



National Assembly, New Assembly Building, Reginald Pye Lane, Banjul, The Gambia

## **[OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT]**

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### **4<sup>TH</sup> SITTING OF THE 3<sup>RD</sup> ORDINARY SESSION OF THE 6<sup>TH</sup> LEGISLATURE**

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National Assembly Proceedings of  
Tuesday **[Afternoon]** 20<sup>th</sup> September 2022 –

### **DEBATE ON THE STATE OF THE NATION ADDRESS** **[CONTINUATION]**

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***2022 LEGISLATIVE YEAR***

## CONTENT

1. **Motion:**

Continuation and Conclusion of Debate on the State of the Nation Address, 2022

*[By: His Excellency the Vice President]*

## **THE ASSEMBLY RESUMES**

**THE SPEAKER:** Honourable Members, the Assembly now resumes. As agreed, we will begin from where we stopped. I just want to remind Honourable Members that we have over 30 Members to contribute, and we have to finish the business on today's Order Paper. So, if you can please reduce repetitions, it will help us a great deal.

**HON ALFUSAINY CEESAY [SAMI]:** Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker, for giving me the floor. I would like to thank His Excellency the Vice President and the Honourable Ministers here present. Also, my special thanks go to the people of Sami for re-electing me.

My first point of intervention will be on the Ministry of Agriculture which is a very important Ministry. Honourable Speaker, we all know the country cannot develop without agriculture, because we will all suffer as a country without food. The President in his speech mentioned that there was a bumper harvest, but there was nothing mentioned about fertilizer. This is a difficult year for the farmers because they cannot afford the cost of fertilizer in this country. From the past five years to date, I have been talking about the accessibility and affordability of fertilizers to the farmers to enhance productivity but to no avail.

Honourable Speaker, agriculture is not only limited to the growing of crops but also the rearing of animals. However, the Ministry is only concentrating on crops. Most of our animals died this year because of a disease outbreak. This is one of the reasons why I want livestock to have its own ministry if we really want Agriculture to move.

Honourable Speaker, the way things are going in the Agricultural Sector is not helping. If we want to get it our way, livestock should be separated from the rest of the sector. If not, nothing good will happen. Most of the animals move from one place to the other in search of food and water around the rural areas like Niani and Niamina. There is no food or drinking points for these animals. Therefore, they must go. These animals are good source of fertilizer in the form of manure for the farmers in those communities, but their movement in search of food and water makes it extremely difficult for the farmers to have the manure they need.

In addition, there are insufficient livestock assistants in the country and I do not know what the Ministry is doing to get more livestock assistants who would easily help the farmers when there are serious disease outbreaks.

It is also mentioned in the President's speech that eight projects are currently being implemented by the Ministry, each of which is for a specific purpose. We want an update on one of the most important among them which is the Small Ruminant Project. We want to know its level of progress since it is not featured in the President's speech. The speech should be written in a way that would provide clear and up-to-date information on all the sectors in the country as we are to debate and ask questions on it. So, if it is not clearly stipulated, too many questions would be asked.

I would shift attention to Health which is another very important sector in The Gambia and the world over. We are aware that our health centres are faced with challenging issues like insufficient personnel and drugs [medicines]. Health centres, for instance Bansang and Sami Karantaba,

would only prescribe drugs for patients since the required drugs are not available. Also, these areas are without standard pharmacies and private clinics as compared to the urban areas. Where are we heading to as a country? So, we have to look at these issues critically because the rural people are suffering the most. It is high time the Government gave a second thought to the affairs of the rural people by upgrading the health centres, especially in areas like Sami Karantaba because the people of Madina go to Karantaba for health services. If it is well equipped, it serves them well.

Honourable Speaker, it is pathetic that there is no major health centre in the whole of CRR North. I have said this over and over in the last five years and I am saying it again. *[Interruption]*

No! Forget about observation. Come up with a Point of Order instead.

