees have also been able to fulfil the requirements of the Standing Orders in terms of looking into the budget and coming up with report together with conclusions and recommendations. I think few ministries have satisfied that like the Ministry of Works. I think we need to be investing in the development aspect of our budget.

You see Ministry of Health have benefited during the COVID, there is a lot of interventions in terms of support. The D500 million, the other D50 million, D750 million for the Ministry of Health. Perhaps, this might be one of the reasons and the Honourable Minister might have been informed, but if you look at this, it is really paltry in terms of development. The development budget of the Ministry of Health is 8.17%. We are talking about health centres that need to be equipped in terms of infrastructural development and machines. As we speak now, the Edward Francis Small Teaching Hospital does not have a standing CP Scan which is a very important equipment for health service delivery. So, I was expecting that these are the things we should visit. Although as a committee, we were

supposed to start an interface bilateral with the Ministry. The officers did not come, unfortunately the Permanent Secretary who is the board controller was not with us. It was the Permanent Secretary [2], and what we expected in that engagement was not what we really realized at the end of the day. We wanted them to come in with full force.

The issue of health in The Gambia together with other African countries have made the commitment of the famous Abuja Declaration that our governments with our [GLF] Gambia Local Funds will not commit anything less than 15% of our budget to health and this time around, we get under 8%. That is the reason why as a committee, we are not interested in any deduction, we just accepted what they have given us. We were in fact struggling for an increase so as to meet that commitment of the government but if you look at it even with that, it is all recurrent not development.

I want to call the attention of the Honourable Minister for finance or Honourable Speaker that definitely, it is development that we expect, even if it is not going to be half or more than the allocation for ministries, it should be a sizable chunk. It is not bad to be borrowing but if you borrow and invest it in infrastructure, you would not need to be doing that for some time, or you invest it in a productive sector that will be generating profit. There are some ministries other than the social service ministries, like education, health, and women can of course generate revenue, but all the other ministries apart from this three, can be utilized to generate revenue. We can borrow, invest in them and stop borrowing then that will

be self-sustaining. There will be in addition to sustaining their operations, they will also be generating extra income for the country to invest in other areas.

My intervention in terms of the Estimates is with regard to the position that the Honourable Minister stated here in relation to how they are approaching this coming year, of course, against the backdrop of the COVID. As far as the position is concerned, it is something one can support but you cannot see it in practical terms in the budget. So, I think when we go to the consideration stage, we will be discussing it in detail to see how we can adjust here and there to ensure that the welfare of the people is really addressed.

In terms of the FPAC report as a committee, we have particularly with health..... *[interruption]*

**HON. OUSMAN SILLAH [BANJUL NORTH]:** Anyway, with health, I think most of this can be dealt with in the consideration stage. Basically, the amount that they have requested, they said they want allowances to follow some of the officials who were at the hospitals and have now been transferred to the central Ministry. This is what is reflected and as a committee, we said, of course, just like it has been argued here with judges that medical workers also need to be motivated. We need to do everything possible to have this mechanism to retain them within the system. They dominate both level of the facilities and also at the level of policy making that is the Ministry. If there is anything like this, we will also consider other cadres such as the nurses. They are also doing

tremendously well especially those at the labs. The entire spectrum of the Health Sector needs motivation. I think everybody can bear testimony of what they have done in putting their lives on the line by serving as buffers between the COVID and the population. So, they really need to be motivated and retained in the public sector because we need them.

As a committee, we talked about overseas treatment of which 20 million is allocated, this is where we can reduce D10 Million. When COVID struck, no one was able to go out, so the lesson is that let us improve our facilities and invest in the development budget particularly with health, so that all the hospitals, health centres around the country and health post are equipped at their level so that there will be no need for referral overseas where you will be paying lot of money.

As a committee, we did not touch lot of things in terms of cut, but this is what we agreed on, that if there is any necessary area where we can cut, we can do so.

**THE SPEAKER:** Thank you very much Honourable Member, you have exhausted your time. Can any Honourable member please move that the Assembly sit beyond 6:00 to finish the business of the day?

*Question proposed*

**Motion to sit beyond 6 O' clock**

**HON. DAWDA KAWSU JAWARA [UPPER FULLADU WEST]:** I move the motion that we sit beyond 6:00.

**THE SPEAKER:** Any seconder:

**HON. SAIKOUBA JARJU [BUSUMBALA]:** I so, second. Thank you.

***[Question Proposed, Put and Agreed to]***

***[The Assembly sits beyond 6 O' clock to complete the business of the day]***

**HON. MUSA AMUL NYASSI [FONI KANSALA]:** Thank you very much Honourable Speaker. As rightly alluded to by Honourable Member for Wuli East, we are faced with a responsibility which at the end of the day, we should be proud to take ownership and that is scrutinizing the Estimate of Revenue and Expenditure for 2021.

Honourable Speaker, to begin with, let me first ask for clarification from the Honourable Minister for Finance before I am out to misinform the people of West Coast, more so the people of Brikama particularly the Supplementary Appropriation Bill in which the Brikama market was catered for at the tune of D10 Million as rightly alluded to by Honourable Member for Brikama North.

Now in the Estimate Honourable Speaker, we are seeing D20 Million. Are we comfortable to go back and tell our people that a sum of D30 million have been budgeted for work at Brikama market?

Honourable Speaker, coming back to the Ministry of Lands, of course, I am chairing the Select Committee on Lands and Regional Government, in our submission to FPAC, they have taken us to another level, the rest is for us as a parliament to adopt and go further and see what could be done to

address the issue of the deficit that each and every one of us is concerned about.

Honourable Speaker, this Ministry have a budget line which supports Local Human Resource Development and here we are trying to link this particular budget line to what it can do in addressing the issue of Youth and Employment. RDI is a household name Honourable Speaker but Look at the condition of RDI today, I think it needs thorough reflection and see how it can be allocated the amount of money that the Ministry budgeted for which is D5 million as opposed to the D2 million. I am happy to report that, we are reliably informed that personnel from the Finance Ministry travelled with the personnel from the Ministry of Lands to go and see the condition of RDI, but it was even a challenge for them to go upstairs and see the dormitories where the trainees at RDI are living because they are scared of going upstairs. How about the staff and the trainees at RDI who are taking the risk of living in those conditions? I think it is important to give it a thorough reflection and see what could be done in face lifting the condition of RDI.

The same thing to the Ndemban Skill Centre, this will help in addressing youth migration from the rural areas to the urban areas, and when they get the required skills, they can be in their own communities and invest. So, this is where we should look at how we apportion some of the funds especially the Ministry of Youths which the select committee had advocated for what could be done to help the situation of the youths in this country. These are departments that can help in addressing youth and employment.

So, it is very key and let us focus on RDI, Ndemban and Jullangen. Once that is done, the congestion within the skills training centres in the urban area will be addressed.

Honourable Speaker, there is one thing, last year, I remembered applauding the government because this is something which is a constitutional requirement and that is the establishment of the Land Commission. The Land Commission is established but the Land Commission is under resourced. The Land Commission is not able to operate, they need to be facilitated. We had few engagements with the Land Commission together with the Ministry. We have seen where their constraints are. Knowing their constraints, we advised them to come up with a budget that will be supported and we will do the advocacy because land issue is a problem on the length and breadth of this country. We have had serious cases that land conflicts have caused in this country. Operationalizing the Land Commission will help them to address some of those issues that we have within our communities. So, I want us Honourable Members to reflect thoroughly on the budget line for the Land Commission. What they budgeted for 2021 is D7 million but in the estimates, it is D4 million. It is almost the same amount which was given to them last year which had made it very difficult for them to be seen and felt across the length and breadth of this country.

Honourable Speaker, everywhere in the Greater Banjul area and even in the rural areas, it is very difficult to regularize construction work going on within people's property. A lot of people embarked on construction without

getting a development permit from the department of Physical Planning and Housing. The department of Physical Planning and Housing field staff find it very difficult to be in the field because of mobility. So, the committee after having bilateral with the Ministry felt that, there is need to provide field staff with a motor bicycle and here the budget line is D650,000 and not 1.6 that was a typing error.

Honourable Speaker, as alluded to by the previous speakers, one thing fundamental is that, we must learn as a country what lesson have, we learned from covid-19? From March, all travels were suspended but that did not stop the country from moving and that did not stop the government from going about its business.

Honourable Speaker, workshop, conferences, seminars were all suspended yet, we were moving as a country. So, I am saying this simply because almost every Ministry, department or agency have a budget line which talks about travels, workshop, conferences and seminars. There are travels that we must have, so we need to prioritize and be guided by some of those activities that we cannot leave out because they are key. Honourable Speaker. We applaud the government for the foresight in ensuring that communication network which is a challenge, they have the mind and the heart to see how best they can address it, particularly in the area of road infrastructure. Here, Honourable Speaker, we need to be guided because the ambition of the government is to construct 87-kilometre road network if I am right, comparing it to what is budgeted Honourable Speaker, we need guidance. Is it actually applicable, realistic

and attainable? It is important for us to know as a Parliament because we cannot start a project halfway and then they are suspended. Now that we are confronted with issues of budget deficit, once we are guided, we can see how we can prioritise and know where to start and where to end which is also very key Honourable Speaker.

Finally, Honourable Speaker, on Land and Regional Government, subvention to councils is part of the Local Government Act on Section 128 [3] which is saying 25% of councils' development budget. If you look at D2 Million per council is not even 5% of the development budget. Last year something good has started at least for the first time of the history of this country since the enactment of the Local Government Act. We have seen the government allocate D1 million to each council. We thought it is work in progress and we are going towards attaining the 25%. Interestingly enough, this year is the other way round, we either move or we stay where we were. It is far better than going one step forward and then two steps backward because supporting the operations of councils particularly in the area of their development budget will help councils also reach out. We are talking about 60/40 and 60/40 have lots of connotations. On 60/ 40, people are asking how is council coping up to address the issue of 60/40 but again, what is the Central Government doing to support the development budget of the councils that is also fundamental.

Honourable Speaker, the Agriculture Select Committee and the Health Chairperson have dwelt on health and agriculture. I may not want to take much time instead, I will reserve the comments that I have as far as

agriculture and health are concerned until we get to the committee stage where we will do more advocacy, more talking to try to let people understand why such activities need to be supported and funded for.

**HON. MUSA AMUL NYASSI [FONI KANSALA]:** Chairperson of FPAC rightly said that the deficit is D6 Billion. We should see how we cut it down but there are activities also that we really must look into and ensure that they are implemented.

Finally, on the cadastral mapping Honourable Speaker, this is what will give the government information on land availability. This is where councils will have knowledge on their resources and again will help in addressing the issue of revenue leakage. Here and there. We talked about GRA collecting this much and we applaud them but did we go further actually to know how much revenue have not been collected. We the issue of cadastral mapping, I believe we will begin to see change in the amount of revenue that leaks. So, I want to implore on the Ministry of Finance to further engage with the Minister of Lands and see how much they can be ...  
*[interruption]*

**HON. SAIKOUBA JARJU [BUSUMBALA]:** Thank you very much Honourable Speaker, though I am little bit sick but I will try to do justice. When I was served the draft budget, I asked myself what my task is, how much does the government intend to spend? Where is the source? What programs are their priorities? Are those priorities responsive to national development plan and the SDGs? What is the interest of my constituency

Busumbula versus the interest of the whole nation? I was able to get some answers.

Honourable Speaker, I want to ask the Minister of Finance this question, does his Ministry or the government have economic planning unit or economic research unit or a department which will mainly do research on the economic activity to be able to advise the government so that Gambia can go away from coming every year and say let us prioritize agriculture, lets prioritize youth this and that? Can we not do a holistic research, come with tangible programs that will empower the Gambia to be economic sovereign? I have no problem with the D6 Billion deficit we are talking about. My worry is the program that the government want to implement come 2021. How are they responsive to the need of the people now? Have the government get any plan to be able to get us away from this yearly deficit. Working toward getting Gambia away from deficit would be better. Is it difficult for government to get money and invest it in productive areas where income could be generated so that Gambia could be saved from borrowing from outside?

Why could the government not have plans to empower the institutions that could generate income? What is the problem in empowering institutions to be self-generating income whereby they can sustain on their own, some part of their development project? This is simple, these are policies that I think the Gambia should look into. I want to remind my colleagues, the National Assembly Members that this 2021 budget is very important to us, if it is not the last, it is the second to last of our five-year term. It is the

year that the National Development Plan is also ending. So, we should be asking ourselves what is the level of the implementation of the programs of National Development Plan and what is the responsiveness of this budget towards those plans?

Honourable Speaker, I want to advise the Ministry to invest in economic activities, empower institutions to be self-productive. My colleagues are talking about agriculture, I feel ashamed sometimes to talk about agriculture. Since I came here in 2016, even long before I came here, we have been talking about agriculture. I could remember the former President Yaya Jammeh used to say, I spend more than the former government in agriculture, but the PPP Government was able to raise more than his government, what is that? Are the people in those sectors ready to work? Do they have the qualification or the willingness to work? I can't talk about the qualification. Do they have Gambia at their hearts? We have what we called program-based budgeting, If you want me to ask for agriculture, I just tease some of my agricultural colleagues here last year, we were able to give them D100 million and they wanted more at the time, I told them no, you have to show me how best you implement that 100 million.

In as much as we want to empower agriculture, the agricultural institution is not yet ready. Let them have programs and come to the National Assembly. You see from the ensuing debate; every National Assembly Member has a passion to invest in agriculture but I am just a member representing. I want agriculture to develop but the people who have the

knowledge of agriculture are not ready to work and do not come with plans, therefore, giving them money, I do not think it is necessary.

On that note Honourable Speaker, I want to advocate that, we use our regimental men and women in uniform to invest them into agriculture to produce because I know they can do it. They work under command; they have a proposal that they want to invest in agriculture. If the agriculture sector is not ready, Hon. Minister, I want you to empower them. Let them work to transform and in that, they will be able to generate income for themselves.

Honourable Speaker, I asked this question to myself, since 1965, every end of year during the December budget, we come to the parliament and National Assembly Members pass budgets only to sustain institutions but not to create development for our people. Why did I say that, the 35 billion dalasi that you want to spend, the greater percentage of it is on recurrent and personal emolument with very minimal percentage on development Will we have to revise our plan to cater more for development than recurrent and personal emolument? The Gambia government need to reform in order to be able to do that. Let us reform but in that, I want to highlight some Ministries though with the meagre amount of money that was given to agriculture, their development budget is more than the recurrent. Let us congratulate them on that. If you go to the Ministry of Works, their development budget is more than the recurrent. Those are some of the types of allocations we want. Come with programs, give us development projects you will see whether we will not negotiate with the

Ministry of Finance to allocate you money. Let us change and invest into the productive sectors.

In that regard, for us to be able to invest more on development, as I said, we are in 2021 and also in the time of the Covid, which is a very crucial moment for us and the country. Can we not forgo and put an embargo or strict measures on travels? Let us not prioritize travels in Ministries, in sectors. We all know that there are some statutes travels Ministers and permanent secretaries can do but when that is done, let them go and send approval and make clear that this is statutory based on the law, you allow them to go. You could make savings and transform them into development.

I want to suggest telecommunication, my friend here you are communicating and you do not buy credit for anybody. The institution is not giving us telephone but we call. Can the Ministries not forgo those telephone allowances, residential allowances, especially for those staying in their houses who are being paid house rent, can we forgo those ones and change them into development. When we do that, we will be able to make savings. I know Honourable Speaker you want me to stop.

Honourable Speaker, the country is expecting something to be said about our salaries. We are not expecting salary increment but we are expecting salary restructuring. We were told by the finance minister the other time. We want to remind you as to when the salary restructuring will be because we have been told that this salary scale was since colonial days. Could there be any way to restructure it?

Honourable Speaker my second to last point, Honourable Member for Brikama North talked about the road from Mandinari to Brikama. We shared that road and I have been speaking about that road since I came here in 2017. Let the government not see that road as a road to Busumbula or road to Brikama North. That road is for the Gambia and I told you the only fuel depot in the country is in Mandinari. We find it very difficult with those trucks carrying fuel in and out of Mandinari because the road is very bad. We said there is a road from Mandinari to Brikama. My friend, I want government to look into that because in the supplementary, we have indicated it. We have seen the name indicated in the supplementary and is not in the final budget. So we want to ask about that. Then the Brikama market *[interruption]*

**THE SPEAKER:** Your time is finish you have exhausted it. Is not your time please sit down? Member for Niamina East the floor is yours.

**HON. OMAR CEESAY [NIAMINA EAST]:** Thank you very much Honourable Speaker. My appreciation goes to the FPAC Committee and all the other Honourable Members who participated during the scrutiny process. It is quite important that any document that is before the National Assembly to be scrutinize and the most important part of that document is to be given due attention.

Honourable Speaker, we are faced with a document that is meant to salvage this country. Here is a document of course, I mean the 2021 budget that is designed to actually solve the situation that our people are encountering. Here is a budget that is actually prepared to meet the need

of the electorates out there, the vulnerable people, the homeless people, the voiceless people, and the jobless people, and all the other individuals out there waiting.

Here is a question Honourable Speaker, is there a possibility for this document before us to help the people realize the quality health service delivery that they deserve? Is there a possibility for this document to at least help the people out there realize the quality education that they deserve? Is there a possibility for this very document to help the people out there to realize the quality road infrastructure that they deserve? Honourable Speaker, I doubt if there is a possibility because we are told by the Honourable Minister for Finance that we are faced with a document that has a deficit of D6 Billion that is where the problem is. That is why I am doubting the possibility for this document to help the ordinary people out there.

Honourable Speaker, out of the 6 billion in question as the deficit of this budget, the little that we are able to secure or that we expect to obtain at the end of the day to spend a greater percentage of this is going to recurrent and not actually development. That is where the problem is.

Honourable Speaker you would realize that we will be spending a greater percentage of this budget to just recurrent. It means to maintain people in their offices, having people coming to work every day, having people being in their offices drinking "Ataya" /coffee and all that without having their functions implemented, simply because there is no fund allocated for development to better utilize or execute their functions. Is there any need

for us to keep maintaining people in those offices for them to be using our internet watching whatsoever and not doing what is expected of them? This is simply because there is nothing much allocated for development for them to better perform their functions. Here is the question Honourable Speaker and it is very challenging.

Honourable Speaker, the number one objection that I have with this budget is that, since 2017 when I came to Parliament and started scrutinizing documents of this kind Honourable Speaker, we keep on seeing things appearing year in year out in this national budget. If I may name, we keep on seeing furniture and fittings, we keep on seeing office equipment, we still keep on seeing small office equipment. They keep on giving all these things differently when they might actually mean the same thing. Imagine, they keep on giving us office maintenance or building maintenance, for instance, the National Assembly, we are all roofed under the same building. Each department/unit under the National Assembly will have a budget line for office equipment. Each unit in the National Assembly will keep having office equipment which is different from small office equipment. We keep on seeing this appearing in the national budget. I will propose to the National Assembly Members here that, we have the ultimate authority to do whatsoever that we feel is to the best interest of our people. Therefore, there is need for us to better examine what are the figures allocated in this various budget lines and if need be, we remove all of them or reduce them drastically in order to help the people out there.

Honourable Speaker, the other point is, there will be a catastrophe if we do not try to initiate or better manage the land conflicts that we are have in this country. Nobody here in this House, nobody within the four corners of this country is ignorant of the land crisis that we are having within the four corners of this country. Any region you get to, any district you get to, you found land crisis between communities, within communities and in the community to community. These are our brothers, sisters, fathers and mothers who are there fighting day in day out when you the Minister, who has the temerity to establish that land commission do not actually defend that budget line allocation for them to better execute their functions.

The Honourable Chairperson of the Local Government Committee did talk about it. They are simply asking for 7 million in order for us to better manage and sort the land crisis that we are having in this country. We are still insisting that, we are reluctant to give them that 7 million but we want to maintain four million for them when that cannot actually do much in order to solve the land crisis that we are facing in this country. I will propose, I am not just speaking, that no matter what we do, no matter how much deduction we are going to make, at the end of the day, we will still have a budget deficit that is obvious. Nothing you and I can do, So, we continue to see our people suffering, before we continue seeing our people dying, before we continue seeing our people killing each other, let us better use part of what is saved from the FPAC Committee to increase the budget line for the land commission for them to start doing their functions, so that all these crises can stop that is my proposal.

To continue Honourable Speaker, there is this rural road project. I am flabbergasted Honourable Speaker because the National Assembly struggle very hard to ensure that, the rural road project they call it, was approved in this National Assembly and was debated bitterly. The National Assembly Members have to scrutinize and ensure that everything was approved. there is nobody who is against development and progress of this nation, but after everything was approved, the delegation went there with the President and the President has nothing much but to say that some National Assembly Members have to reject this rural road project. I could not remember in any way seeing any National Assembly member voting against that rural road project that was brought here in this National Assembly in a form of Supplementary Appropriation Bill. You know this Honourable Minister for Finance, you struggled with us here but we have to approve it at the end of the day. So, if we have people out there saying the National Assembly Members, some of them went against this rural road project, then you are trying to bring conflict between the elected Members and the electorate and that is not helpful.

Honourable Speaker, in the area of agriculture, last year D100 million was given to Ministry of Agriculture. Obviously, agriculture is very close to my heart. I am a child of a domestic worker, I was fed from agriculture from my parents and of course, my fees were paid from agriculture, farming I mean. So obviously anything that will motivate, anything that will mechanize agriculture, I am in for it. The D100 million that was given, there is nothing much that we have seen but the donkey project they call it, because they want to satisfy the people, they want to make people happy,

they want people to support them politically, they went and bring some donkeys to show the electorates out there, when they were having a rally or whatever they call it which is not helping. It is in full package; we were expecting that full package but not to rush things just to satisfy the electorates. We are not into that Honourable Minister.

Honourable Speaker just to conclude, I am from Niamina East, the people of Niamina East by law, are paying their taxes as any other individual is doing in any part of this country. Obviously, I expect by law, the 60% that we are entitled to, be ploughed back to the people of Niamina East by giving to them in a form of development, in a form of road, in a form of good hospitals, in a form of good education and you name them. But because the people of Niamina East decided to vote or support the opposition, the government is doing everything to deny them good road, the government is doing everything to deny them good health care system, the government is doing everything to deny them good quality education. The government is doing everything to deny them from development needs. Is this the way we want to move our country? Just because we are opposition, there is no laws ... *[interruption]*

**HON. LAMIN J. SANNEH [BRIKAMA NORTH]:** Thank you very much Honourable Speaker. First of all I want to seize this opportunity to thank FPAC for making our interventions very short with regards to certain areas. Notwithstanding, I still have some issues to deal with.

First of all, we have the 2021 Estimate before us that if you go through, we are anticipating that this year, we have a revenue of 25 billion which is

divided into tax revenue and non-tax revenue. Interestingly, Honourable Speaker, I want to lay emphasis on the area of budget deficit below the line item more especially, the financing aspect of it. The issue of domestic borrowing is my major concern. I think when we talk about domestic borrowing, we need to be very much aware of the private sector aspect of this country. When you talk about domestic borrowing, we believe Treasury bill is going to be sold out and most of the commercial banks come in here. This is another interesting area, when we know that our commercial banks need to be private-sector driven, but if there is domestic borrowing, if you go there as a private individual who wants to venture into business, you find it very difficult to get loan from these banks by virtue of the condition in the area of collateral and even the interest rates. So, these are big problems and they boil down to our electorates, so we need to look at that.

The deficit here is D6 billion which is on the high side, and if there is another way of financing other than the domestic borrowing aspect of it, I will be more than the word grateful. Going into it Honourable Speaker, I know much has been said by my able Chair when you come to the Ministry of Regional Governance and Land. I only want to buttress certain areas that is the issue of land commission that the Niamina East has already elaborated. Since last year, the Commission has been established and 4 million was allocated to them. In fact, this was not disbursed to them, so that is a problem. At least for a start, to avert our problem, these are potential areas in our country which we cannot be nurturing.

We have land issues in and at the borders even with the Republic of Senegal, we have lot of issues when you come to these borders. So, we need to adequately resource the commission to take care of internal disputes in our borders and land issues in the country. More especially, the allocations to the local councils which is a constitutional provision. I think the two million that is apportion to each council, should be considered.

Apart from this Honourable Speaker, I just want to draw the attention of the Assembly to the COVID which is a very interesting period. This has adverse effects on our economy which everybody agreed to, but if you look at it, we are anticipating that before the middle of this year, we will completely forget about it. This is what we are hoping and praying for. But the post-effect COVID economic recovery, we need to look at that. How do we widen our economy? I think I have a different opinion with my colleague. I think the only way out to post-economic revival is agriculture, which is a very interesting area.

Honourable Speaker, if you look at the agricultural budget 2020, it was D2.5 billion that have been allocated. This year, the estimate is D1.6 billion and this has drastically reduced by 916 million deducted from the Agriculture Ministry. We also need to invest into the productive sector and agriculture is the way out. If you look at the area of inputs, these have reduced from D42.5 million to D13 million. The research and development have been reduced from 30.5 million to D5.6 million. If you look at entirely the agriculture subsector, it has been reduced completely by D916 million which is on the higher side. Again, on the estimate under page 34, detail

revenue estimate by collecting agent. In our revenue, we were anticipating that agriculture will generate D1.9 million as a Ministry that is going to generate income which is already factored in this estimate. If you want agriculture to do more than this, I think a lot should have been done, but I really want to concur with FPAC because they have done our job very easy.

Under input subsidy, under centralized service we have input subsidy of D200 million that has been budgeted, and we want this one to be transferred to the Agriculture Ministry, the parent Ministry because since it is there for the procurement of fertilizers and seeds for the farmers, let it go to the Agriculture Ministry. Again, we are also demanding the D300 million that is also coming from the subvention under centralized service to go to agriculture too. People are very much sceptical about the D100 million last year that was given to agriculture, but if you look at it, this 100 million is divided into department of agriculture, livestock and seed secretariat. Under this, you have power tillers, combine harvesters that are procured for our farmers and we have to understand that there are lot of sine hoes, probably, the report is yet to be tabled because we intend to table it in this particular session but the estimate come first before we do anything. Before the end of the session, the report is going to be tabled for you to see. We were opportune to go out to see for ourselves some of the material that have been procured and this year we were even fortunate to have that abundant rainfall that give us a very good produce, but if you look at it, the rainy season is gone we are in to the dry season, how much rice do we want to import in this country to feed our nation when we have our Jahally Pacharr and others?

We can still adequately invest because the only way to post COVID economic revival, I believe is agriculture. So, agriculture is very important since there is COVID, the sector needs to be seriously resourced. D916 Million is on the higher side for that to be deducted from agriculture. So, we need to look at that aspect.

Honourable Speaker, with regards to the Ministry of Works, first of all, I want to make this clarification as a Select Committee. What we agreed on as per our recommendation, and as far as this particular Select Committee is concerned, regarding the allocation, what it entails in the FPAC report, I think this was a misrepresentation. This was not our recommendation but what we recommended if I am permitted to read, I will just explain. There were some savings made under recurrent with your permission, Honourable Speaker, I would like to read these things.

Under recurrent general administration, the Committee recommend that the budget estimate for maintenance of vehicles in 2021 which amounted to D1.5 million to be reduced to D1 Million, so, we have a saving of D500,000 from there. You also go to development budget, under development budget the Committee recommend, the Ministry of Works to have a massive increase of D557, 2020.

**HON. NDEY YASSIN SECKA [NOMINATED MEMBER]:** Thank you very much Honourable Speaker. I think he who speaks last just take the remnants. In this case, I just want to make it general that I am scared as a National Assembly Member. I am scared and I am concerned due to the fact that, this deficit of six Billion is still existing, and as some of my

colleagues said, we are just going to 2021, I was thinking that by this time, we would have been raising our eyebrows to talk about a good development that we had in this country. Since that is not the issue, let us think of how to go about development, recurrent and PEs are taking us nowhere. We are all talking about Rwanda and do we know what Rwanda did to be where they are now? Can we not do the same thing as Gambians. I just do not know, sometimes I just do not want to hear speeches because what people say here and what is happening is different totally just like day and night, darkness and brightness. What is wrong with us? I think we as National Assembly Members, let us take drastic measures to make sure that we monitor and scrutinize just as we did because if we do not scrutinize, we would not know what happens.

Look at the bilateral, any Ministry that we invite will tell us that, this is not what we gave. My problem was the ceiling that they were telling us. Do we ever know that there is a ceiling and if there is a ceiling how much is the ceiling? What is the ceiling and how much is it? Do we know as National Assembly Members, since 2016 up to now, we do not know the ceiling that is put before all the Ministries. So where are we heading to? I am really scared and I am concerned.

We have to compare our revenue and estimates and what our deficit is. Let us look at it. Are we fooling ourselves? My other thing is that, the lump sum that we are advocating, if you ask whether there is anything for people with disability, yes, it is in the budget, but where is it? Go to the Department of Social Welfare, it is dilapidating and it will collapse very

soon. If it collapses, let us not say anything, but it may happen and we are talking about maybe, if the Disability Bill is there, there will be fund. What about if it is not there, it means we will not have anything.

What about health, some people who are sick will not come here to talk about agriculture. Let us invest more on health, if we are healthy, we will be wealthy, we will talk about agriculture here up to tomorrow. I know those are the areas we should prioritize, health, agriculture, education, youths, women, children, and people with disabilities and what about children with disability what is there for us? So, where are we and what are these estimates telling us? I cannot digest anything from this budget to be honest. I am just looking for what is available for us. How can we go towards development? I am not saying we forgo this recurrent budget completely because if you do not have it, an empty bag will not stand but this is too much. I think we should invest more on development not on recurrent and the other thing is, if we approve it, if we say this is what we approve, something else will come not what we approved. So, what is the issue, what is happening?

I want the Honourable Minister to explain to us what is happening. We are not rivals, we are brothers and sisters in the executive and in the National Assembly. What is stopping us from coming up with a realistic and concrete measures to make sure that our country moves forward, and this is what we are looking for. We all need development since 2016, that was the time that I knew about this budget that we are doing the same thing. There is nothing that makes me raise my eye brows. I am talking from my

own opinion, I am not seeing anything that we think, if we talk about it, it will bring development in this country. Who are we? We are Gambians, what is wrong with us. I think by all this, as Honourable Member for Wuli West sometimes say, I think we should try by all means to make sure that we sacrifice. What is stopping us from sacrificing? To make sure that we leave a good legacy here in this country for our people.

We were talking about system change, regime change, better Gambia, one Gambia, new Gambia, but I am not seeing anything new since I was going to school up to now. Since I knew myself up to now, the capital city is just the same as Banjul. So, what is new and what has changed here in this country? We are talking about budget every year, any time there is budget estimates, people will call and tell members to make sure that when you go to that place, do something about it because we are not seeing any changes. Where are we now? What shall we do? Honourable Minister, please tell us what shall we do? I think everything that we said here, people will say yes and then at the end nothing will happen. Where are we heading to.? Thank you very much.

**HON. DAWDA KAWSU JAWARA [UPPER FULLADU WEST]:** Thank you Honourable Speaker. I think the nominated member Ndey yasin Secka just spoke my mind here. We have to ask ourselves where are we heading to with this kind of budgets? Honourable Speaker, this could be our last budget that we are going to approve and witness the implementation of the next budget that we might approve here. We may not be part of its implementation, so it does not matter what we approve here next time, but

for the last time, this is something we can do and see to it that whatever wrongs we might have done in the past are corrected.

Honourable Speaker, like the Nominated Member did mention, we came into office hoping to help this government stabilize the economy, stimulate growth, provide employment and all kind of stuff to the private sector by reducing government dependence on borrowing and to cater for its expenditure and stuff like that. We want to reduce poverty by investing in human capital ventures like health, education, agriculture, youths, women, higher education, research, fisheries and tourism, things that can actually help the Gambians to take ownership of their daily realities as well as their future.

Honourable Speaker, after one week revision and five other budget approvals, in fact, we are adding to the poverty problems of the Gambians that is the fact. Our debt portfolio is not getting any better, even though, we have rebased and rebased time and time again on our GDP. We are not seemingly giving priority to sectors that are going to plough back revenue for the government so that they can actually cut back their reliance on foreign donors to drive our existence as an independent nation.

Honourable Speaker, the Minister like ourselves, I think we all mean well. we are all patriotic Gambians who want to serve our people, the Minister did his job by presenting to us a budget that he thinks in his view, is the best policy for this country. FPAC did their part to advise us what they think we should do, but the ball is with us. Whatever we do here today, would determine how the next one year is going to be like. We have to

honestly ask ourselves whether this budget is a true representation of the views and aspirations of our people. Is it going to help eradicate poverty? Is it going to stabilize the economy, address our budget deficit, budget envelope or our debt portfolio? No! it is not going to do that, rather, the areas I have mentioned before, health care, education, agriculture, youths, women, higher education, fisheries, and tourism, we are spending monies on allowances, travels and per diems, vehicles, fuels, lubricants, advisers and in functional projects at the tune of 25 billion which we cannot afford and we think, it will generate income. We also assumed that the donor partners would come in with D12 billion dalasi to help us. Well, we want to borrow another D7.6 billion dalasi on top of that to finance what they call "below the line items" for the budget deficit of 6.1 billion including the foreign domestic amortizations, we are going to borrow 7.6-billion-dalasi next year, where we are paying about six Billion dalasi on debt and debt interest.

My point is this, I do not have problems with whatever the government wants to do. We all want development but why is it that for all these years, we cannot afford to do these projects because any responsible government would look at what you have and see what you can afford not to borrow and do certain developments. That is why we are not able to do all these things till now. Why all of a sudden, we think it is ok to borrow monies that we cannot even think of how we are going to pay them, and you invest them in areas that for the next 20 years is not going to bring back any dividend but Just because of some few roads we are getting here and there. This is why I made the argument on this Banjul projects and the

Hakalang projects that, we want them, but let us take long term loans [concessional loans] where we can actually spread the course over 30 to 40 years and we might not be paying anything now until 10 years later and we still enjoy the roads now and the economic benefits it will bring to that area. But no, we thought we can put it on the GLF, we do not have enough to pay for our existence but we want to actually take from there and pay for certain other developments that have no short-term interest or benefit. Apart from the social aspect, people will complain that we want this road since 50 years ago and we still do understand that but there are so many other ways to finance them and not even through the GLF. That is why, I differ with the hon. minister to think that, it was a good decision. I beg to differ and I still think I am right in my position.

So, we should ask ourselves in this budget now that FPAC have done their part. They have cut what they think they can cut, but I think we still have an opportunity when we go to the Committee level and see how much cut we can do because we honestly need to cut Honourable Speaker. This is our last budget that we are going to scrutinize its execution. Let us not pass a budget that we know definitely is not going to help us today neither is it going to help the future generations that we represent. So right now, we have pregnant women who are at labour and they might not make it because we do not have adequate equipment in these hospitals to take care of them. The lights might go off in certain areas. Right now, we have certain kids that are born with deficiencies because they do not have the right intakes of vitamins and other nutrition when their mothers were pregnant.

They could be our own wives, sisters, mothers, but we do not consider them in this kind of things rather, what we are looking for is things that are going to give us political capital. Health is very key, before we think about roads and other things, let us think about our health, food. The Honourable Member for Wuli West did mention here that all decisions we made today, might affect how the future interest rates would look like. How inflation is going to affect the same people, we think we are serving because any increase in our spending means more borrowing for the government, and interest rates will go up at the commercial banks and it also means that the cost of rice, bread, oil, potatoes, onion would only go up because input duty would go up at the ports. So, we ask this question, who do we think we are serving? So, I am appealing to this august Assembly, it is nothing personal and politics aside, I have no problem, if we can afford all these, but not at the tune of 7 billion dalasi borrowing on top of all these other revenues that we have, it is just too dear and did not worth it.

In 2017, we found that Yaya Jammeh wanted to spend D19 billion dalasi on expenditure and we said, it was too much, we said he was being irresponsible and we cut it to D13 billion. What were we to do with that D13 billion, when the same ministries, the same personnel, and the same work force that we are spending 31 billion and still thinking of increasing here and there on fuel allowances, travel allowances and per diems. I do not know, I do not want to make a case making me like if I am unreasonable. I am but I am appealing to this House that we still have the opportunity, we still have till tomorrow 12: 00 midnight to cut this budget

and help the Minister tighten his belt and deliver the same mandate, the same results. It can be done. Just yesterday, the British Parliament rejected to increase certain benefits of theirs because they are in the Corona Virus and they are expecting to tighten their belts. why can we not and we are relying on those people to help us with handouts. We can do the same, we are poor we should act poor. Anyway, I do not think I need to waste time. I think I have made my point. Thank you very much.

**HON. YAYA GASSAMA [KIANG EAST]:** Thank you Honourable Speaker for the floor. I would like to begin by appreciating the work of F/PAC in consolidating the reports of all the Committees of the National Assembly. Having said that Honourable Speaker, I am worried about the fact that since we took over office in 2017, the same budgetary problems keep coming all the time. Since we started in 2017, we had hoped to make significant changes in the lives and livelihood of Gambians. This is the fourth year and by next year, this time we would be packing our bags to leave for good. As we speak right now, these problems that we found here in 2017, are still persisting helplessly. It seems that we have either run down of ideas or we have failed in our responsibilities not only the parliament, I mean the entire government have failed in their responsibilities to make the desired changes so that ordinary Gambians would benefit.

A budget deficit of D6 billion dalasi is indeed worrying and when we look at the 2021 budget, this deficit is expected to be funded from either borrowing or taxes or cutting certain expenditure items to fund the deficit.

All this have implications, borrowing will increase our debt portfolio which is not convenient. Taxation is a no-go area because no matter how you impose these taxes, it is the ordinary people who are going to feel the burden. As we are saying now or as we are seeing cutting expenditure items, it is going to cripple some of the important programs of certain ministries. So, it is like we are caught in a catch 22 situation in which as we want to solve another problem, more problems keep coming. This is a very sad situation.