In the speech, the President talked about community ambulances...  
*[Interruption]*

Nobody can distract me. I will say what I want to say. These community ambulances came with obstacles. We are told that fuel and the drivers' salaries are constraints. The communities are paying the drivers, fuelling the ambulances and even taking care of their maintenance on their own. The Ministry should reconsider this issue and at least take care of the expenses of the ambulances.

As regards Basic and Secondary Education, we know education is the key to success, so only quality education will move the country forward. Partners are doing a lot for the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education.

The speech indicated that a lot of schools and toilets have been built. However, we must thank GTUCCU for building staff quarters for the teachers and also a school in Bolibanna. Honourable Speaker, our committee once went on a tour to that place during the 5<sup>th</sup> Legislature.

**THE SPEAKER:** Honourable Member, which committee do you mean by "our committee"?

**HON ALFUSAINY CEESAY [SAMI]:** I mean, the Select Committee on Education.

**THE SPEAKER:** Honourable Member, do not argue or entertain side talks with people who want to observe you. Just ignore them and continue if you do not want to allow them. Also mention the committee's name whenever you refer to a particular committee.

**HON ALFUSAINY CEESAY [SAMI]:** I believe when I started, I said Ministry of Agriculture then Health and now Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education. I do not want to be repeating "education". You must follow the pattern of my speech.

**THE SPEAKER:** Honourable Member, you have done a lot of repetition here as you were speaking; we never commented. However, when you are talking to people, let them understand you. You may be talking about one thing and go to another thing. Please, it is a simple thing.

**HON ALFUSAINY CEESAY [SAMI]:** No! Follow the pattern of my speech. Thank you. Honourable Speaker, I mentioned the Ministry before I started my deliberation on it, so dwell on it. I do not want anybody to take me back by asking, "Which Ministry?" Thank you.

**THE SPEAKER:** Honourable Member, can you please take your seat? You were just being interjected, Honourable Member. You called yourself chairman because you are on the floor so that nobody can challenge you. You need to respect others. I am overseeing the operations here as the Speaker, so if I interjected you, it is not a distraction. I just want everyone to be on the same level. People should be informed, so no assumptions whatsoever. It is very simple to say "My committee, the Education Committee". However, it does not necessarily mean when you are on an issue, it is specific to education alone. That is just for your information, please.

**HON ALFUSAINY CEESAY [SAMI]:** Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker. During the 5<sup>th</sup> Legislature, the Education Committee went on a tour to look at some of the places teachers were staying. We found some of them staying in classrooms in horrible conditions. That alone is disheartening.

During the 5<sup>th</sup> Legislature, we once allocated ***D100 million*** to Agriculture. I think this time ... *[interruption]*

**[Point of Order]**

**THE SPEAKER:** May we hear the Point of Order?

**HON BILLAY G. TUNKARA [KANTORA & MAJORITY LEADER]:** Honourable Speaker, Order 30[1] which states: "*Debate upon any motion or amendment to a motion or upon any bill, part of a bill or amendment to a bill shall be relevant thereto, except in the case of a motion for debate on the adjournment of the Assembly.*" Honourable Speaker, Members

should confine to the President's State of the Nation Address otherwise they are taking time of the Assembly.

**THE SPEAKER:** I must acknowledge that the President in his address talked about education. I think the only relevance of taking us back to the previous legislature is to probably make examples, but the issue is the current situation. You can continue.

**HON ALFUSAINY CEESAY [SAMI]:** Thank you. We once allocated ***D100 million*** to Agriculture, so I want us to allocate the same amount to Education this time around so that the problem of staff quarters for teachers can be fixed. If we want better education, those delivering it must live comfortably and have free mind. How can they deliver if they are not living comfortably? Therefore, we have to consider that.

Also, I do not see anything in the speech that talks about addressing water and furniture problems in schools. These are serious issues schools are facing.