Honourable Speaker, since we are limited to only ten minutes, I have some key concerns and I want to appeal passionately to this august Assembly to try and consider those areas. In the Minister's statement, he spoke about adaptation and mitigation of Covid-19, we all know that when Covid-19 struck somewhere around March this year, every aspect of the economy is impacted negatively, every aspect of government is also impacted negatively especially schools. Schools have closed down for nearly eight months our children have not been going to school, they have lost considerable amount of teaching and learning time and the effect of this is going to continue to be felt for quite some time.

One of the strategies that the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education adopted after the opening of schools, was to make sure that schools complied with the Covid-19 guidelines as prescribe by the Ministry of Health. Now, this response strategies include reducing the number of students in the class room and that has force almost all the schools in the Gambia to go into double shifting. Schools are doubled shifting; some are

forced to reduce the number of days that some students go to school. For example, I understand that in some schools, certain classes are required to go to school for three days and then alternating classes will also be given another 3 days that is one strategy.

Now, the overall effect of all of these is that, the number of classes right across the country have increased. This naturally means that the number of teachers that the system needs to keep operating has increased and by default also, teachers or schools have been forced into doubled shifting which naturally means that, these teachers have to be paid double shift allowances. Now, this area is a serious concern because if these issues are not addressed, very soon we are going to face very serious problem in the education sector. Already, there is a shortage but the shortage is going to be more serious and of course, when such things happen, it is usually the rural schools that suffer. We can expect that teachers may refuse to go to schools or they may even strike as they are already used to, but this is understandable because you cannot increase somebody's workload in terms of number of hours per day and you do not want to give them additional allowances to keep them working, that is a problem. I would want to urge this Honourable House to advocate for more funding because the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education needs up to D200 Million to address that and I know, there is some money available for it. Of course, for example we can tap into contingency funds, I think there is money available for that.....

**HON. YAYA GASSAMA [KIANG EAST]:** The Ministry of Higher Education Research, Science and Technology are receiving the most serious problems. Last year, during the budget session, I made an appeal to the Ministry of Finance to increase funding for the Ministry of Higher Education in order to help them pay the scholarships.

Last year, they requested D83 million and it was not given. I even prescribed or told the Ministry of Higher Education where that funding could be tabled. I was not heard; I was ignored and you see the same problem is coming back again to hunt us. Now, this time instead of D85 million, we need up to D93 million dalasi to address that situation, because if it is not addressed, we can expect the worst to happen this year. Why? only D40 million is allocated to the Ministry of Higher Education for open scholarships. We have our students going to the University of the Gambia, we have some of them studying abroad and the Ministry is expected to provide more scholarship for those that have just completed grade 12 and hoping to go to the university this academic year.

So, where there is no funding to address the problems of last year, I wonder what we can do again to keep this people going. I think we need to consider that very seriously if scholarships are not given it means... *[Interruption]*. Anyway, we need additional funding for that. There are also skill centres; Ndemban is a structure that is under construction but it has stopped for a long time now, and the structure is dilapidating. There is also Mansakonko and Julangen that need funding. I want to personally

appeal to the Assembly to help these projects. On that note, I thank you Honourable Speaker.

**HON. FATOU K. JAWARA [TALLINDING KUNJANG]:** Thank you very much Honourable Speaker for giving me the floor. I would also like to join my colleague to commend the FPAC for doing justice to the work.

Honourable Speaker, before going further, I would like to draw the attention of this Honourable Assembly to the budget line of health. What we have on page 2 compared to page 21, what they have under development is like 8% is allocated to development Honourable Speaker and going by the document presented to us by the National Assembly paper on the proposal for the improvement of the allowance to the medical doctors and the PHD holders, I think this is a case for concern to every Honourable Assembly Member regarding this allocation.

If the Honourable Chair may permit me, I will go through the medical officers' allowances, the responsibility allowance, special skills allowance, professional allowance, House rent allowance among others. But just to check on the consultancy allowance for the Minister of Health D115, 000, I think we need to check on this compared to the development that we have in our health sector.

Honourable Speaker, our health sector is in serious crises, we all know that many women died during labour, so we need to strengthen the demand for social services and the allocation for that part is very limited. If we can also look at the program for people who have mental health, that one also

needs to be boost up. Honourable Speaker, in order to attract the investors, we also need to strengthen our health sectors.

Honourable Speaker, before going further again, I would just like to make some comments with regards to the budget. I do not think during the next budget session, I will support any budget or any line Ministry that do not show the revenues that they generated yearly. For instance, Ministry of Interior, what they generated from passport, ID among others and the fine imposed on illegal fishermen by Navies, we need to know. I know some of them are captured in the budget line but they need to come up and show the masses what they are gaining so that we can be in a position to allocate for them, but we cannot keep allocating for line ministries while we are not seeing what they are generating. The mining site [petroleum], I think they also need to do something. I do not have much to say because my colleagues have captured most of the parts that I wanted to intervene, but with regards to the defence sector also, I recommend for the adjustment in their rent and wages because they say it is part of GAF regulation for them to be given allocation on that, but it was cut to zero. On that note Honourable Speaker, I thank you.

**HON. SULAYMAN SAHO [CENTRAL BADDIBU]:** Honourable Speaker, I want to thank all the Honourable members and the various ministries for the exercise that we had in the previous weeks.

Honourable Speaker, our task regarding the budget before us, is neither easy nor difficult. We have the cake and the knife to cut and allocate where it is necessary but sometimes, I wonder why we should cry more

than the brief. We cry more than the bereaved as Honourable members. The destiny of this country lies in our hands, and this budget is going to determine what type of Gambia we will have in the near future.

Honourable Speaker, by looking at the budget, you do not need to become an economist or an accountant to know whether it is a deficit budget or not. The task that we have today or days to come is to look at how to reshape the budget to suit the interest of the Gambian people.

Honourable Speaker, our budget should be oriented in a way to better our living conditions. Our budget should be oriented in a manner to address institutional problems in this country. Honourable Speaker, the budget should be oriented in such a manner to link sustainable development goals 1, 2, 3, and 4.

Honourable Speaker, this budget, we all know that Gambia had also been hit by Covid-19 and all our revenue sources were seriously hit. Now we have a budget here, our expected expenditure is very high and the revenue source that we have here, is it realistic to sustain our development that we want to do? It is not. We must have a budget that is realistic and attainable, but we cannot have a budget that is not Sustainable. At the end of the day, we will experience inflation and if this country falls short, we will be blamed; National Assembly members will be blamed. We are not here to be "yes sir" no sir" members, we must make a decision for the benefit of countrymen and women. We must make a decision; we must look at the budget and cut where it is necessary, and we must look at the development project that can be achieved within a stipulated time. We

cannot just start a race from different angles, at the end of the day, we will not know what we achieve. We want to kill ten birds or twenty birds with one stone, it is not possible. Money does not fall from the sky. At the end of the day, we put the Ministry of Finance to task as where they will get all these funds from. Everybody wants their road to be constructed which is not possible. We must give ourselves time, we must prioritise.

Honourable Speaker, let us look at education, I am not using road construction as a yardstick for development in this country. I believe the number of graduates that we have in this country can also be used as a yardstick for the development of this nation. This young people from the University of The Gambia, where can we absorb them? It is very important to find out the solution to the problem. Unemployment is a problem and it is in this country. Is our budget oriented in a manner to address unemployment in this country? The condition at the University of The Gambia is very poor. Lecturers are not motivated; students do not have a better place to learn. You have to stand during lectures. Primary education is poor in this country. It is only donors or individual philanthropists that are supporting schools. Teachers are not motivated, we have to look at the budget, since we are now in the COVID, children are alternating. Some are going in the afternoon; some are going in the morning and the same teachers teaching them. What kind of stimulus package do we have for those teachers.? Honourable Speaker, we are at cross roads and we have to decide.

Fishing industry, what kind of investment are we putting into our fishing industry? Agriculture, I think is high time we priorities. The debt service is very high and how can we address that situation?

Honourable Speaker, you are an economist and we expect you to save this country. COVID is here and is not yet gone and the whole world is hit by COVID. They are trying to put up measures to the global economy. Gambia is not doing that, instead we are spending more than the revenue.

Honourable Speaker, looking at certain items in the budget, I do not think when we reach at the committee stage, we should accept those budget items.

Presidential advisers, what are they advising the president on? Let them go to the political bureaus and work so that we take them out of our budget. They are not playing any adversary role, it is manifested and seen. Let them be in the political bureaus and serve as advisers there. The permanent secretaries and the ministers are the advisers to the president. We must tell each other the truth; we must help and save this country.

Honourable Speaker, with regard to the president's "meet the famers tour" or laying of foundations, how many vehicles do escort them? How much fuel would they use? It is a waste and we need to cut the cost and invest it into better sectors. We are seeing loopholes and everybody is keeping quite as if we do not care about what is happening in this country.

Honourable Speaker, travel expenses is getting higher and higher. Last year, we all witness what happened but this year in the budget, we have

seen D376 Million. That should be reduced. I am not saying that we should not have a travel vote but we should reduce it. Honourable members, our budget as I said, it must be designed towards poverty eradication, youth employment, education and health.

Higher education, will take me back to Ndemban where there is a skill centre in Ndemban which has been there since time immemorial. We need to find solution for that, we need to equip it so that young people can learn skills, but nothing is put there in the budget. So, we must graduate from a budget that is only politically designed but the budget must be socially designed to serve for its purpose. We should look at it and prioritize. We know that road construction is also fundamental as far as development is concerned, but should we take all the resources and put it into road construction and make other institutions to suffer? In the budget, most of the institutions and ministries are suppressed. RDI, the institution that has been known for delivery and building skills into young Gambians who are serving in different sectors of this country, the place is now dilapidated, staff are not motivated. So, what do we do should we pass this budget like this? I think tomorrow, we have a great job to do. Let us revisit the budget, let us cut where it is necessary, let us make sure that is fit for purpose. The trust lies on us. The Gambia that we want, The Gambia that we said is a new Gambia and things must work in the right direction and is us that can do it. I thank you all for your kind attention.

**HON. BAKARY CAMARA [KIANG CENTRAL]:** Thank you Honourable Speaker for giving me the floor. Let me equally join my colleagues to thank

FPAC for a job well done. They have made our work easy. I have few areas to talk on Honourable Speaker, the first one is basic education. I think our focus should be on social sectors. Covid-19 like my Honourable colleague said is still around and we do not know when Covid-19 shall leave us. We have a situation where most of the schools are operating on double-shifting to minimize the number of students in classes and some even have classes on Saturdays. So, what I am foreseeing in the Ministry of Education's budget is that, there is a need for us to put our contingency in the event that, these teachers in future ask for anything because we do not know what would happen. Covid-19 is here and they are working, I think something should be done to address their problems because education is one of the most essential areas and what I have seen in their budget, like Honourable member said not only recruitment but also make contingency plan for teachers that may ask for something in future. In fact, the plan is, they want to continue teaching, there will be nothing like first term break or whatever. These are some of the areas that we need to factor in education.

On Higher Education, we all complain that the Ministry is not given enough scholarship because they are not given enough money. What is given to them, we have seen some increment, but to me I am not satisfied with that. It is the same Gambians who will complain that people do not have scholarship in this country and the only thing we can do to solve that problem or to minimize it, is to give them more money because we all queue at the end of the day at their office to ask for scholarship and they cannot provide. We have the public university in the country which is

under-resourced in terms of finance, or whatever. These are some of the areas.

Honourable Speaker, I have seen in the budget that the government is paying lot of money when it comes to rent and rate. I think government has land in this country, why is it that the ministries are renting private properties? We do something for them to build their own offices so that we can save money.

On traveling, this is not your priority that anywhere you go in this world, people are not putting much emphasis on travelling because of the Covid-19. So, why not we slice it, we look at the budget that is given to all the ministries in terms of travelling and drastically reduce it. Let us focus on areas that are really important rather than travelling.

Honourable Speaker, I have seen road construction as one of the areas that the government is putting much emphasis on, or attached great important to it. Fine, we all know road construction is very important, when we have good roads, economic activities are enhanced. But do we have enough resources, where are we going to get this money in terms of getting these roads being constructed. You see we have to do things gradually, even if we are to construct one road in a year let us focus on that one when we finish it, we move to another one but if we want to start 2, 3, 4, 5 at a go, at the end of the day, we will not succeed in terms of completing any of those roads. We have seen the Ministry of Agriculture in the provinces, they have seen unfinished projects and there is no hope on finishing those projects. So, why is it that we want to bite more than we

can chew? Let us do things gradually so that at the end of the day, we will be there. If you look at the development or road construction regarding my region Honourable speaker, no area is being factored except that of the Kiang West that I have just seen in the budget. It is only the Kiang West Road that is being factored in that road construction. We have seen that; the people of Kiang now have the electricity and then the Minister of Interior have been advocating for the construction of fire and rescue station. A land has been identified in Kiang where fire and rescue station could be constructed, but for 2021, I have not seen anything for that particular project. So, in other areas that are given, we must try to minimize. Road constructions like I have said, when we complete one, we move to the other one, if we want to do more roads at the same time, to me is not going to be possible.

Honourable Speaker, the issue of land dispute is very common in this country, and we have seen and realized that there is land commission but like the Honourable Member for Foni kansala said, why is it that this commission is not operating? They are doing nothing absolutely. So, we must work and make sure that we have land commission in place trying to solve land disputes in this country because they are increasing on daily basis. So, if we can get more for them so that they can be fully operational and then do their work effectively. So, these are some of the areas of concern that I want to talk on except on defence and security. Last time, as a member of the Human Right Committee, we went around and then we visited detention centres. Thank God that I have realized that something is being given in terms of prisoner's diet. We were told that

they are given D5 since colonial days. What can D5 gives you for a prisoner's lunch, D5 for diner and there is no breakfast. At the end of the day, It is the police officers who will put their hands in their own pocket to get food for detainees at the various detention centres. I have seen something is now given to them so that, it will certainly solve that problem. On that note Honourable Speaker, I thank you very much for giving me the floor.

**HON. AMADOU CAMARA [NIANIJA]:** Thank you very much Honourable Speaker for giving me the floor. I do not wish to take that long. First of all, like my colleagues, I also wish to thank the various committees and that of FPAC. The committees have done wonders, this is what is expected of them. If something is brought before us, we need to scrutinize and see what is best for the people you represent here.

Honourable Speaker, what is before us is the budget as highlighted by other members, the 2021 draft Estimate of Revenue and Expenditure from the Ministry of Finance. From their end, they have done their part in fulfilling their constitutional requirement and now it is before us for consideration. I just wish to thank the Ministry too, especially the Minister and his able director of budget. Definitely, I know you have done a tremendously good job and I just wish to thank you and commend you for that.

Honourable Speaker, first of all on the revenue side, if you look at the budget, it is divided in to two sections; revenue and expenditure. We are expected to generate the revenue from various sources ranging from GRA

and MDAs but my emphasis will be on other ministries, departments and agencies. Some might term it as a minor thing or whatever, but I think it also needs to be looked at. Definitely, GRA is doing wonders, we have seen that every year, they are improving from ten billion, eleven point something billion, thirteen billion, unexpected revenue collection. I think we definitely need to commend them for that and I think they can still do more. But for the other MDAs as highlighted by previous speakers though, it may be small from the Ministry of Health on their charges. Fisheries, Interior and Agriculture are also ministries that can generate revenue. These are ministries that we definitely need to put our eyes on especially, the various select and standing committees to make sure that, we help them, help ourselves and realize more revenue coming in because if we cannot get more revenue, definitely whatever that you want to do, it might result in to loans and then that is what we are running away from.

Honourable Speaker, coming to the expenditure side, as highlighted by previous colleagues, and my Honourable Chairperson who have spoken extensively on that but I just wish to emphasize also on the need for the government to have a special budget line for the procurement of family planning services because these are essential commodities that we cannot do away with. All the FP services as we are told by the Minister, is being procured by donors [UNFPA]. So definitely, we also need to be doing something from our own local funds to at least get FP services for our reproductive and child bearing mothers.

So, Honourable Speaker, regarding the Ministry of Health, there is also another recommendation from our committee relating to allowances, but to me, I think it is either you do all or you leave it. They said they need special allowances for doctors and also PHD graduates whom you know that, when they are moved from one unit to the other, they just need to be moving with this allowance. I think this should also be reflected on other cadres like the nurses, the public health officers, the lab scientist and so on. If that is not achievable, I think it is better wherever you are, and whatever is catered for, you go with that. If you want to have those allowances as a medical doctor you need to be performing the duties of a surgeon or gynaecologist or whatever. that specify your role. But if you are at management level, I think these are allowances that we can do if possible, but if not possible I think we just let it go.

Honourable Speaker, moving forward to the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare, this is a new Ministry that was created sometimes back in 2019 and I think special attention needs to be given to this Ministry. If you look at it, their budget is minus 0.39% of the total GLF component. I think is very small, though members are crying that we should be adding here and there but I think we should give special attention to this particular Ministry because this is the Ministry that deals with our women and children and the marginalized people in the society like the disables and others. If you go through our committee's recommendations, these are issues highlighted and I think, we definitely need to give special focus and attention.

Honourable Speaker, moving towards the Ministry of Works, Transport and Infrastructure, we have seen their budget increase especially that of the development budget and I just want to differ with my other colleagues not that, I am a beneficiary no, but we have to look inwards. We cannot be going out expecting development to be done by outsiders, expecting to be going for loans, grants and others for building our roads. If you see we are talking of good healthcare and good education access and others, definitely, if we have good roads, in the rainy season, if you have a complicated case, let me give example of Nianija a complicated case that needs referral out to maybe Farafenni or Bansang from Nianija, and you do not have any access roads, how do you expect that patient to survive? I think we need to be thinking critically and look at all these variables from other sectors.

Definitely, I think it is a good gesture from the government, Ministry of finance and Ministry of Works to be looking inwards to see where possible from our own GLF sources, to get a portion here and there and do some of these major roads in the rural areas and urban areas. I just want to appeal to Honourable Members to definitely look critically to this, because we already started with the Supplementary Appropriation and now, we are just advocating for minimum allocation in the tune of D210, D260 and D300 Million. These are figures that we can start with so that we can spread it in different budget cycles and be able to complete it. If we want to rely on outsiders, definitely, we have been crying for years and we will continue to cry. Then like I said, during the previous adjournment debate, had it been, we are bordered with Senegal, probably we will start

protesting and say let us go and be part of the other countries because this country do not value us anymore. I think the Honourable Assembly have started that good gesture that they have given back to the people of Nianija and other marginalized areas, and I think it will continue from this budget too.

So Honourable Speaker, definitely I just want to crave the indulgence of the entire membership of this Assembly to look at this budget critically though, the deficit is huge and we see where we can cut and make savings. If possible, reduce the deficit to a bearable figure, so that the negative impact it will have on the economy like deficit budget will be definitely reduced to a level that will be bearable. I think that is the whole essence and that is the whole emphasis and I think it is doable. Let us, do it? Thank you very much.

**HON. ASSAN TOURAY [BAKAU]:** Thank you very much Honourable Speaker. I think I have the shortest contribution since most of the issues have been highlighted by my colleagues.

Honourable Speaker, going through the allocation of the budget, the amount allocated for the Ministry of Agriculture compared to the amount allocated for the Ministry of works, there is a big gap of which, I think I have a different feeling. The huge difference is that, since Agriculture is described as the back bone of the economy, I will put a question to the Honourable Minister as to why there is these huge differences?