Honourable Speaker, we are saying that the results are poor but we never ask ourselves, why. The reason for the poor results from the rural schools is that most of the teachers handling subjects like Mathematics and English are not available in those areas. Some of the teachers do not want to go to provincial schools. As a result, schools in up-country suffer and this is why students are performing poorly. Also, some essential school materials are not available in those schools as compared to schools in the urban areas.

Honourable Speaker, on Higher Education, I refer you to Page 23 [*Paragraph 10*] of the speech. I quote: "*Because of the need for skills*



*development programmes, the Julangel and Mansankonko Skill Centres will intensify training efforts in this area. Both are fully operational in URR and LRR. To boost this, the revitalised Ndemban and Kanilai Skill Centres in West Coast will begin operations soon.”* This speech reminds me of Section 30 of the 1997 Constitution [*Right to Education*]. The speech indicates that our region, CRR North, is not catered for. How many skill centres are there? From colonial time to date, CRR North has no skill centre and Section 30 is saying right to Education at all levels. Honourable Speaker, skill centres are in all the regions in this country for youths to learn skills except in CRR North. Most of our youths want to learn skills but have no access and cannot come to urban areas because of accommodation. So, there is a need for the Government to at least provide one skill centre in Sami and another in Panchang so that those around there can also have easy access to skill acquisition. There is a camp which can be transformed into a skill centre. It is just for the Ministers of Higher Education and Transport to discuss as to how they can transform that camp to a skill centre. Even in Panchang, I am sure a land will be given for that purpose if approached.

Honourable Speaker, about Petroleum and Energy, we were told in the President's SoNA that the on-going Rural Electrification Expansion Project will be Universal by 2025 which means everyone will have access to Electricity. However, the previous SoNA stated the level of progress, but it was not stated in this year's SoNA. It only stated that **685** communities are to benefit from it, but we do not know which districts or regions are involved. That is why I said the President's SoNA should be well informed. We can understand if the regions concern were at least stated.

Honourable Speaker, I think the Assembly should create a budget line for National Disaster Management Agency [NDMA] under the Office of the Vice President as we all know disasters are bound to happen. It takes time before they respond when disasters occur since everything is centralized. Also, victims go through so many protocols while they are suffering. So, we should allocate certain amount to NDMA so that when disasters occur, people can easily get help without delay.

Honourable Speaker, I said it here when we were approving the 30% salary increment that it only helps those receiving high salaries but not the low salary earners. What we need is salary restructuring and not 30% increment.

Regarding Transport, Works and Infrastructure, there are so many roads under construction, but they were not talked about in the President's Address. In fact, we visited Hakalang during the 5<sup>th</sup> Legislature, but nothing was mentioned about its state of progress. Roads at Kaur, Nianija and others approved in this Assembly were not even mentioned in the SoNA. We do not know their levels of implementation. Also, they have already laid the foundation stone of Sankandi to Karantaba Road Project. What is its level of implementation now?

Honourable Speaker, on Page 39 [*Number 11*] of the speech which states that the ferry service plays a very vital role in linking the North Bank to South Bank although it remains challenging in the year under review. The Ferry Services Authority move Banjul-Barra Ferry Service to restore Barajally Ferry Service, but Bush Town Crossing Point continues to be paralyzed. This is very serious. It means this Ministry does not know Bush

Town Crossing Point. It is a very sensitive crossing point and many patients or people die there. Honourable Speaker, people cross Bush Town Crossing Point to access the only major hospital at Bansang. This crucial crossing point is in a very serious situation as I am speaking to you. This important crossing point was not mentioned in the Nation's Address. It seems the Ministry does not know what is happening there. The Ministry should seriously do something to fix problems there. Since colonial days, our people were manually pulling and are still pulling the ferry to cross. During the past election, a ferry service was momentarily provided there, but it was removed and taken to somewhere else I do not know. Please, the Ministry should fix the perennial problem as it links people to the only referral hospital there.

Honourable Speaker, concerning the legal sector, ***D160 million*** was spent on the Draft Constitution which expresses people's voice because people around the country and even abroad were consulted, but it went down the drain since we [National Assembly Members] rejected it. During my deliberation at the time, I stated that I want the draft Constitution to pass, but many people were against it. In spite of that, the President in his speech said they want to draft a new constitution to spoil our resources again.

### **[Point of Order]**

**THE SPEAKER:** Can we hear the Point of Order, Member for Wuli East?

**HON SUWAIBOU TOURAY [WULI EAST]:** Honourable Speaker, I refer Members to *[Behaviours of Members]* Order 17[f] "*While a Member is speaking, all other Members shall be silent and shall not make unseemly*

*interruption.*” We must allow the Member to make his deliberation so that when it is our turn to make deliberations, nobody will interrupt us, please. Thank you.

**THE SPEAKER:** The Honourable Member is right. So, let us allow Members to express their views on the issue. If you have a different view, you will be allowed to express it when it is your turn to do so. If you want to observe and the Member does not sit down, please keep quiet.

**HON ALFUSAINY CEESAY [SAMI]:** Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker. I know people who want to observe me. They are going to say something which is going to ... *[interruption]*

**THE SPEAKER:** Please, do not create more dialogues on this.

**HON ALFUSAINY CEESAY [SAMI]:** Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker. I am still on my feet. What I was saying is that a huge amount of money was spent on the Draft Constitution, so why do they want to Draft a new Constitution again? Let us review the draft which failed to pass and come to terms to save the country’s money. Why consult the people again? I think we should not allow that. Let them bring the Draft Constitution for us to review and compromise the things that we do not want rather than redrafting a new one.

As regards Ministry of Lands, Regional Government and Religious Affairs, the speech talked about the Local Government Act 2022 which is the same as what is in the 1997 Constitution. *Section 25[e]* of the Constitution states that every person shall have right to freedom of association, which shall include freedom to form and join associations and unions, including

political parties and trade unions. Why should somebody be dismissed because he/she is not in the same political party with you? That is a violation of the Constitution. Our Chiefs and Alkalos are not free because they are appointed by somebody. It is only this Assembly that can save them. This country needs good laws so that we can move freely and make best choices. Honourable Speaker, we need to change this country.

We, the National Assembly Members, are entitled to pension if we serve two consecutive terms, but this is not the case for Ward Councillors as it is not in the Local Government Act. When the Executive brings bills to the Assembly, we should consider the interest of our people and not any other person before we passed it.

As regards the Interior Ministry, we all know the importance of security as this country is not safe, Honourable Speaker. Under the prevailing circumstances, we should know when to go out because somebody attacked the current Minority Leader in the Assembly some time ago. So, we should be very careful by virtue of people envious of us. Where Ministers have security guards, National Assembly Members ought to have as well since there is need for it.

Honourable Speaker, our security officers, especially in upcountry Police Stations, must have mobility in order to easily arrest culprits because armed robberies are rampant. Mobility is their major constraint. Besides, most of the Police Stations do not have good residences for the officers. The officers at Karantaba are really struggling with mobility. How can they swiftly respond when armed robbers launch an attack? Honourable Speaker, we have to prioritize the rural areas because the rural people

suffer the most in times of crises or unfortunate incidences. Taxis can be hired here, but it is impossible in the rural areas hence the need for mobility. We are tired of saying this problem over and over. At least, when we have mobility at Karantaba and other Police Stations, only then we would say the Government is responding to our needs. How can the Government maintain peace and stability when Police Stations lack mobility?

Honourable Speaker, Paragraph 8 of Page 55, there is no fire station from Balangar to Sami Tenda in CRR North and fire outbreaks in the area are frequent which virtually burn people's houses. When there is fire disaster, the people manage to put out the fire on their own. This situation needs to be addressed.