My second question will be, is this allocation politically motivated since at this current time, the construction of the roads should not be given priority

over agriculture, health and youth development? Again, there is an allocation on travel expenses. On my view, with this COVID situation, I have the conviction that, the allocations made for travel expenses should be reduced since the pandemic is still existing and we do not know how soon it will go. My last observation is on the allocations of the presidential advisers, regarding their salaries. My question is this, what are they advising the president? Are they political advisers or advisers that are there to advise the president on national interest? I understand that the budget allocated for these allowances and salaries are tax payers' money. Tax payers' money should be allocated to individuals who are serving the nation and not serving an individual. Honourable Minister on that note I thank you very much.

**HON. ALHAGIE S.B SILLAH [NIANI]:** Thank you very much Honourable Speaker for giving me the floor. I also add my voice to thank the FPAC committee for the job well done.

I am going straight to the point as an agriculturalist. I thank FPAC for the consideration and approval of the D300 Million that is supposed to be given to the Ministry of Agriculture.

Honourable Speaker, regarding the D100 million that the National Assembly has approved last year, it has made a lot of impact in the agricultural sector. So just to name a few of what was purchased from this D100 million, include sine hoes, Seeders and the approval was done based on their request, which the report will later highlight. Sixty million was given for crop production, D20 Million was given to livestock and 20 million

for seed secretariat. This is the first time; the seed secretariat was able to purchase from the government's coffers an amount of D18 Million worth of seeds for the farmers. We have also purchased some Power Tillers and rice Combine Harvester, the marrow farm combine harvester machine used, also came from that D100 Million. Another Combine harvester is there and that has addressed the post-harvest loss. So, I would have loved those who were talking about agriculture that they are here, but they are already out.

What I am telling this Assembly is that, agriculture has three advantages or disadvantages. These are the three factors; nature, government and farmers. As I used to say here that nature depends on the rainfall patterns resulting to poor or good harvest. When it comes to good rain or good harvest, the second thing is about the government marketing, if you go round now, there are lot of watermelons around but no market for them. So, it discourages farmers not to grow more. If you expect some thousands of Dalasi from your produce later, at the end, you see it falls short of expectation, you will become discouraged. The other aspect is on the farmers themselves, attitude, in most of these projects coming, you do not expect a doctor or a technician to go and do the practical aspect for the farmer. They are there to teach them. I am part of those extension workers who were teaching farmers but the problem is attitude because you do not expect to build a store, and a sheet of corrugate moved from that store and then you say, it is the argic personnel who will come and replace that corrugated iron sheet. This is for the farmers and the store is for the community. So, these are some of the reasons why you cannot see

most of the impacts in certain projects, for example, Projects are given to them like poultry production, and they will be provided with all the facility that is the house, the feeds, the drugs and the bags, they will just use it for one year, after which you will not find any of the facilities in the poultry house. So, these are the other things that also affect the agricultural production, but we assure you that this money which you have allocated for the Ministry of Agriculture through the Select Committee, we will make sure that, we will utilize it to our utmost best. This is because out of this D100 million, we cannot remember where government has purchased a vehicle for agriculture. From this money, we purchased four vehicles for livestock and other regions have been benefitting from those vehicles, but we went round and found that there, and we saw it. Even the vaccines, there are a lot of vaccinations that happened when we went for oversight function. We asked farmers and they said their animals have been vaccinated. So, to name few of those benefits from that 100 million, the report will tell you more about it.

So, in terms of budget also, like what we have seen on the allocation for agriculture, other institutions like GLMA and WALLET zero was allocated. That means. they want that institution to fail or just to eradicate it. So, I do not think that is necessary because even NARI during our oversight, we found out that the money allocated to them is very small. So, I think consideration should be done on it and FPAC has shown justice to what we wanted and that has been given to them.

On the issue of roads, I am not saying no to roads but is the government really interested or are they ready to do the road construction? I was at the laying down of foundation for the road construction, I was part of the people who were there. What supposed to be done is that, the committee should be briefed about the cost, time, and completion of the project but as we said here, we assumed, it may be political briefing because if you see most people who spoke here, are all politicians, nobody came from the Ministry of Works. The Minister, the consultant and the contractors did not speak. So, are they serious in implementing that project? I think what we are there for is to make sure that, the committee knows the benefit, the cost of the money and the length. The permanent secretary was there, he is chairing it but at the end of the day, he was overcome because the former chairperson was the political adviser who first spoke. He was saying that, let us make sure that we talked about politics before we come to the real business. What he was telling them was that, chiefs and Alikalos were or should be behind the president, and everybody who came, all spoke about that. We will make sure that 2021 he wins. So, they did not even tell them the benefit of the road and at the end of the day, it was the Permanent Secretary who was highjacked as a chairperson because none of his ministry's officials spoke about the road itself. Let us be serious or let the government be serious and we leave politics aside and go straight to the point that is what we are here for.

I am in for the road and I really concur on the benefits and I even say in that gathering that thank God because during past governments all the roads were constructed by World Bank, ADB or donors but this one is our

tax base GLF. So, we expect the road will be very good and it will be very useful for us. We assume that the road will be finish as expected, but is that going to be possible whether our revenue can accommodate it is another question.

The women enterprise fund, we spoke here and we approved that. So, what I expect is that this fund is coming from Women Bureau passing through the councillors. So, the councillors are none political. All what they supposed to do is to make sure that all women will be inform if the funds are there but they cannot be taking as party lines or my people are there so they will not be informing other who are not in line with them. So, it has already been started, information is coming to me that councillors are going without informing other people. I think the Women Bureau should consider that also.

On scholarship, to my part I will always appeal to Ministry of Higher Education that our people need scholarship and we have seeing that the scholarship has been drop drastically from 92% to 40%. I still concur with the committee that at least let them remain the D92 Million for scholarship. On that note Honourable Speaker thank you.

**HON. MUHAMMED NDOW [BANJUL CENTRAL]:** Thank you very much Honourable Speaker for giving me the floor.

We have a budget estimate before us here which has a deficit of D6 billion Dalasi. There is a recommendation that is saying that the savings made by the various committees should not be ploughed back to the budget. I respect the recommendation very well but I am saying no to it. I want it to

be ploughed back to the various sectors that is Agriculture and Tourism. These are the engines of economic growth, without these sectors, the country cannot move, we surely depend on loans and grants. The expenditure of this budget is planned to be spent from the GLF. So, investing in these sectors will help us to boost the economy. Within three years, we can have a very vibrant economy. Gambia is one of the countries that have the poorest economy in the sub region. We are one of the countries that have the highest rate of unemployment.

So, these two sectors can boost the economy and it can help us to reduce the percentage or the rate of unemployment in the country. It will help young people, women and People from different sectors to be able to secure jobs. We always advocate that “we grow what we eat and eat what we grow” yet, we are not investing in this. I have talked about this in this parliament about reviving the cotton industry in the Gambia which was helping us very well and we are still not doing it. This needs investment, we should invest in this sector, but can you just imagine giving Agriculture 1.81 %. Last year it was D486 million and this year D402 million which is very small amount. This cannot help the country to move anywhere.

Talking about tourism 0.17%, it is reduced too, and we know that tourism creates lot of employment in this country both directly and indirectly. It helps us to gain foreign currency. In fact, the loans that we are supposed to pay, we are all saying that is on the high side. These sectors can help us to pay these loans because we pay in foreign currencies. So why can we not invest in these sectors? Relying on loans and grants, it always comes

with conditions that sometimes do not favour us. So, where is the independence that we are talking about? Where is it? Even in this budget, most of the funds that we are expecting, some of them will be loans and grants. If the institutions or organizations fail to give us these loans, what will we do? The country can shut down and everyone will suffer. So, giving huge amount of the cake to other sectors forgetting about Tourism and Agriculture will not take us anywhere. We will not move. These are the sectors that will help the country to have money and spend in to the health sector, the education sector and all other sectors. So, we have to really consider them. The deductions that have been done by various committees and do not want them back to the budget, it can go to the budget. It is an investment, a positive one for that matter. So, what are we waiting for? 45% of it can be given to Agriculture, 45% to Tourism and the 10% to Higher Education on scholarships. We know that the University that we have here is a private University I can say. We call it public University but people struggled to pay for their tuitions. If you go to Senegal Sheikh Anta Jobe University is free and they are paid stipend and everything. We do not have all those things here, so, we have to support Higher Education and give them a little bit of allocation for them to be able to help the needy who wants to pursue or further their education to higher levels. We have students suffering within Africa or outside the continent, so we should consider that too. There are students who have graduated for so many years with good results, and they are not able to secure scholarship. It is not that the Ministry does not want to give them scholarship but maybe they do not have enough resources to give them.

So, it is very limited and minimal. I am appealing to all the National Assembly Members to support what I have just advocated here and give the one billion deductions to these sectors. Thank you.

**HON. MOMODOU CAMARA [FONI BINTANG]:** Thank you very much Honourable Speaker. I think here we all agree that there is a deficit in the 2021 budget, and our main aim is to reduce the deficit. Honourable Speaker, if we want to reduce the deficit to stabilize the economy, we must prioritize. In prioritizing, it must be in line with the NDP and the SDGs. We have to look at whether the budget is in line with the SDGs. That should be our main focus because we are here to approve a budget that we think should have reduced the poverty of the Gambian masses.

Honourable Speaker, there is a ceiling for every Ministry set aside by the Ministry of Finance and I would want to know from the Minister what formula did he use to establish a ceiling for every Ministry that is very important. So, I would want to know that, and I would also want to know that you have a basket, a pocket which we cannot go beyond. All the committees here are advocating for increment in their ministries, but it is important that we cut our coat according to our cloth. What the ministries want, they cannot have it all, even the National Assembly cannot have it all. Now we are saying, we want to reduce the deficit but instead we are increasing the deficit. The FPAC committee has reduced one billion dalasi and now the committees' recommendations have made an increment of D1.2 billion meaning that the deficit has been increased to D200 Million which is not a wise move. I think we have to rationalize, prioritize. Yes,

you want to have better life but you cannot have better life when you have limited resources. You have to utilize the limited resources you have and prioritize what you want. I would have loved not to even take loans but manage the little we have which is possible. We have to sacrifice. China, 50 years ago, was like Africa but what they did was, when Chairman Mao came, he said no loan, they close their doors and they only depend on what they have in their country and now look at where China is today. Can we not do that as a country? We can do that.

Honourable Speaker, I think the other issue here is, when we approve budgets, the main problem is monitoring. We do not monitor most of these ministries as expected. It should not be only monitoring on paper, but we have to physically go and see what they are doing, how the money is spent. Sometimes we also go for monitoring, when we have recommendations and want to implement those recommendations which is also a problem. So, we have to make sure that all this is done perfectly so that what we want, we will have it.

Honourable Speaker, the other thing I want to talk about is that, the Chairman of Public Enterprises Committee [PEC] has touched on that, The Public Enterprises are there to operate, and to pay taxes and dividend to the government. Honourable Speaker, it is sad to know that most of this Public Enterprises are not paying dividend to the government and they are there to make profit and pay dividend to the government. In the PEC reports, you will see that in 2019 there was zero payment to the government, in 2020 you can see there is a deficit of 50 million dalasi and

2021 is earmarked for only D15 Million dalasi and that is earmarked for only Gambia Ports Authority. Honourable Speaker, there are thirteen SOEs that are there to make profit and pay dividend to the government. If you can allow me, let me just read those pages. They are a burden to the government, instead of paying dividend to government, they are being subvented by government. So, I want the Ministry of Finance to tell us what they are doing with these State-owned Enterprises [SOEs] so that they can be profitable and pay dividend to the government. Even if they are paying D15million every year each, they are thirteen, out of these thirteen SOEs, they can fund 51% of our Budget. So, I think it is very important for SOEs to be profitable and the Ministry to come up with something either a performance contract to monitor the SOEs in terms of performance. If any SOEs do not perform you can go. You cannot be a burden to the government, given that they are given lot of money every year and you are there to make profit for the government. So, what is the essence of you being created?

**HON. MOMODOU CAMARA [FONI BINTANG]:** I think the Ministry of Finance should try to have a performance contract. SOEs' can be given two year or one year depending on the agreement. If you do not pay, you go because you cannot be a burden to the government. So, I would want to know from the Minister that, this D15 Million earmarked for 2021 for Gambia Ports Authority, we were told by the witness who came from the Ministry that there is no formula for that. So how do you expect ports to be paying that D15 million dalasi? How do you know they should pay D15 Million, I would want to know? The other thing is, we are in COVID and

now we have seen in Europe and some part of the world that COVID has come for the second time, more serious than the first time, and we hear that there is going to be vaccines probably end of next year December or January. So, I would want to know whether this is a fact or not because it is very important. When these vaccines work, we have to buy for the Gambian people because we know Covid-19 has affected everything in the world.

The other thing I always emphasize in every adjournment debate is about rent, furniture and fittings. We pay a lot of money on rents, furniture and fittings. I always say this because we have certain issues here which are approved by the Parliament and they are not forthcoming. Firstly, we approved the vehicle policy and they told us that we have been saving 300 million every year and we do not see the implementation of that.

Regarding the furniture and fittings, I always say that, we have our Government Institutions that is the Ministry of Youth and Sports and there is the President Award Scheme that can make furniture, even stronger furniture than we buy in the shops here. Why can we not contract those people so that the money can come back to the government and can be invested elsewhere. It will create employment for the youths because as the Honourable Member for Banjul Central said, the unemployment of the youths is very high, so I want the Minister to look into this. If that is possible, we give the money budgeted for furniture and fittings to the President Award Scheme to make chairs and other materials for our

government institutions so that the money will go back to the government again. Thank you very much.

**HON. ALHAJI SUNKUNG JAMMEH [FONI JARROL]:** Thank you Honourable Speaker, although a lot have been said. I do not think I have that much to say only to thank the Members for their contributions and then also advise them to adhere to what the FPAC have recommended. It is our mandate to go through the estimate of revenue and expenditure and the reports sent to us. If we can adhere to our advice, it will help us a lot because we have set examples to you as to why the deduction. It is not to say that the money is not there. Yes, the money is not there because all the money that we are talking of, are going to be collected from the expected source, but then it is not something certain. Due to certain reasons like the COVID [pandemic] in the whole world which is an obstacle to our development. So, let us cut our coat according to our cloth and see how best we can at least give support to these various institutions, other than that, this is going to create a problem for us. When you do not have what you think you can do for yourself or can do for somebody, then why create such things. So, let us be very realistic and see this thing as our document. The most important thing is, whatever we allocate and agree on it, is for the betterment of the Gambian people. So please, I am advising all of us to be very mindful and very cautious to see how best we can put these estimates to the best use. So, on that note thank you very much.

**HON. OMAR DARBOE [UPPER NIUMI]:** Thank you very much Honourable Speaker for giving me the opportunity. Let me also join my colleagues to thank the FPAC for doing a good job we expect them to do. Honourable Speaker, a lot have been said by my colleagues and I also want to thank the Minister of Finance and his team for doing justice to the Gambian people. For the first time, major projects like road constructions have been financed through the Gambia Local Fund [GLF].

Honourable Speaker, to go straight to the point as part of the Select Committee on Agriculture, when we go through the budget line of the Ministry of Agriculture and the recommendations being set up by the committee, we have agreed that exactly 300 million dalasi should be set aside for the Ministry of Agriculture. The input that was at the Centralized Service Unit to be also moved to the Ministry of Agriculture. The reason being that, the technical arms of the Agriculture Extension Services like the argic planning, plant protection, food technology unit, agribusiness and others are underfunded or not being allocated at all, and we hope that, if this amount is given and spread among these units, it is going to put them at the right footing.

Honourable Speaker, when we go through the technical arms of the sub vented institutions under the Ministry of Agriculture [NARI] National Agriculture Research Institution, is going under a serious financial trouble. They are facing difficulties in paying their staff almost every end of month as a public institution. They have to go to banks and take overdraft to pay each staff and when you work at NARI up to your retirement age,

sometimes it is very difficult for you to have your benefits from the government. This is because NARI owed Social Security lot of money that they need to clear. I hope if this money is given to the Ministry of Agriculture, they will do everything possible to pay those arrears.

Honourable Speaker, Gambia Livestock Marketing Agency is not budgeted under this current budget. On the National Seed Secretariat, we do not see anything from them as well. [WALIC] West Africa Livestock Innovative Centre, the beauty about this is that, lots of countries within West Africa requested for this institution to be in their countries, but Gambia was lucky to have it here, and if we do not sub vent them or give them money probably, we may lose this opportunity. That is why, it is important for this august Assembly to allocate extra D300 Million dalasi for the Ministry of Agriculture, because the D100 Million which was given last year as indicated by my colleagues, was 100% fully utilised, that is why we have bumper harvest this year because of the intervention of this august Assembly. Honourable Speaker, now to the Minister of Health, if you want to attract and retain our qualified personnel within our health sector, they need to be motivated and that is why the committee concurred very well with their demands and thank God FPAC also have captured it in their report and we thanked them for that. That demand needs to be considered because when post-World War II was stroke with starvation, the scientists around the world gathered together and to find out the way forward. Agriculture and Health was the only way out at that point in time. These two things go concurrently to rescue the world and post Covid-19 stroke

the world again. History is repeating itself and these two institutions, Agriculture and Health are the available choice to rescue the world.

Honourable Speaker, I tend to differ with the Honourable Member for Niani that the laying of foundation stones of road projects be politicized and the important thing to be heard which people do expect to hear from the government was not heard, that is the timeline for the project, and I can tell you that these are the smartest projects government have ever brought to The Gambian people because they are specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time bound. We were told during the laying of the foundation stone of the Hakalang road by the Ministry of Works that the contract will last for 24 months. We were given 1.3 billion dalasi as cost of the project. The advantages of constructing that road were mentioned to us that, it will enhance the free movement of goods and services and by extension, it will boost the Tourism Sector, Agriculture, and access to health facilities within that area. Therefore, I tend to differ with my colleague that that is what was done at Hakalang. I do not know that was done in CRR but this is what we heard. Therefore, we thanked the government for bringing the most needed projects that are funded from the GLF. This is the first time in the history of this country that, a massive project of this nature is funded from tax payers' money. We thanked both ministries for the good job.

Honourable Minister I would like to ask you this question. Many ministries complained and lamented to us that, you gave them a ceiling during the budget bilateral and their expenditures are budgeted according to the

ceiling, yet the Minister of Finance cut their budget or sometimes allocate wrongly. Why? We want to know the reason. Sometimes you make wrong allocation to a budget line which they do not request for and this happened to the Ministry of Agriculture. I want a clarity in that.

Honourable Speaker, I think there is no politics when it comes to the development of this country. So, people should not fear that this government is doing a lot to move this country forward. It is going to hinder something somewhere for them tomorrow. No, whatever Allah has decided, it will come to pass no doubt about that and therefore, we thanked the government of the day for doing the best thing for the Gambian people which we have been yearning for almost fifty years.

**HON ALFUSAINY CEESAY [SAMI]:** Thank you very much Honourable Speaker for giving me the floor and I would like to apologise for being away. I would like to thank all the National Assembly members for a job well done and all the ministers and their technocrats for being with us during this session. Special thanks to FPAC members who took their time to compile all this information. They have done a great job.