Honourable Speaker, regarding the President's Conclusion on Page 62 [*Paragraph 10*] where he talked about the functions of the National Assembly Members: *oversight, representation, and legislation*. We must be firm on those things because the whole Gambia is relying on us. If we fail, the whole country fails. This is why each and every one of us here should do our utmost for our people are looking at us.

When you were here, I did not tell you to wrap up. How can you tell me to wrap up when you took people's time?

Honourable Speaker, *Paragraph 11* of the same Page 62, he talked about peace. How can we maintain peace in our constituencies, in The Gambia and everywhere? Honourable Speaker, during the 5 years that I was here, I have never seen what I saw in this Assembly on Wednesday. If we want peace, we should not allow that. National Assembly does not belong to any

political party [*NPP, UDP or any other party*] but the nation. I saw NPP "*Yayi Compins*" holding meeting in one of our committee rooms with things written on banners. There are witnesses here who saw it. Let us put a stop to that. If a political party is allowed to have meeting here, another political party will also want to have meeting here, then we are not calling for any peace. The country belongs to all of us, and we want peace. If I want, I can be in any party. All political parties have political bureaus/places. So, let Political activities be in their bureaus and avoid using the Assembly for political activities.

Normally, Presidential/National Addresses are organised by the National Assembly and the security. I have never seen what happened this year. Let us make a stop to it in order to maintain peace.

Honourable Speaker, Paragraph 12 of Page 62, we are National Assembly Members and leaders. As leaders, we should say something that will bring or maintain peace. We educate our people who listen to us and we tell them what is real. So, we should not say or do something which will bring conflict among us. That is why, we should educate our constituencies. On that note, I thank you very much.

**THE SPEAKER:** Thank you very much, Honourable Member for Sami. Honourable Members, during the deliberations, we have heard very beautiful and brilliant suggestions from Honourable Members, but this is a debate on the President's Speech. We have very vibrant and powerful oversight committees that all of us belong to. If you would spare time, those Committees will always table their reports at the plenary and decisions will be taken. I would have to suggest that it would have been

better if most of what has been said today by individual NAMs be captured in the various Committee reports and recommendations. If agreed upon, the Assembly can move ahead. Otherwise, we are going to turn the whole thing into an adjournment debate where people will be talking about individual and all things. I now invite the Honourable Member for Foni Brefet.

**HON AMIE COLLEY [FONI BREFET]:** Thank you so much, Honourable Speaker. I would like to thank His Excellency the Vice President, the Honourable Ministers and my fellow Honourable Members for working very hard to the development of the country. I would also thank President Barrow for doing his constitutional duty. The debate here is based on the President's SoNA which is very important.

I want to buttress on Agriculture for we know that it is the cornerstone of development in The Gambia. As a former Agricultural Extension Agent, I know the importance of agriculture to the advancement of The Gambia, so we need to reconsider Agriculture very well. I want us to scrutinize procurement in Agriculture and the issue of bidders. We need to know the bidders to assign importation of fertilizers. For example, it is a serious problem to assign a person who does not know business to import fertilizers. This leads to the high price of fertilizer which is disturbing our farmers in vegetable and other crop production.

Honourable Speaker, I would want the Honourable Minister of Agriculture to take Integrated Farming System into consideration because we cannot continue to embark on subsistence farming. We need to venture into integrated farming system which involves vegetable production, animal



husbandry, and food processing. This means doing vegetable production and value addition as well as animal husbandry on the same farmland. The waste product of the animals can be used to fertilize the farm and then turn it into biogas. Through this, agricultural production will be advanced in the country.

Honourable Speaker, to reply to one of the previous speakers who asked whether the youths want to work, I would say the youths of The Gambia really want to work. I am a youth and I was an Agricultural Extension Agent at the same time an entrepreneur. I trained more than 100 on value addition and vegetable production. So, we [*the young women*] are ready to work, and we do not want to depend on the Government. This does not mean that I am supporting President Barrow, but I am an Independent NAM serving the people for the betterment of The Gambia.