Honourable Speaker, when I saw this budget, I thought that there is going to be changes because for 2020 when we are doing that, we did not know that there is going to be this covid-19 pandemic. So, this pandemic is already here we do not know when it is going, and there are certain budget lines that keep on occurring. You see others D750 million in 2020, D750 million in 2021. I do not know what they are buying.

I think we need to look at these things when we want to move as a country. Definitely Honourable Speaker, this 10 minute should not have been done, we should know that this is a very important session. Why should we cut this, this is the life of the Gambian people, we should leave things at liberty say whatever you want to say, but how can we give 10 minutes time allocation. What can you say within 10 minutes?

When I look at the budget, and given that this COVID-19 is already here, why are all these travelling expenses increasing? We said it is increasing in other countries and everyday people are coming. Let us reduce them and wait until we see whether this pandemic will go or not.

Honourable Speaker, I know FPAC have done a lot as other speakers have said. I am just looking at some of the ministries, even the Office of the President have to be reduced more. Other Speakers argued over what the advisers to the president are advising. The best adviser Honourable Speaker, is the ministers and their Permanent Secretaries. If you appoint me as a Minister, and I do not have expertise in such areas, I will put you in a hole. Honourable Speaker, let us call a spade a spade. Honourable members, let us erase all these advisers there. Let us erase them there. Whoever wants advisers, you can pay them from your own money but not tax payers' money.

Let us try to change now, for how many years now we are still doing the same thing and other speakers said it is a new Gambia, I do not know which new Gambia are they talking about. I want to say a lot but the 10 minutes definitely is too small Honourable Speaker. If you look at the

sector that suffer a lot in this hard time is the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education followed by Ministry of Tourism, Higher Education. Now schools are open, if a classroom should take 30, maybe it should now take 15. Teachers are working very hard, and we must be very careful honourable members. Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education have budget, we should increase it, and when we fail to do that, we are the people who are going to suffer, especially, those at the rural areas. Go to the schools there are no teachers on special subject areas like mathematics and English is a problem. More funds should be allocated for training in those areas so that those people who want to go to rural areas can be trained to teach our own children, but it happened that teacher are trained here and they do not want to go to the rural areas and this is the case every year.

Honourable Members, lets us increase the budget if not, there is going to be a problem for the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education. They want D200 Million,

Ministry of Higher Education what was stated is that they have arrears of D93 Million which is not paid. We visited Ndemban and other places but nothing is done and we say we want to improve the skills of our young people. Those skill centres are lying there for years underutilised.

Honourable Speaker, when we look at the president's visit to the provinces which is allocated for D10 million and during this visit, every Alkalo is charged an amount. What are these funds for? Should we charge our Alkalo because of the President is coming? Should we charge them?

Because the President is coming and there is a budget line of D10 million earmarked for the President's Visit to the provinces. Let us reduce that and other occasions.

Health is another important thing, when you go to our health centres, there is a problem. The health sector also needs to be well funded. They are talking about drugs and dressing not only that, the personnel have to be trained. You go to health centres you found only one competent nurse there. If that nurse travels woe betides. So, we have to look at some of these things.

The Ministry of interior is talking of mobility for the Interior Minister, what about those police who do not even have good houses. Go to Karantaba, if you see where the police are staying, in fact, I do not know whether they have ever visited them to see the critical condition that some of these police officers are staying. You have to encourage them. Ministry of Agriculture is saying D100 Million which we approved last year, but they distributed equipment without any need assessment. How can they take rice milling machine to my village? My people are not producing rice, it is lying there only to gather dust. Go to the communities and ask them what they want? We have so and so package, what do you want? Please I have few minutes if you disturb me what i want to say will not be said. I beg you. *[Interruption]*

**THE SPEAKER:** Honourable Member address the Chair; you have one more Minute.

**HON. ALFUSAINY CEESAY [SAMI]:** Now there should be need assessment before anything is done. I want them to come and ask the community what they actually want. If you bring something to a rural community that they do not need, it will just be there to gather dust. We want a coos milling machine instead of a rice milling machine. Honourable Speaker, agriculture as I always....*[interruption]*

**THE SPEAKER:** Honourable Member your time is up thank you very much please can you take your seat.

**HON. KAJALI FOFANA [JARRA WEST]:** Thank you Honourable Speaker and the FPAC committee for what they have done. Within a short period, everybody knows how hectic that work should be, comparing it to our own committee bilateral and compiling all the reports from every committee, it is really not an easy work. FPAC members really need to be congratulated for that. Honourable Speaker, the beginning does not intend to take long time and even the time allocated for everybody is not long. There are few areas I wanted us to take our mind back to. It is a common saying that where there is taxation there has to be representation. What are the purposes of taxation and what are the reason of representation? These two things have to be factored. Each and every one of them should know what they are tasked to do. To go into the details of the budget, I think we are going to leave that until we meet at the committee of the whole House.

I believe that our budget is talking more about the expenses than creating income and I have my reasons to say that. A budget with a deficit of about 70% and we are still trying to spend more instead of looking for more. My

reason is that, the budget constraint we have inherited is still continuing. When are we going to take a first step to stop it for posterity? If you have a simple business that you are doing on your own, you need to critically calculate it before you start spending anything out of your capital. We know what we collect is always less than what we spend. What is the direct translation? We keep on borrowing and keep on increasing tax that will be a burden on our people. Of Course, we need development but it has to be calculated that is my baseline. You look at the budget for example somebody has mentioned it here, travel expenses in total went up to D297 Million, I know FPAC has done justice to that amount but here, I am trying to compare something. You look at the Foreign Ministry under their detailed budget line, there is a portion before you go to their expenditures, they generate income through visa fees that are paid to them in various countries where we are represented. Last year, they collected D35 Million and this year is estimated to be zero. What does this tell you? They are not expecting any body to enquire about a visa from them. The same Ministry's budget for traveling is up to 90 million dalasi. We share the same globe with people, developed countries are trying to cut their expenses just to be able to mitigate the situation they are living in right now. We know COVID is here, it has not gone anywhere and what will happen in post COVID only God knows. We do not even know when it is going to end. My position is, looking at the budget in general, we have to concentrate on productive areas and social services because we cannot do away with social services. We cannot do away with our social services, they are our daily lives. Like health, education and other social services, we

cannot do away with them. We have to, we must spend on them but apart from that, let us look at our productive sectors. Whenever we do that, it will be time when we start thinking about budgeting without taking huge loan or without having a big deficit.

Honourable Speaker, there are few areas I want us to look into. Like my colleagues have said in agriculture, there is always misconceptions when we talked about Ministry of Agriculture. We are not talking about the Honourable Minister and the people working at the Ministry, this is an institution that has the highest number of employees in the country. How many have been in agriculture? How many people are engaging in the agricultural production? It is larger than any other institution in the country that is why we are asking more for agriculture not because of the Ministry is for the people. Let us take this as an example. Right now, GGC has done their estimate of products, specifically on groundnut and on the projection. They are expecting to get D80, 000 tonnes and they have made it clear that they did not have the capacity. They did not have the capacity to buy the entire product from the groundnut sector. So, what have they done now, they are divided into two and take care of 40% and leave the other percentage Who is going to take care of that? What is going to be the fate of our farmers? These are the productive sectors; we have to think about. Like I told you before, global GDP everybody knows, has gone down, so loans and grants might be expected but not as we used to get them because you think of your problem in the first place....*[interruption]*

**THE SPEAKER:** Honourable Member for Jarra West you have two minutes more.

**HON. KAJALI FOFANA [JARRA WEST]:** Then I think I will come to my final augment that is a question, if the Finance Minister can help me clarify whether Yelli- Tenda-Bamba Tenda is a completed project according to what I have seen in the budget because nothing is estimated for that project this year. Meaning the project is finished and in the initial contract of that project, they are connected roads that should be part of that contract. If I did not forget is 15 kilo meters, 7.5 in the North Bank and 7.5 in the South Bank. It is part of that project and I once made this question here, one technician from the Ministry of Works told me that those connected roads are now taken from the contract and now the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure will take care of them but I did not see them in the budget. My problem is, an already signed contract, an international contract, why part of that contract be taken and transferred to the government, that is my big confusion and I need to be clear about that because I did not see anywhere in the budget where these 15-kilometre road is featured, and we are all aware of that. So, I think I come to the end of my ten minutes. Thank you,

**HON. BAKERY NJIE [BUNDUNGKA KUNDA]:** Thank you very much Honourable Speaker. Section 125[1] [a] gives us mandate as National Assembly Members to consider and approve the budget estimates within 14 days. Honourable Speaker, we have a job to do and the Executive did theirs and it is now our turn to look at this estimate before we approve it

within 14 days. at this juncture, I would like to thank my colleagues for doing extra work to make sure we do not break the law in trying to make sure we approve it within 14 days. Before I go any further, I would want the Honourable Minister of Finance to help me... *[Interruption]*

Honourable Speaker, I want the Honourable Minister of Finance to help me with his statement on his final remarks where he said, 2021 promised to be transformational, revolutionary and despite the gloomy clouds associated with Covid-19 and our 2021 national budget, it can place us to the part of becoming a high productive nation. The budget in front of us when I looked at it, I do not see how it can put us in the part of becoming a highly productive nation. If you look at what is in our budget, especially, a budget with a deficit of D6 Billion.

Honourable Speaker, it is very sad that year in year out to be dealing with a budget deficit which we are counting in millions. Every year we come here, we try to reduce the budget deficit which we all know that our country is quite indebted and yet, we are not thinking of coming out of that circle of poverty that we found our self in anytime soon. I think the first year that we came in here, there was a tactical move, that is to say, we revise the budget and make sure that it is realistic and the following year, there was some measures that the executive came up with to make sure that our budget is realistic but a part from those two years, all what we have been seeing is budget deficits in millions. Honourable Speaker, to be quite frank, we are here to make sure that we deal with a budget that would have impact on the lives of our people but not a budget that will be

brought to us from the Executive without critically studying whether it will have an impact on the lives on of our people or not the people we are representing here.

Honourable Speaker, looking at the work of FPAC, the report they gave us, I am happy that there are lot of cuts though, not quite sufficient but there were at least some cuts which are significant and definite, they should be commended. But if we look at it properly, we are in a crisis, we are in a situation and this situation we must think of how to get out of it. The coming of the COVID was unprecedented and it was un expected. It hits hard in the country and the world at large and we know that the economy did not perform up to expectation. Here we are with a Draft Estimate where we are not thinking of generating income, instead, we are thinking of spending more than what we are generating. Somebody made mentioned of or even expressed compliment to GRA for increasing their revenue. We should be cognisant of this that GRA is increasing their revenue simply because each month, they are tasked to raise certain amount of money. GRA, instead of trying to tie up the leakages where revenue is reportedly leaking, they are increasing port charges which have direct bearing on the prices of commodities on the street. This is affecting the lives of our people. I think in any meaningful budget, we need to have an open mind set.

Honourable Speaker, if you look at what is happening now before we start adding or before we try to concentrate on constructing roads that we do not even see the design. Look at Westfield-Jabang Road that is recently

built, before Westfield that road is completely destroyed and they are rehabilitating it simply because, the way we build our roads are not correct. We are wasting tax payers' money in trying to do whatever we want to do. I think it is high time, we start to seriously think about these things before we do it. I can remember in the past supplementary budget, the budget for consultancy is in the millions and yet, the roads that they build for us can only serve for few years and these are in millions. So, if we are trying to develop, I think we should go back to the drawing board, look at what we should do in trying to develop. If we want to make roads, and the roads are not very bad, we can rehabilitate them first but we have to look at the way to build good... *[Interruption]*

**THE SPEAKER:** Honourable Member at the start of your debate, you cited a provision in the Constitution, could you please repeat that Provision of the constitution and the Standing Order you cited please for the records?

**HON. BAKERY NJIE [BUNDUNGKA KUNDA]:** Section 125[1] [a].

**HON. YA KUMBA JAITEH [NOMINATED]:** Thank you very much Honourable Speaker. I am part of the FPAC Committee and I would just like to thank my colleagues and all other Honourable members who sat in these committees to come up with a report given the short period of time we had.

Honourable Speaker, I would just delve right into it. As a country, the projection for 2021, is that we as a country would make from tax and non-tax revenue only D13, 705,747,000. This is what we are making as a

country only above D13 Billion and I want us to think about this for a moment. We are given grants as a country, grants for projects and budget support at a tune of over D12 billion. This is almost what we are making as a country. So, we are receiving gifts almost the same amount as what we are make as a country and this has to sink. In this budget, we are planning to spend D31 Billion and above D31, 902 million. These figures do not add up. I think just one moment, if we think about this and let it sink, we need to come together as a country as a whole country and decide what we have to do moving forward. I do not see how we can develop as a county if the only revenue we have is above D13 Billion. What we are receiving in grants is above D12 Billion, but what we are actually spending is D31 Billion, a deficit of about D6 Billion. How do we move? I do not understand really where the Honourable Minister based his assumption that this budget would likely be a transformational, revolutionary and would put us on a part of becoming a highly productive nation, how? I want the Minister to explain to me exactly how this budget would achieve these remarks of his. What exactly is in this budget that would transform my life Come 2021? What exactly in this budget is there to give the young people quality education? What exactly is in this budget that would change the health care system as a whole and guarantee quality health care for the lives of the Gambians? I want him to point out exactly the figures in this budget that we are investing in these areas and that would guarantee the revolutionised country that we are hoping to get in 2021 within the period of 12 months. That is what I want to know exactly because I do not see that when I look into the budget.

These are questions we need to ask ourselves. These monies of over D6 Billion deficit that we are planning to borrow, these investments we are making, we all know that we need these roads, but when would I get my return in investment? Are these investments going to bring me returns that is worthy of barrowing this amount of money and creating a deficit. Exactly when? Do we have any other means of sponsoring these projects? I want the Honourable Minister to tell me what exactly is the return on investment on these loans we are going to take, and we are going to be paying as a country and what are we going to get in this return. What is our plan exactly? what is our economic policy to change what has been going on for over 50 years. Taking loans here and there putting it in projects, and we do not see the returns in investment instead these roads by the time you know it, we are even paying more money in maintaining them than getting investment. Let us look at the sectors we really should be invested in to get returns. I think we have to be clear on our economic policy and where we want to go as a country, because this really is not sustainable. It is absolutely not sustainable. We really need to invest in the productive sector, sectors that we are going to feel the returns as a country. I do not have to wait to borrow D6 Billion and then wait another 30 years before I have a return on my investment that does not make sense. If I am borrowing D6 Billion and want to put it somewhere, to get the returning investment in at least three to five years, and I know this borrowing does worth it, I need to see the returns in at least within the period of 1 to 5 years. I really want the Honourable Minister to explain these things. So, coming direct to the sectors, I will just choose a few one that is very

important which is the issue of the local government, the contribution of central government to local councils. I think this has been neglected for a while. I think it is important that we make a decision here as National Assembly to make sure that the central government is contributing to the development budget of the local government because this is a constitutional requirement and I really want us to give out funds they are asking. The committee is asking for D16 million, I think this is very important. Central government which is closest to the people, need to be able to realise these developments services and feel that the mayors and chairmen are actually servicing their interest. Another important thing is that, I was just reading a post a minute ago on Facebook about the land disputes in this country and the conflict it is likely to create. We called the land commission to a meeting with the local government committee and you could not believe, what they said was, their budget is only four million. How can they carry out their important functions when there is only D4 million? How do we expect them to reach out to the people and take care of these problems? I think the land commission needs to be financed enough. What is wrong is that, they are housed at the Ministry of Local Government and Lands, and that is wrong. This should be an independent commission, they are using the secretariat of the Ministry of Local Government and Lands, and how do you expect them to be independent. I think this is one area that we need to finance and in financing this we would immediately see our return in investment because it will make sure that we do not have land conflicts. Really, it is a very serious concern for everyone, that every time you wake up, they are demolishing here and

there, people are fighting and harming each other. I think this is one area that parliament should focus on, the subvention and the issue of the land commission, it is a big issue.

Then I will come to our own problems here as parliamentarians and I think for years of ignoring these problems is becoming an issue. Recently, we have been allocated lands as parliamentarians and there is caveat that we must build these lands within the period of three years. Given what we earned, I do not see how we do this as parliamentarians unless there is a loan given to us in the budget. This is provided for Civil Servants and also other corporation to have access to such facilities. We are the only parliamentarians in the world that are not given cash. Recently, I heard the remarks of the president that these opposition members are even driving my own cars and campaigning against me. I had it though and I said, I have a profound realization, that, this is something serious because I experienced this when I was booted out at the National Assembly. I was receiving calls directly from the Office of the President asking me to return my car. This shows that actually these cars that I thought were donated to the National Assembly to be given to the Members, the President feels that they are his property. They threatened me, saying they will stop me and disgrace me if I try to drive the car, I told them the matter is in court and I am not going to return this car until the court makes a decision and that is what I did. This is a very serious issue and I think as National Assembly Members, we need to correct this by creating a budget line and put funds in it so that any National Assembly Member that wants access to this fund as loan to buy a car or to build a house you can have it. If you do not want

to take it it is fine but it should be provided for, so that we can have our own vehicles and have something to start building these properties.

Ok thank you, I think we are coming to the tail end of the debate now, I will call the Minority Leader to take the floor.

**HON. SAMBA JALLOW [NIAMINA DANKUNKU & MINORITY LEADER]:** Thank you Honourable Speaker for giving me the floor. Let me first of all thank the National Assembly Members for definitely scrutinizing the budget, through our various committees. I would also like to thank FPAC for the job well done. Honourable Speaker, it is often said that, if you speak last you speak less. What we have before us today is the 2021 budget and we are told D25 Billion is our income. We have an expenditure of D31 Million and we have a budget deficit of 6 billion. Then FPAC have definitely come with a recommendation because that was the idea of FPAC to reduce the D6 billion and then, I think the Minister of Finance also could be able to tell us how we are going to fund this D6 Billion. In one way or the other, it might be loan, it might be tax increment or to broaden our tax base. Honourable Speaker, our main source of revenue is tax and non-taxable. On non-taxable, the issue of ID card came to my mind

because we are trying on how best we improve our revenue base. If you look at this country, how many people should get ID Card? They are supposed to get it, but the access for them to get this ID Card is a problem. It is only people who are residing where you have the Immigration Department or in the major towns who have access to ID Card, other than that, the rest of the population are sitting. They want to get ID Card, but

they do not have the access to get it. The more people get this ID Card, the more revenue we are getting. I think the Ministry of Finance should liaise with the Ministry of Interior, that is responsible of ID Card production in this country so that people can have access to ID Card and that will definitely improve our revenue base.

The other issue is that, The Gambia Revenue Authority is responsible for tax collection in this country. I am not levelling any allegation, but I think Honourable Minister for Finance must also apply some control mechanism. Like the Gambia, we have one Institution that is printing receipt in this country, to me I think all Government institutions that generate revenue for this country should print their receipt in that institution. If you apply that, you can definitely establish a control mechanism of the amount of money that are collected in this country, but if any institution can go anywhere you want to print its receipt, it will be difficult to account for that revenue. I think that is very important to note.

Honourable Speaker, let me go back to the report of FPAC, if you look at the first table on top, you have budget line and telecommunication, and the estimated figure is D4 million. Honourable Speaker, I think it is high time that we move with the generation. Now telephone calls in the world is very cheap, communication is cheap and people are using the social apps, you talk until you are tired. Why do we want to spend D4 million Dalasi on telecommunication? Why not we shift and use WhatsApp for our international calls. Most of our embassies are outside, then it is better now we recommend that we use internet call which is very cheap. Definitely,

we need to move with the world. I think that one Honourable Minister, you need to look at it. If you look under the Ministry and embassies, I can only see telecommunication under the Brussel Embassy, all other Embassies, there is no telecommunication expenses. So, I do not know whether they are not communicating or whatsoever, but it is only under Brussel embassy that you have D75000 for telephone calls. As far I am concerned, even this one, looking at internet calls, it is very high, with only 1Gigabyte, you can make telephone calls until you are tired, I think we need to look at that one.

In the Ministry of Interior, I do not know whether the Minister is around because I have a question, in case the Minister of Finance cannot answer it. That is the issue of immigration and police, it is made mention that they were asking for a budget of D3 million and D2 million because they are anticipating the forthcoming presidential election. I know during Presidential elections, you have police officers attached to the polling stations, but to my understanding, it is the IEC [Independent Electoral Commission] that is responsible for election. So, I do not know why the Immigration and the Police are asking for the million because of anticipation of the presidential election, I definitely need an explanation on those budget lines.

Honourable Speaker, the other issue is that, I would want to put across to the Honourable Minister with regard to the restructuring of the salary of the Civil Service of this country. The Member for Serrekunda gave us some grading systems. Honourable Minister, every day you are going for work,

every morning you wake up and go to work, but you still remain poor, why are you going to work? It is better you stay at home and sit down. I can remember there was 50% increment but that does not create the disparity. If you are receiving 1000, 50 % of it does not change anything. So, I think it is very important for the salary of the Civil Service to be restructured. People remain poor in this country because their remunerations. It is definitely a pity especially for grade 1, 2 and 3. I will relate this to allowances. Honourable Minister, I am surprised that in this country, people are receiving D71 thousand, D115 thousand for allowances, while those who are doing the real service, are paid pittance. When I looked at some of these allowances, I see what they call professional allowances. You are employed because of your profession, that is why you are employed. Again, you want to be paid for that profession. Without that profession you will not be actually employed, but you are employed because of that profession and you are asking another allowance to be paid for that profession while those who are doing the real job are down there and paid nothing.

**HON. KEBBA K. BARROW [KOMBO SOUTH/ MAJORITY LEADER]:**

Honourable Speaker I will be very brief; I am also a member of the FPAC Committee. I want to start thanking the committee clerks for doing the job very well and I also want to thank the office of the Clerk for taking the bold step to recruit the competent people to serve the National Assembly.

When we came to this National Assembly in 2017, the capacity of the staff was very low, which we must admit and that has caused a lot of delay in

the production and preparation of reports. Over the last eighteen months, the Clerk has taken the bold step to recruit competent people so that the integrity and publicity of the institution can be there. I can attest to the fact that the work that the committee clerks have done over the last seven days have been very good. They have been very committed and have produced very quality reports. So, on that note Honourable Speaker, I want to thank the Clerk and his team for giving us very competent people to do our work, which is making life easy for all of us.

To go on to the speech of the Minister of Finance when he laid the budget, paragraph 12 says, 'meanwhile the service sector is projected to incur the sharpest decline from 6.8% in 2019 to -6.8% in 2020. This is as a result of the devastating impact of the corona virus pandemic on the tourism and hospitality sector, given that, this vital sector was temporally shut down from April to October this year.

Honourable Minister, this is continuing up to January, it is not even October it is continuing up to January. As of this way, the UK has announced a lockdown of one month, France two weeks, Germany four weeks, Italy to follow suit, and all these countries have confirmed that, the second wave of the pandemic is catastrophic and it is deadly and this is where our tourists are coming from. So, what are the plans for the Ministry of Tourism to ensure that they regain the bookings because up to January there will be no bookings? The tourism starts in October and ends in April. So, if you do not have any bookings in January, how are you going to have income for the sector which contributes to more than 20% of the GDP

So, these are special circumstances and we live in an extraordinary time, and I think it is important for all of us as National Assembly Members to look back to the budget and look at those discretionary budget lines that are in all these ministries and wipe them out of the budget to reduce the deficit, because Corona is here to stay with us, so why do you have to budget D6 million, D9 million for travel when you will still be in Banjul? How are you going to travel? So, I think it is important to look at these things. Members have been saying that the budget lines have been done in such a way that they cater for small number of equipment, and allocate D9 million for printing. When you have your stationery, you have your printer, you have your photocopier, you have your laser jet, you have your laminating machine, why do you have to pay D9 million for printing to a private printing company? So, these are issues that we need to look at, and if we look at those budget lines, we will be able to cut more than D500 million from the budget line that is presented by all these line ministries, departments and agencies.

My final intervention will be on the Ministry of Youths and Sports, we need to be serious about creating job opportunities for young people in this country. The Ministry of Fisheries also, I am not sure whether he is around. Kombo South is the biggest constituency in this country, we have five fish landing sites in this country, we have other 20 vegetable Gardens, yet, Fisheries, Youths and Agriculture, there is no value-added change program or horticultural productivity. The last time I told the Minister that, all these monies and charges that we are having, we should buy machines, fishing gears and train young people in this fish landing sites, so that Gambians

can be capacitated and be involved in the industry instead of saying that, there is no money.

There is nothing in this budget concerning the training of young people to go in for fishing or to encourage them to do it. Our women are spending all their time on vegetable gardens, at the end of the day, it will all perish, because they lack storage facilities in the vegetable gardens. So, these are issues we need to do, and I think it is important for us when we are revisiting all these in the Committee of the whole House, we need to look at them to ensure that there is job creativity in this country for the women folk, the youths and other vulnerable groups.

The other thing is, I think the Ministry of Women, Children and Gender needs to be very cautious about these Women Enterprise fund. People are going round collecting funds saying that they have money to give. We have only D6 million dalasi in the budget for this Women Enterprise Fund, and the £3 million that has been given by the European Union, if you put all that together even if we have hundred organizations that you need to give country-wide, that will be less than D5000. What is that going to give to the women? So, I think it is important that we look at these issues to see how to fund these programs to ensure that women have enough money and more capacity. They should be given more resources to be able to do these things. The combination also needs to be there, so that they need to go back to the regional offices and tell them what is embedded in that Act.

The Act has just been assented by the President, and there are issues, rules and procedures that need to be followed. So, it is important that everything is clear.

So, I think those are issues we need to look into Honourable Minister. I think it is Important that you go back to the drawing board and sit with the Ministry of Women and Children to ensure that they follow what is entailed in the Act, that has just been enacted by the National Assembly. Thank you very much.

**THE SPEAKER:** Thank you Honourable Member, Let me thank everyone for their contributions, may I now call on the mover of the Motion for the debate on the consolidated report of FPAC to respond to the issues and concerns raised on the report during the debate. The Mover of the Motion, the floor is yours.

**HON. ALHAGIE MBOW [UPPER SALOUM]:** Thank you very much Honourable Speaker, and thank you very much Honourable Members for the compliments you have made to our committee in terms of the report we have presented today.

I think the bulk of the question is for the Minister of Finance to help explain, but there are few concerns that some of the members actually have and I will attempt to address those issues and the rest I will hand them over to the Minister of Finance to Clarify.

I think the first one essentially was for the Member for Illiassa, who said we need to totally reject the Estimates, but I just want to remind him that

this is just a proposal from the Minister of Finance and that is why it is called Estimates. It is up to us to review to the best of our abilities to ensure that we can get this to pass.

However, I would also like to remind him of Section 151 of the 1997 Constitution , sub section 4 which reads, *"If the appropriation Bill in respect of any Financial year has not been passed into law by the beginning of that Financial year , The President may authorize the withdrawal of money from the consolidated fund for the meeting expenditure necessary to carryout services of the Government for a period not exceeding 4 months , from the beginning of the Financial year"* , and subsection 5 further says *"the withdrawal of funds in accordance with subsection 4 shall not exceed 1/3<sup>d</sup> of the sums authorized for the relevant services by the Appropriation Act for the immediately preceding financial year"*.

So, without this being revealed by us and approved, then the next step is going to default on to this particular section and that would allow the President to do what it actually says.

So, I think it is in the best interest of all of us to critically review and then come to terms with what is presented to us, because it is just a proposal from the Minister so that we can move forward. Now the Member for Basse, I think he is out, he was just asking whether we are aware of the D500 million savings that we actually have so that it can be ploughed back. Of course, we do because we presented the report, we are aware, in fact, it is D510 million, we are aware of that but our intention is not to reallocate it but to help reduce the deficit of the Government. Again, at the beginning

of the presentation, I think I was very clear regarding the Minister of Finance that there are certain things he cannot do, he cannot reduce anything from the judiciary, the IEC. He is really depending on us to be able to do that for him so that at least the deficit can be further reduced. In other Ministries, I presume that he is okay with the way their budgets are and that is what he has presented. The other institutions that he cannot control, he is really asking for our help to reduce the deficit.

The Member for old Yundum, he was quite right when he asked that he has not seen the total savings FPAC has made in relation to what the other members really wanted to add. Now what FPAC has done was that, we tabulated the entire cuts. What we had is about D1 ,044, 000 000 as funds cut.

However, the Members' recommendations from various committees to add certain things, E.g., in the Ministry of Works, the Ministry of Health, and the Ministry of Tourism, altogether is about D1, 220, 000 000. Effectively, we are actually increasing the deficit. So, if the recommendations that are coming up from all the committees are put together and implemented on this estimate, Effectively, we are increasing the deficit instead of decreasing the deficit and I am not so sure if that is exactly what we want to do. That is the reason why the committee actually made a recommendation in very clear terms where it is applicable, we do not reallocate backward, we have saved except in very rare situations for example the office of the Ombudsman and some other areas that we think it is really very necessary that we have to do that, otherwise we are saying

all the D1 billion plus that we have cut , let us try our best to ensure that we help reduce the deficit to a level where we can actually manage the economy very well .

Now the Member for Sabach Sanjal actually did mention about the shortages that we actually see in our hospitals. With that, the only thing I can actually say is that, if you remember few weeks ago or few months ago, the Minister of health did explain to us sometimes that it is not really shortage, sometimes they are not making request in the right place. So I think I did make a recommendation that, perhaps we need to automate the inventory management system at the level of the medical stores so that they can know at any particular time what is in the stores; in Farafenni, Basse or in Njaw Sawal. So, by doing that, they can have real time information on what is actually in one place as opposed to just saying we do not have it, while the same medication they are looking for is lying down somewhere in Bakau or another area.

Now the Member for Janjanbureh also was saying that, the recommendation was really about to add another D300 million to the budget for Agriculture. I am not so sure but again, if you look at the centralized services, you know there is an input subsidy of almost D200 million, that particular D200 million was meant for the Ministry of Agriculture. There is also another D300 million that is also meant for GGC, that is meant to ITFC repayment, and this is directly related to the Minister of Agriculture. Now if we say Agriculture is the backbone of the economy, and I think for almost 50 years, we are saying the same thing, but

whatever we are ploughing into Agriculture actually is not really generating dividend as we really wanted, what do we really need to do? That question maybe will be left to the Executive, perhaps to revamp the entire agricultural policy that we actually have to see what we can do to actually change that, so that we can have some of these productive sectors to generate more revenue for us.

Now the other member did mention that, there is a need for a guide but again, I will leave that one for the Minister of Finance to make clarification. The other one was from Brikama South about the domestic borrowing which I think I can touch a little bit, but the rest I will leave it with the Minister of Finance.

You know when we look at the domestic borrowing, we have a very good financial market actually, and there are various ways that we can raise fund locally here.

Most of the time, people talked about treasury bills or "suku sallah", that is fine but there are other avenues that we can also do to be able to raise a revenue within or to raise local borrowing, for Example, Infrastructure bonds. When you go to other countries, there are lot of money that is available in the private sector, and sometimes too much investments in the banks may not yield lot of dividends, so they cannot do away with bonds. Sometimes you have 3 years bond, 5 years bond or 30 years bond that we have seen in Central Bank with 30 years bond.

Now I am aware that there was some infrastructural bonds that the government want to do but it was oversubscribed, and these are 3years

bonds. I am sure the Minister can explain that more, but I think there are lot of avenues in this country where we can actually help to do domestic borrowing without actually hindering the private sector themselves.

I think the Member for Upper Fulladu also was alluding to the same thing about the deficit, saying that maybe we need to take loans that are long term. Personally, I am not so sure about that, maybe the Minister can actually help to clarify that because it may have a very long-term effect. Again, the longer the number of years perhaps the interest you have to pay really needs to be calculated and then it may not actually be in our best interest, but if we can help manage ourselves properly, I think we can go a long way.

Honourable Speaker, that is what I had for the responses for the members, but also, I wanted to make some few clarifications on certain areas, because I really did not have the opportunity to put in my points across this debate because of the reports that we have laid. I think we really need to be very careful because a lot of members did talk about the manpower budget, for example special advisers. I am not so sure, if legally, we can actually do anything or tell the Government to reduce the number of workers, I am not so sure, if Parliament can do that, we need to be very careful. I am not so sure whether, legally, we can increase the deficit. We really need to think twice about that, because in the manpower budget there are certain things that the PMO actually does in terms of how they hire, retain and what kind of service structure they give to those employees. So, I am not very sure whether Parliament can actually tell

them that, you need to reduce this number for example from 10 to 5, or from 5 to 10, or from 5 to 3 or so. We really need to think twice on that area. I think let me just highlight that area to the members.

I think I did talk about this before here, one of the biggest issues we have as a country is the revenue we are actually generating. Statistically speaking, if you check back what we actually have as a revenue, in 2015 was around D4.5 billion to D5 Billion as a revenue for Government. Now coming to 2019 or 2018/2019, that has increased by two-fold, now we are talking about 10 point Something Billion revenue generation.

Now, what I am saying is, the revenue Government is actually getting from the tax revenue and non-tax revenue is actually on the rise. Now the question the Minister missed to find out is, why is that happening? Is it because of efficiency at the level of the GRA collectors, or is it because of the volume of business is actually increasing? If it is the volume of the business that is actually increasing, I think perhaps there are certain things we really need to do to help increase that. If it is efficiency by GRA, I think we need to give them more support to be able to get more revenue or to make sure their collection mechanisms are enhanced to ensure that they do more collections. So whichever way, the Minister can help us understand. The most important thing is that, there is need for this country to expand our revenue base. We must not depend on only the tax revenue, non-tax and the grants that are given to us, because the risk factor involved in those two areas alone, I think we really need to be very careful.

If there is any issue in one of them, we are in serious trouble. So, we really need to expand the revenue base.

I think for quite some time, Honourable Speaker, I have given a lot of information to the Minister in terms of the State-Owned Enterprises, and I think lot of members did also mention the same thing.

You know when I look at the GGC for example, which is now the National Food Security and Processing, what has actually happened to the Groundnut we have been buying for the past 4/5 years? We do not know What has happened, yet we are giving money to them as input subsidies for the farmers for fertilizers. Now think about that, we are taking our own money instead of them generating their own money to give input to the farmers to help them grow more groundnut more rice etc. I think it is about time, we really take a very drastic decision on Gambia Groundnut Cooperation, to ensure that they are able to bring some kind of revenue to the Government like the Gambia Ports Authority is doing. If you look at all the State-Owned Enterprises about thirteen of them, how much money are they bringing to the Government as revenue? I am only aware of one that is bringing something which is about D15 million that is the Gambia Ports Authority. So, what happened to the others and the essence of actually having those state-owned enterprises is to be able to help the Government in revenue generation, instead, they are not generating and Government is ploughing back to them, for example GGC, NAWEC just to name a few. I think there is the need to rationally look at those institutions to ensure that they can help the Government to generate more revenue.

Another area also, Honourable Speaker, is the National Broadband Network which we actually approved the loan here, the network is ready. So now in fact, The Gambia right now as far as fibre optic is concerned, we are one of the most connected countries, but what do we get out of that? You put the cables there, you get the connection and then what next? You see in many countries; their source of revenue is actually changing. The e-Trade that countries are investing into, is actually contributing a lot to that but in The Gambia here, you have the National Broadband Network that most of the private sector actually are not doing anything on. That is the reason I said here last year that, there is need to create a new company to manage the National Broadband Network that will help the Government to generate money and to be able to repay itself in the long run, otherwise that thing will be there. Remember, the ECOWAN project that started the fibre optic cable in the country. The ECOWAN project under ECOWAS was done, but they could not finish. Then we took another loan from the Chinese Exim Bank and they have also completed it, but what are we getting out of this? We need to create the avenue so that the private sector can leverage on those networks, instead of creating their own.

It does not make any sense, anywhere you pass by, you see a tower, anywhere in the country, especially the Greater Banjul Area. Why can they not work together and do collocations where they can help to save a lot, besides that, they can actually leverage on this network that is owned by the Government for a fee, instead of taking their own money to invest into those particular areas. We need to rationalize some of these things that we actually do.

The last area is about the manufacturing industry Honourable Speaker. What actually are we doing here? You see if you go to any corner in Banjul, in fact, I can say the Greater Banjul Area, there are small mini markets, look at all the products they have in there, where are they made from? 99% are not made from the Gambia. Besides that, the quality of those foods that are sold in those mini markets really is extremely low. You know what implication that does have, it is certainly going to impact on the health of our kids and on us who consume them. Why can we not take and do value addition to solve the agricultural problem that we have Instead of importing all those things? Go to every corner of Serrekunda or Banjul, there are small minimarkets, and besides look at the owners that are there, check whether they are Gambians and the standard of What they sell. The standard is extremely low and that is actually not good for our health. Do we have the machinery, or do we have the labs that could actually check the quality of those food that we consumed? That is the reason when you go to the hospitals now, you see 18/15 years old diabetic patients, and hypertension, even in the villages that I come from it is rampant.

So, Honourable Speaker not to take more time, let me just mention that to the Honourable Ministers.

To conclude, I will just say there is need for the Government and when I say the Government, I mean the Executive to really look at the attrition and retention of employees in Government. If you want to attract professionals, if you want to retain them there is a need to really look at

the salary structure. There is a need to do that, but that must not be done in one particular Ministry or one particular sector and you leave the rest. It must be done across the board to ensure that there is equitable distribution and not for people to start pointing finger saying, it was done there, but not here. So, I think there is need to look at the civil service reform, just to ensure that it is made attractive, particularly for the professionals that we really want to retain in the civil service. On that note Honourable Speaker, I want to say thank you.

*[Question proposed]*

**HON. HALIFA SALLAH [SERREKUNDA]:** Honourable Speaker, it is true that it is the report we are discussing, and it is the report we have been discussing, it is a motion for the adoption of the report. There are certain things that are in that report if we adopt them, I see quite a problem, because the two are linked, maybe, there can be a motion to suspend the adoption of that report, and we proceed with the Ministers response, because we are not in agreement with the content in the report. There are so many things as we have heard, sometimes if we combine everything, we are increasing the deficit. So, mover do you really think we should adopt this report?

**HON. ALHAGIE MBOW [UPPER SALOUM]** Thank you very much Honourable Speaker. I think it is actually better to suspend the adoption for now, until we also hear from the Minister because if we adopt the report now, effectively, we are increasing the deficit. I think I have given you the figures, what we recommend as a committee at the level of FPAC

and what the members also recommended, but the members' recommendations in terms of increasing some of the budget lines is more than the savings we have. So, I think it is better, we suspend that and get the Minister to answer some of these questions and then we can move from there.

**THE SPEAKER:** Honourable Member for Upper Saloum, could you please move a motion for suspension?

**HON. ALHAGIE MBOW [UPPER SALOUM]:** I rise to move a motion for the suspension of the adoption of the report.

**HON. HALIFA SALLAH [SERREKUNDA]:** I rise to second the motion.

*[Question Proposed, Put and Agree to]*

*[The adoption of the FPAC report be suspended]*

**THE SPEAKER:** At this juncture, may I now call on the Honourable Minister of Health in accordance with the Standing Order 25[2] to partake in the debate on the report. Thank you

**HON. AMADOU LAMIN SAMATEH [MINISTER FOR HEALTH].** Mr Speaker, distinguished Honourable Members, thank you very much for giving us the opportunity to stand in front of you, to participate in this debate of immense national interest.

We wish to take the opportunity to thank you again for all the supportive words we heard over the period. Our apologies, we had very pressing issues so we are only able to come in towards the tail end of the debate.

However, our team have been present since in the morning, and made quite some number of jottings for us to be able to respond to.

We thank you for the advocacy for health.

Mr. Speaker, distinguished Hon Members, the health sector has been working very hard over the period to make sure the people of this country receive the standard care that they deserve. Of course, health care is not cheap, it is very expensive, and resource intensive. The training of the people who work in the health sector, maintaining them in the sector, the provision of the services need resources. We need equipment to be able to provide those services, we need consumables, we need medications, and sadly enough, none of those originates from this country, they all have to be imported. What makes it more expensive and we keep on saying, the human body is the same whether is in the Gambia, or in Japan or is in the US. When a person gets acute appendicitis in America the treatment is the same as the one who gets acute appendicitis in the Gambia. If the person needs adrenaline to survive, the person certainly needs the same adrenaline in the US, as in the Gambia to survive. The adrenaline is produced in a different country and that adrenaline has to be bought by a middle person who will bring it forward in to The Gambia; pay transportation, costume duties and then put profit on it and then it is sold in the Gambia. So, the cost will go up and this Adrenaline will be given to the same patient who has the same disease that makes health care very expensive and more expensive in developing countries where we do not

manufacture any of these. We are poor, yet, we pay a heavier price for these items.

At this juncture, we also want to thank you for advocating to increase the health budget to the recommended 15%. This is the standard recommendation owned by the Abuja court, and this had come out of a lot of calculations enumerated/exemplified by some of the points I mentioned earlier, to be able to give out people optimal health care services, we need that percentage to be able to adequately take care of the health service delivery. Unfortunately, we have never reached that and we are happy that has been mentioned in this August Assembly, and also increasing the drug budget.

Drug consumption is pretty high, each year, we need the increment because the population keeps on increasing and the challenge as mentioned by the Honourable Member for Upper Saloum that, we have seen a whole lot of diseases in this country now, when it comes to the non-communicable diseases, Hypertension and Diabetes is on the rise because of the lifestyles and what we consumed. The food we consumed, something needs to be done about it and for that reason, at the end of the day, the health sector is affected because we see more and more people. When there are challenges certainly, the health sector feels the brunt of it.

I think the other challenge we have been having is the fact that, whatever is budgeted for the people of this country, it is shared, especially when you go up country. When you go up country especially the towns and villages around the borders, we see a whole lot of people coming across the border

to consume the drugs that we thought are for two million people. This has become very difficult and really the solution is very difficult and I think we all need to sit together one day and discuss as to the way forward, because it is not sustainable. Health care is cheaper here and the services are good and so people come, and unfortunately, we are unable to send them away. We give them the services but at our own cost.

I am also happy that the Honourable Member for Upper Saloum did mention, the issue of an electronic monitoring system for inventory, because a lot of times people go to the hospitals and they are told there are no medications, when we have a whole lot of them in the stores in kotu or we have more in one facility, where they are not consuming it as fast, meanwhile, it is exhausted in other facilities and we are working on that.

Mr. Speaker, the health sector is turning around, we are embarking on massive renovation of the health facilities of this country. We have seen quite a lot of dilapidated health facilities without functional water and electricity systems. We have seen our people living in dilapidated buildings and we think that is unacceptable. By the end of next week, in the past one month or five weeks, I would have visited fifty health facilities in this country and we are doing a thorough assessment of each of these facilities and we want to renovate all these facilities to standard level, With the help of the Government and donor partners.

Mr. Speaker these things are not easy, we inherited a lot of difficult situations, but they cannot be left like that. Something needs to be done about them but certainly they need resources to be able to improve on

these facilities and we will be very happy if those resources are forthcoming.

At this juncture, we will be happy also to announce here that, through the collaboration or the efforts of the Ministry of Finance, the World Bank has finalized with the Ministry of Finance, the grant for the support of the RBF that is the health system strengthening and other related activities at a tune of \$30 million. The negotiations have been on for quite some time. This is what is going to replace the result-based financing that has just expired in June this year and this is a welcome phase and it is going to help strengthen the health sector. It has infrastructural component and we are going to use that to strengthen the health facilities across the length and breadth of this country including Edward Francis Small Teaching Hospital and all the other facilities.

As part of our strategies too, Mr. Speaker, distinguished Honourable Members, we have taken concrete steps to build four new health centres in this country, and nine new health post with delivery facilities that will provide basic emergency services. We have seen in so many facilities across the length and breadth of this country whereby, women cannot deliver in their own villages, they have to go to other villages to deliver and we think that is not acceptable. Two weeks ago, we were in the North Bank Region and we heard a sad story and I mentioned a similar story here before. They were taking a woman to a nearby facility, because that is the thing now. We say to women not to deliver at home, you must deliver in a health facility where you will have supervised delivery. They got

attacked by wolfs again, and the horse was running because the horse itself was very afraid, the pregnant woman almost fell off the horse cart and that was just about a month ago. So, these things are still happening in The Gambia and we think it is not acceptable, we want women to deliver in their own health facilities.

As we speak, we are also procuring 23 extra ambulances to be distributed to the rest of this country for that purpose so that women are picked from their homes to the health facilities to deliver in peace.

Mr. Speaker, we have had quite a number of interventions that talked about retention of staff. We heard the allowance issue was discussed, before I came and others when I came. Yes, just as speakers have said before, health care professionals are highly trained and we certainly want to maintain them in the facilities. How do we maintain them in the system? They have to be remunerated well otherwise they will go and we cannot do much about that. Now, when it comes to training a health care professional, the ordinary university degree is four years, the Doctors' training takes six years. Now others after four years they go and work. The Doctor trains for another two years that is the houseman ship training to get the license to practice as a doctor that is eight years for the basic medical degree. If the Doctor wants to train further to become a consultant, like some of us standing here, he needs an additional five to six years if he /she passes his exams well and for most people, it takes them up to ten years. These are the calibre of people we are talking about. How many of them do we have in our health system? very few Gambians are consultant we all know. That

is why we bring in people from Cuba, we bring in people from all over the world. So, these few that we have, it makes sense that we retain them. I think we need to be able to retain them and retain more that are coming otherwise others will not even be interested in staying. We will look at it. When it comes to health care workers, professionals in a Ministry for example, do we need Doctors? I think we do. Otherwise, who knows about the doctor issues to talk about in health facilities, if we do not have the doctors there? Now, it is ironical too, you move a doctor from a hospital, yes, the Doctor is useful at the hospital but at the policy level, we need somebody who understands those things, who can implement them, who can monitor them, and who can supervise them. Now, if a doctor comes to the Ministry or one of the programs, he gets 30% of what he was getting just across door from the same budget entity from the same Government. Can we skip those doctors in the programs, no! We manage to bring in quite a number of them, we convince them and they have come, but they have started grumbling that they are going to go back to the hospital. Do we need them to head those programs? We do. I give you an example, we have now a doctor heading the reproductive and child health unit of the Ministry, do we need an optician to head that? Yes, because we are talking about maternal mortality, he is competent, he knows what it needs, he knows the strategies to implement there. If he gets 30% of what he was getting in Edward Francis Small Teaching Hospital, we certainly cannot keep him. So, these are the things and it is not coming out of the blue. We also realized that in the same system, you go to the parastatals, how much they are paying, we all see it. We go to other State-

Owned Enterprises how much are they paying. So, if you want to keep highly qualified people, we need to compensate them.

Now the professional allowance that is spoken of incidentally, it is not just the proposal. If we look at the draft budget, many ministries have professional allowances, in fact, it is almost across the board for professional allowances and so on. We are not just reinventing the wheel, it might not be news to this august Assembly that, it is exactly the same package of the Ministry of Justice that we are asking for. The lawyers are getting it. In fact, it is a copy card of that. We think that is fair if we have professionals who are trained to this level in the health sector. Why should the other group be paid? I am not trying to cause any problem, but I am trying to explain in case people do not have that information. So, we said it is important that these doctors who are trained to this level also get this.

Now, it is not just the Doctors, there are nurses and public health officials who have PhDs and they are in the Ministry. Those PhD holders, we cannot keep them for long. There are public health officers, there are nurses, they have come back we cannot keep them in the Ministry, if the situation remains the same, do we need them there? Yes, we need them there. I think these are some of the challenges why professional institutions like the Ministry of health has had challenges over the period, because the competent people stayed away. They decide not to work in the Ministry. Now, we say we will be very happy if you give it a second thought and approve it, but if you do not, many of our young ones will go. Some of us will stay because they tell me that since you enjoy suffering that is what

they tell me. It is not part of enjoying or suffering because we need to get things done, but really to encourage more young people to be able to fill in those places. I think we need to support this.

Mr. Speaker with regards to service provision, I think there is a lot of improvement. The accountability mechanisms in the Ministry of Health, we are impressed with it now, and that is very important because the funds that are allocated must be spent well, and we try to make sure they are spent well. That is the more reason why we ensure that we do an initial assessment ourselves of every health facility that needs to be renovated. So, we see what the problem is, we put it together and when the contracts are finally awarded to the successful bidder, we also go there and ensure that quality work is done. During the work, we inspect and after the work we inspect to make sure the people of this country get the best of care. Mr. Speaker I would like to take a break at this juncture, thank you very much.

**THE SPEAKER:** Thank you very much Honourable Minister of Health for his intervention, may I now call on the Minister of Higher Education in accordance with Standing Order 25[2] to partake in the debate, Honourable Minister for Higher Education the floor is yours.

**HON. BADARA JOOF [MINISTER FOR HIGHER EDUCATION, RESEARCH, SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY]:** Thank you very much Honourable Speaker. I would like to start from where my colleague the Minister of Health almost ended. We need doctors, qualified doctors, we need Nurses, qualified Nurses in order to have an effective, efficient health system. We talked about Agriculture, you need the Agric technicians, the

Agric Engineers, the Agronomies to transform, effectively agriculture in this country.

We talked about teachers, the shortage of teachers in basic education, effective and qualitative teachers, that is what we need to transform education at the level of basic education. To do that, the mandate rest with the Ministry of Higher Education. Reducing the budget of the Ministry of Higher Education, if I might use metaphor of the Covid-19 would tantamount to an academic lockdown and intellectual quarantine. It is therefore important that we revisit, especially, the scholarship vote as priority. We have close to 28,000 students in tertiary and higher education in this country. We have a large number of students in Morocco, in Sudan, in Tunisia, in Turkey, In Cyprus and as far away beyond the source of this country in Malaysia, they come to the Ministry of Higher Education for Assistance. The grade nine results have just been released; they have started coming to the Ministry for scholarship. If you cut the scholarship vote by more than half, which cannot even cater for the continuing students, much less admit fresher. It means this year; we will not have the first years'.

Assuming that the budget improves next year, and they increase the scholarship, it means next year's batch will be first year, and this year's first batch will go in to second year, and there will be no second year. It will have to take for a bachelor's program four years to complete the cycle. We owe it to those people who have just completed grade 12 to have

access to higher education, and you are politicians, they come to you, and you come to me, think of that.

In Morocco, there are types of assistance, the Government has strengthened an apartment in Morocco for fresher, but even there, we pay \$900. Those people who are outside, we give them \$1200. People in Sudan, Tunisia, Algeria we give them \$300 as subsidy not to talk about UTG, MDI, GTTI, Gambia College, American International University. I do not think it is right that the current statuesque in terms of the scholarship allocation should stand as it is.

**HON. BADARA JOOF [MINISTER FOR HIGHER EDUCATION, RESEARCH, SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY]:** In the Ministry of Higher Education, we do not believe in routines, we do not believe in promoting the statuesque and that is why there is a new thinking in terms of our strategic plan, to reengineer the entire Higher Education sector. Hence, we are looking at research, how to establish a research fund and a research council, higher Education cannot move, cannot break new grounds, cannot move the frontiers of knowledge with research without fund. We are looking at developing an entrepreneurial citizenry and that is why, we want to establish an entrepreneurial fund, have entrepreneurial clinics in all the Higher Education Institutions.

You train them with the relevant skills that are responsive and receptive to the labour markets needs of this country but they have to be assisted to be able to establish themselves. That is one good reason why if you have skills, you can be self-employed or employed by the private sector or be

employed by the public sector. You have a three-prong approach to employment but it can only be done if there is an entrepreneurial fund that would help you establish. Gambian youths want to work as what the National Assembly Member have said, it is not that they do not want a decent life, it is not that they want to stay there, spend their lives and time sitting by corners and drinking "ataya". They want a decent life, a decent family. They can only get that if they have the relevant skills and the Ministry that provides that is the Ministry of Higher Education. Think about that.

We come to the issue of teachers breaking new grounds and that is why Higher Education took the initiative to tell Basic Education that we are facing out the PTC, or what is now call the Diploma in Education. The perception of TVET and the perception of teaching is very sad, and we are right now with the assistance of KOICA [Korea International Cooperation Agency] trying to change that perception. They will tell you hold on to the teaching until you get something better. We are the backbone of the service, that is teaching. We need to upgrade this, I admit that the road to success is not by the elevator, it is a stair case thing step by step, but the 39 steps we have to take as Buchan pilgrim of the 39 steps, to do that, we have to face the reality and peg the minimum teacher qualification in this country in the next two years to be HTC or Advanced Diploma in whatever it is. It will be a three-prong approach in the HTC that leads to the Bachelor's program. HTC in the sciences where you have two teaching subjects in the sciences, HTC in Arts where you have two teaching subjects

in the Arts or HTC in Early Childhood Education, and it continues to the Bachelors and to the Masters level. Higher Education provides that.

At the level of the ACE project [Africa Centre of Excellence] the World Bank has a program of establishing centres of excellence in Africa. All the countries of centre of excellence got 6 million except Gambia. The Gambia got 12 million, it is a grant. Everything in the ACE project is a grant. The 3 million from KOICA is a grant. When we were giving our envelope, it was about D307 million, we did not burst our envelope, we work within the envelope. The development budget was D96.9 million and it was sliced to D39 million. How can we respond to aids? How can we respond to Ndemban? Just today, we had a meeting with ITC and the YEP project and we were able to raise \$100 000 for Ndemban. Government must be seen to be committed, if they can give D500 million and you put in the budget D6 million. Last year we had D9 million, it was taken off because of Covid-19, we understand that. This year, it was reduced to D6 million, what can we do with D6 million. At least, we had under the development budget D21 million plus the 5 million and 26 million could make a head start in Ndemban with an entrepreneur attitude and positive mind and then start to develop the entrepreneurial fund.

I think Honourable Members, I would appeal to you in collective conscience to look at the Higher Education budgets. Even the subvention to the four Institutions which get D2 million was reduced and it is for other charges and salaries. So, it will mean that one or two people or some people will go with lesser salary, how do I explain that? That will hit the streets, I cannot

explain that, I cannot solve it and we cannot solve it. I am sure the Minister of Finance has locked some contingencies somewhere in anticipation of some challenges in future but let us cross the bridge when we get there. For now, as we are working to the bridge, let us solve the problems. As one English poet said "live and live in the living present for tomorrow is uncertain". The contingency is for tomorrow, today is here, let us address the perennial issues of today, the challenging issues of today, the challenges in scholarship allocation, the challenges in the ACE of development budget, the challenges in the subvention, then we can take a quantum leap of progress to respond to the aspirations of those young people who want to attain university qualification.

In a society that is increasingly driven by science, engineering, technology and mathematics, it would not be salutary. It would not be an edifying story to cut the budgets that would lead to that. We will still be marooned in the past. How did China get to where they are today? They invested heavily in higher education. The China of Chairman Mao and Chuen lee is different from the China of Xi Jinping. The United Arab Emirates in the 70s and Saudi Arabia in the 70s, is different from the United Arab Emirates and the Saudi Arabia today. The development curve between the camel and the Lexus and the BMs, and the Benz's is very short. They got it right and they got it right through higher education. This country has to get it right through higher education.

Rwanda came here and I was in Finance when they were studying the IFMIS, they got it right and over took us because they invested heavily in

higher education. No, you cannot cut the budget of higher education. If you cut the budget of higher education, you are cutting down the feet of development and you do not achieve development on the heels of certain deputy, you achieve development with the eagle mentality, dis-patterned shrewd character and the frugal tough-mindedness of a citizenry. Honourable Speaker, thank you I rest my case.

**THE SPEAKER:** Thank you very much Honourable Minister of Higher Education. I now call on the Honourable Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs, the mover of the substantive motion, to respond to the issues and concerns raised during the debate of the Draft Estimates 2021 of Revenue and Expenditure of the Republic of The Gambia and wind up the debate. Honourable Minister the floor is yours.

**HON. MAMBURAY NJIE [MINISTER FOR FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS]:** Thank you very much Honourable Speaker. I think one of the most important departure points is when we talked about the recurrent and development budget. 2019, the recurrent budget was 19.4 million, in 2020, 19.2 million, development budget 13.9 million for 2019, development budget of 2020 is 16 million. Why I want to reveal this is we have been able to put a cap on the recurrent whilst we move the development. This is part of the revolution that I am talking about. I think the Health Minister did mention some of the attempts that they are doing to change the sector to make sure they deliver to the most vulnerable.

I just want to go back to a portion of my statement when I lay the Estimate here just to recap what I meant and the way forward. I said,

despite the significant obstacles that Covid-19 has placed on our global development trajectory, it is a generational opportunity for self-reflection and for utilizing our unique means to build a resilient people, resilient economy and resilient partnership whilst interconnecting all these with an adaptive planning model that is agile and also responsive to exogenous shocks, uncertainty and fragile multilateral systems. Again, I repeat on the same paragraph, I said whilst striving for equilibrium and avoiding dislocation within our fiscal space, the 2021 budget aims to stimulate economic recovery through practical and tangible support to all sectors of our economy. I further went to say that the budget also reaffirmed our national commitment to live no one behind by enhancing our social protection response program.

In essence, what I am trying to say is the revolution, the next year's budget is placing the foundation. What we have seen in the main sectors that we have lesser focus on infrastructure, health, education, energy, youth and sports Levy that we were able to pass in here with your support. This year alone, they were able to collect almost D100 million and we have already disbursed about D44 million which they have been able to use.

Going forward, I have to appeal and number 1: I think I will have to start by congratulating the FPAC for doing a very good job. We have been interacting for many weeks and I have to salute you in the bold steps that you have taken. I will explain when I am going to explain the issue of deficit financing that the original figure that we had from the submissions was actually a deficit of D12 billion. We had to burn the midnight candle to

make sure we reduce it to D6.1 billion. Here what I am trying to emphasize is to appeal, we have been together and we have weather the storm, no dislocation and actually our economy according to observers internationally despite the lack of resources, our discipline, I think our vision has guided us and I think, I must commend the National Assembly for the SAP that you have passed, really you guided us and you help us and that is among the cushions we were able to sale through.

So today when we are talking about moving into 2021, the uncertainties everyone is aware that irritation is inevitable. So how do we manage that with a small fragile vulnerable economy like us? What we did really, the model that we have, somebody may ask, yes! we have planning and research department including the budget. We have a model and we have a medium-term expenditure framework where we can tell you in the next three to four years in every sector, what we expect your expenditure pattern to be including our revenue. I think an Honourable Member also asked regarding what is happening with the revenue. Yes, I think in GRA, there is a major improvement in their efficiency coupled with the fact that the volume has also increased. So, in a nut shell, in moving forward I want us to allow this budget that I have submitted so that, we go with it up to mid-year because the storm is still there and we do not know what is going to happen. Once we are able to go, we can agree to have a mid-year review to revisit all of these issues. Whether we can now do the necessary adjustments or not, what is happening, here is that, the report sounded like the deficit is going to increase, if the report is adopted, what we have, is a manageable deficit.

I think my appeal specifically is to the entire National Assembly Members that there is a lot of sacrifice that we all need to do until we go through the storm. On the deficit, I think some Honourable Members have raised the issue, the deficit of about D6 billion. Actually, by average regional standard, both in terms of the deficit and the borrowing, The Gambia is really performing below the ceiling and I believe this is important that we put into context which is the 5.75% of GDP. This is below our normal growth rate of 6% prior to the COVID pandemic.

Secondly, as one of the Honourable Members also mentioned, which is of vital importance is how the deficit is being financed. We already have the source of funds. Of course, half of the deposit which is 3.4 billion to be exact, will be financed from our domestic borrowing. However, I would like to highlight to this National Assembly that, we have engaged the IFM recently and concluded that we will now rather tap from our own ECF quarter as an additional D1.1 billion is provided. Let me just explain that this fund is our fund. It has Zero interest and there is a grace period of 5 years. So, we will take the funds and repay it for 10 years. It is the basket of funds that we have explained earlier that it is there as our quota but fortunately, at the beginning of the pandemic, we were smart enough through our own prudent fiscal policies, we did not take all. Most of the countries virtually wipe out their quotas but we only took 25% of it because we said with the fiscal discipline, we would be able to maintain and manage up to this level, and today, when we really realized that the next stage is this deficit issue, no we were taken aback. As at now, there is lot of liquidity in the system because we did not go to the market.

Interest rates, the last time we issued the infrastructure bond, it went down to 5% and now, the strategy is how do we try to mobilise more resources as a cushion for the future. Therefore, the 1.1 billion will reduce our domestic borrowing burden roughly to D2.3 billion instead of D3.4 billion as currently envisaged. The reason that we have chosen this, is to minimize the interest rate pressure which have been at the lowest for 12 months which is between 4-5%. I think the last time we heard of this has been decades or plus.

In addition, we have also intended to continue influencing the growth to the private sector, which has increased by more than 30% in both 2018 and 2019 meaning that, we are not prodding out the private sector, we are very sensitive to the fact that the less we borrow, the more fiscal discipline we have and the more liquidity the banks will have to be able to give it out to the private sector.

Another critical issue raised was the reason behind the deficit and the budget submitted to you shows that most Ministries' budgets drop when compared to 2020. This is evident that we have tried as much as possible to be fiscally prudent. Not all have taken it lightly because the revolution that is going on in all the sectors, I think both the Health Minister and the Minister for Higher Education were here and I am sure, if all sectors' ministers were here, you will see the confidence level, the vision they have and everybody wants to have resources for their sectors.

Really, in fact, on the first draft produced as I said, it was D12 billion. We did not sleep, then they have to look at things that we have to cut. With

heavy heart, I will share with you, there is a program for accelerated and community development program, which is in partnership with UNDP, and this program is supposed to construct 20 boreholes throughout the country and this will include drilling, tanks and network piping. In the same program, electricity will be available to villages that currently have no electricity especially around Niumi, URR, LRR and this will be done by purchasing stepdown transmitters and cables for internal distributions. In the program, we also have a 30km road access which will be constructed across the country and this will include Farefenni, kubanaw, Sanjal and Tumana. In the same program, we also have agriculture and it has two components; that is to purchase agricultural labour-saving devices and this includes tractors, power tillers, and processing machines to be supplied to 47 communities across the country. Included in this is also livestock and this will include support to WALIC formally known as ITFC, reactivate the WALIC farm, enhance their animal and range, and they will import twenty-five special breed of pregnant cows which will be distributed to the communities. This is because we were moving, we were cutting down on the deficit with heavy heart, we have to do it.

So whatever savings, I will appeal that coming from the FPAC, last year we have budgeted D250 million, this year, I said we have to suspend it and I have to go and look for funds that can finance this program that can really be geared towards poverty alleviation, but we have to make a decision. Again, the point that I am trying to mention is what contributed to this D6 billion deficit. It emanates from few key Ministries notably, the Ministry of Works and Infrastructure, IEC, Basic Education, Health, Petroleum. For the

Ministry of Works as you all know, the roads network, which is non-political, what has happened is during the pandemic, we have also realized that some of the villages and towns were impassable. Women finds it very difficult even to access farms, clinics and schools. So, it is in that spirit that the master plan of the infrastructure, the Ministry decided that, let us now take it on our own not to go outside, but to use our own innovative financing to be able to finance our development, and this is among the revolution that I am talking about. We are in charge. A project normally that is financed through foreign aid can take three, four to five years before it is completed and with conditions, but here, we are being very proud that this is our money, this is the tax payers' money and it is very important for Gambians to see that our taxes that we are paying, this is where it is being invested. So, this is the type of revolution we are talking about that it is not about anything but the audacity, the combative approach that we have.

Furthermore, the time has come for us to really start looking inwards and try to finance the same thing, our development and government wants to shape its own destiny by financing everything that we have.

With regards to education, their budget has increased [Basic Education] because the provision of key social services such as the school improvement grant which is a subsidy to the school tuition fees. This amounts to D291 million. This is why public education is free of charge. In addition to the school improvement grant, we have factored an additional

D120 million for the school feeding program and D594 million which will also be given to sub vented schools.

With regards to the Ministry of Health, I think the Health Minister did explain the additional \$30 million grant and an additional D1 million that was just concluded two days ago. This is all geared towards improving the health system and we have increased the subvention to hospitals by D539 million. We have factored D136 million for the purchase of drugs and medicine, and 100 million for the national health insurance scheme. This is just the beginning. Again, we have never ever had health insurance in our country and here we are targeting the 1-5 years kids, the retirees, the vulnerable in the provinces of course, the civil servants and the National Assembly Members are part of it, but it is contributory at our level. What we are trying to say as part of the dignity for our own people at least, if somebody is sick, you can have a card that you can go to the nearest clinic or to the nearest pharmacy to be able to purchase those drugs. In the Ministry of Finance, I said it is an investment protection for our own investments that we have been able to train quite a number of young bright kids over the weekend, and we have seen it here between Friday and Monday. Somebody will be sick and cannot have access to certain medical needs, maybe somewhere so far and does not even have the means to come to Banjul to be cured and that investment is gone.

So, these are the issues that I said, we should really be alert and again, I just say that our appeal really is to try to maintain of course with few additions, we also had D113 million arrears that we owe. Right now, if you

go to the airport, there is a digitalized system that secure the airport. What we owe them is D113 million, but I have to take all of that out. This is statutory, these are agreements that we signed but in the interest of maintaining the balance and not sacrificing the other social sectors, we really have to do it. Then I will just go to some of the questions that were asked.

The Brikama Market, yes! we have released the D10 million and the other D20 million is also for Brikama market, D40 million for the Basse Market. We have already released it, and D60 million for the 2021 budget. So, all these commitments that we have made especially, the agreement that we have during the SAP, we were able to fulfil virtually all of them. The D2024 million for humanitarian agriculture is still working with the World Food Program to do the distribution.

The Member for Sandu, I think we were talking about travels, now just for you to understand that the system of both foreign and local travel did not break it down, it is all lump together. So, what we have been encouraging most of the people in the sectors like Health, Education, Agriculture that you must go out there, you must go on a trek and in particular, the Ministry of Finance now do go and monitor the projects. Now we just do not disburse. Some of the frustrations that some of the sectors have been encountering with us is when we disbursed because of the fiscal discipline that every month you submit exactly what you requested, we will give you that amount but based on the revenue.

If the revenue is not there, I think most of the National Assembly Members did promote the issue of cutting your cloth according to your coat, and that is what we have been doing but not to discriminate anyone. Once you submit it, we should be able to give you. Sometimes it is not 100% but if the demand and the need is there, sometimes there is a difference between what you want and what you need, but when it is really needed, I think the Health Minister will confirm. At the beginning, it was very tough but later, it was fine and I have to commend him. You have heard him saying that, he personally went for the last one month to over 50 centres just to make sure, he has evidence that this is what is required and the amount of saving that he is being able to make was tremendous and I have to salute and really commend him for that activity. He is very active in terms of tracking to make sure that the money that we give him is well spent.

In terms of debt, the difference now is, we are not going to take any debt for consumption. Every debt that we take now must be converted to assets that is key. During the time of the pandemic, it was very tough and we have rejected quite a lot that:

- i. It has to be concessionary
- ii. We have to have a well-defined decision that must be made because we said we are the one going to pay the debt back.

So, if it is not convertible into an asset, then it is something that we reject and we have a committee called the Strategic Review Board. Last time we rejected a grant of almost 6 million euros, because when they calculated

and did their own analysis, they realized that 97% of that grant is staying out, it is only 3% that is coming in to The Gambia. We said thank you very much, we have more than 50%, so, this is the type of revolution that we are talking. It is no more business as usual and we as I said, we have to be combative, we have to be strong, we have to sail through a very tough storm but again with your help, with your guide, we can do it together.

Regarding the 2021 budget, I appeal, we can have an agreement that we have a mid-year review, but for the time being, really, we can manage the deficit. We should be able to do it in a way that will not have any inflation or interest rate that will negatively impact on our economy. The resources are there we can tap them, but I think with your help, we should be able to do it together. So, I just have to stay here in the event I missed anything because some of the questions were together and that I just want to make sure that I answer to everything.

Honourable Speaker, I want to stand in the event I missed anything. Any Honourable Member can just call my attention, but the main emphasis is let us do it together in the sense that, it is not business as usual. We should be able to climb that tough ladder that was so high but I think going by what we have been through, with the experience we have, we would be able to manage our economy. I think we can do it again and I appeal to the National Assembly Members that let us do it please, for the estimate is a planning tool. I talked about the adaptive measures, that is to really adapt to a fast-changing environment. These are the issues that I

really want to share with you. So, if I missed anything please, let me know exactly.

**THE SPEAKER:** Thank you very much Honourable Minister. Honourable Member for Serrekunda the floor is yours.

**HON. HALIFA SALLAH [SERREKUNDA]:** The key point is the revenue side whether you are amenable to ensuring that the departmental self-raised revenue is properly calculated and calibrated so that we twin it to expenditure that is really the key question.

**HON. MAMBURAY NJIE [MINISTER FOR FINANCE & ECONOMIC AFFAIRS]:** Thank you very much. I am glad that you have raised that. I think among the efficiency gains that we have realized with GRA in particular, the little digitalization that they did, we saw an improvement. I agree with you that we have seen that there is no way that we are talking about but to broaden the base and to see that, these leakages and overtime, we have been able to solve most of it. I think what we always say that once you are able to digitalize the nineteen allocations, half of it almost \$20 to \$30 million dollars is going to be spent on digitalization. I think linking that revenue with that expenditure is key, and we want to continue to do that.

**THE SPEAKER:** Honourable Minority Leader.

**HON. SAMBA JALLOW [MINORITY LEADER]:** Thank you Honourable Speaker. The Minister of Interior is not here but I have these figures and that without clarification, it will be very difficult. We have rent for the

Ministry and Semlex, my position here is with regard to Semlex. Are we paying rent for Semlex as it is indicated here? The other issue is D3, 500,000 and D8, 500,000 for the Immigration Department and the Police, the reason they forwarded is that, they are anticipating the election in 2021 and they are responsible for funding it.

**HON. MAMBURAY NJIE [MINISTER FOR FINANCE & ECONOMIC AFFAIRS]:** We are not paying for Semlex. It was part of the agreement that they signed with Semlex, that is the revenue sharing then after sometime, they will have to take over. As at now, we are doing everything possible to make sure it is moved to Kora, but we are not paying for Semlex It is in the agreement.

With respect to the Police and the Immigration, we are doing everything possible to avoid duplication. When they request the whole election as one package, we cannot approach it surgically, we have to make sure whatever is allocated and you try to compartmentalize it, that is where the confusion is. The IFMIS system will not be able to catch all of that, if we say it is the Ministry of Interior, there is one accounting officer and that is the Permanent Secretary, So, we allocate to the Permanent Secretary and the Ministry will do the reallocation. It is their own responsibility now for auditing that they will be held responsible.

**HON. MOMODOU CAMARA [FONI BINTANG KARANAI]:** I think my question was the formula you used to have ceiling for ministries. The second question is about these SOEs, you know I told you that, they are not paying dividend only Ports does, what are you doing to ensure that

they pay dividend and also how do you arrive at the projected D50 million for Gambia ports Authority?

**HON. MAMBURAY NJIE [MINISTER FOR FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS]:** No. [1] The ceiling that we have is medium-term expenditure framework and every sector including the National Assembly, that is what we give them and what they give us was higher. We cannot be talking too much about that, but we were able to bring them down to the ceiling. With respect to the ports, it is a percentage, it is like cooperate tax that they pay. They are treated like a commercial enterprise and that is the dividend that they pay based on their own performance.

**THE SPEAKER:** Honourable Member for Upper Saloum, I think I will control these questions. I will give you just 2 minutes.

**HON. ALHGIE MBOW [UPPER SALOUM]:** Mine is actually clarification on the question he asked about the Ministry of Interior. What FPAC realized was in the Kora list of properties that they pay rent, we saw D1.5 million for Ministry of Interior. So that is why, we want to remove it from the Ministry, otherwise it will be a duplication. We cut it in the FPAC and we have highlighted it that, there is a duplication. The Ministry of Interior is actually asking for rent of D3 million, when kora is also asking for the same thing. So, we removed that from the Ministry of Interior.

**HON. MAMBURAY NJIE [MINISTER FOR FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS]:** When you remove it you send it to where? No, you have to because this is an agreement none of us were there. It was signed. What we said is after the expiration, kora have their own ceiling. Everything will

be moved to kora and kora will negotiate, if negotiation is not successful, then they will have to move.

**HON. ALHGIE MBOW [UPPER SALOUM]:** No is still under kora, so it is just removed from the Ministry but the rental thing is still with kora as part of the budget.

**THE SPEAKER:** Honourable Member for Wuli West.

**HON. SIDIA S. JATTA [WULI WEST]:** Thank you. Honourable Minister it is very pleasing to hear you say what you have said that, you have now embraced the idea that we have to look inwards to generate our means of development. Very fine! Now what I have heard you say is that, you are developing your capacity to manage what is manageable. My question is, she is gone but she has asked you this question, what do we do to cut down this deficit that appears every year? What do we do to generate really the means for development? That is my question. What do we do, because you cannot see that in the budget and that is what we need to see there to be convinced that yes, now we have to use your word revolutionizing. We have to do that to become revolutionary in terms of self-reliance for development.

**HON. MAMBURAY NJIE [MINISTER FOR FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS]:** We have the capacity and this is a gradual thing, it cannot happen overnight. What we are talking about is ownership and the capacity is there and we are moving into that direction, but it cannot be overnight. That is why we said we are laying the foundation for the revolution to take place. That is to say, if we already have the self-

confidence that you know what, with all of these things, we have realized that the capacity is there to manage and we are moving forward. How do we do it? Deficit, as long as they are manageable and if it is a deficit that you are taking just to consume for luxury, then that is not good news, but if you are taking it to be able to solve the problems of the most vulnerable, to be able to invest on something to convert it into an asset or give you a good rate of return; those type of activities you will be able to do.

**THE SPEAKER:** Honourable member for Banjul south and it will be the last to entertain. The committee of supply is tomorrow you can come up with your questions please. You will be the last on the list please.

**HON. FATOUMATA NJAI [BANJUL SOUTH]:** Honourable Speaker, I will take back the Honourable Minister to his budget speech which made mention that the budget also reaffirms our national commitment to live no one behind by enhancing our social protection response programs. But I feel that, it is leaving a lot of poor people behind. If you cut scholarship for Higher Education, you are leaving a lot of poor people behind. Maybe you and I can afford to send our children to school without scholarship but the vast majority of Gambians will be left behind. And I would appeal to this august Assembly to ensure that scholarships are given back to the Ministry of Higher Education because those children would build our country.

I applaud the Ministry of Higher Education for the commitment for at least giving the teachers at least a minimum of HTC. I think that should be reaffirmed and given back to them to ensure that our children are

educated to give them the opportunity to build our country. I think we must look into that and give it back to them.

**THE SPEAKER:** Thank you very much Honourable Member. Honourable Minister please can you answer that and then we move?

**HON. MAMBURAY NJIE [MINISTER FOR FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS]:** Is that a statement or a suggestion?

**HON. FATOUMATA NJAI [BANJUL SOUTH]:** You said in you statement that you are not leaving anybody behind. I am telling you that you are leaving them behind.

**HON. MAMBURAY NJIE [MINISTER FOR FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS]:** Let me just explain in the good old days, issue of scholarships have never ever been a problem. Again, when we are faced with a problem, there are drastic actions that we do not like to do, but it is not something that we can just say, it was not a very easy decision. You are the National Assembly but this is what we are doing not that these are permanent things but this is the cuts that we made to be able to manage the deficit that we have.

We understand where you are coming from and we know there are poor vulnerable families that might have issues that are very difficult at this juncture, but these are things that we can always review.

**THE SPEAKER:** Thank you Honourable Minister. At this juncture, let me thank everyone. I want to inform you all that after the debate on the draft Estimate 2021, the document is now referred to the Committee of supply

of the whole House in accordance with Clause 86 [8] of the Standing Orders to consider the Estimate in detail.

*[Question Proposed, Put and Agreed to]*

*[The Debate on the Draft 2021 Estimate be referred to the Committee of supply of the whole House]*

***[Adjournment]***

*[The House stand Adjourned until Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> November 2020 @ 10 a.m. sharp]*