My concern is for The Gambia to move forward, but if the youths are hungry and do not have anything to do, they would obviously attack the Government. I want all the ministries to make the youths busy in meaningful ways. I know how the youths are, so give them what they want. However, with Integrated Farming System, many youths can be employed and will never think of going against the country but if they sit the whole day drinking "Attaya", they will go against the people and the Government in particular. The reason of them being on social media every day mocking us is simply because they are not busy doing anything meaningful. So, they should be engaged in something to generate money. That is why I want Ministry of Agriculture to look into this area.

I know projects like NEDI, GIZ and FASDEP are trying a lot to train youth on entrepreneurship, but a grant of ***D50 thousand*** is given after training when the price of all the raw materials is high. What are we going to do with that money? Gambian youths can really make many things we import. So, contract Gambian youths to make shampoo and "eau de javel" instead of importing them from Senegal. I know the youths I trained with in Cameroon and Benin, and a lot of them are here. We can make shampoo, "eau de javel", different kinds of juice and many things which are being imported. Also, a lot of money is spent on importing food into The Gambia. Please, make the youths busy since they can do all these things here.

Honourable Speaker, I also want to react to my fellow Honourable Member who said that human wants are unlimited. Truly, our wants are unlimited but the resources are scarce in The Gambia. This is why people are fighting and doing bad things. The demand for the scarce resources is higher than the supply. We definitely need to address that.

Honourable Speaker, without good health, we cannot move as a nation. Ministry of Health is trying, but I want them to do more scrutiny and monitoring of the nurses. Why are the women dying during labour? Why are our children dying? What is happening? I do not want people to blame God for the deaths. Many a time, it is lack of proper care. Honourable Speaker, I want Honourable Vice President to make unexpected visits to the different ministries some times. In such visits, he would see some things which he does not wish to see. Not only the Ministers but the people of The Gambia in general are corrupt. We need to change for the country to move forward. It is not only the Ministers or the President but also the

people must be willing to work perfectly and honestly. We held the Holy Quran and swore that we will do our duty as Muslims in every institution, ministry and every working place, so we must be honest because "*kullu nafsin za ikatil mawti*" [every living soul shall taste death].

Honourable Speaker, the way we are moving is not good for the people of The Gambia and I really want the Honourable Minister of Health to help us. In fact, our people always complain about the Health Insurance. They said that if they go to hospitals even with the Health Insurance after checking and prescribing, they have to buy the prescribed medicines somewhere since no medicine is given. So, what is the essence of having the Health Insurance?

Honourable Speaker, on an oversight tour, I noticed that most of the hospitals lack many things such as medicines, human resources, and machines. I know the Government has invested a lot of money in Health and Agriculture Ministries which are important but to whom much is given, much is expected. So, we expect a lot of changes in these ministries, please.

Honourable Speaker, on the Ministry of Youth and Sport, the youths do not only need football but also entrepreneurship. Though football is important, they want to work and have money too. I keep saying that as an Independent NAM that I do not hate anyone and I cannot hate a son of my fellow woman, but I will tell the truth. We are witnessing many killings and murders everywhere. What is going on? People are blaming the President for this because he is the leader. He needs to talk. A leader's voice must be heard and whatever he says must be implemented. Any person who

commits wrong should be disciplined or sacked. If anybody kills, he/she should be jailed so that people will not see him/her again rather than imprisoned for three months or one year and freed.

My husband, here is not the matrimonial room. We are working, please.

Honourable Speaker, about the Sankuley Kunda Rice Field Rehabilitation Project, the field rehabilitation is not going well because farmers are complaining about Pavi Fort whom the project was contracted. The project should last for a period of 13 months and it is now more than 13 months still the farmers do not have any place to do farming. I would like the Honourable Minister to investigate this Pavi Fort issue because we cannot give contract to people who are not willing to work.

Also, giving contracts to people without monitoring is not correct. Projects should be thoroughly monitored because the money does not belong to the Minister or the contractor but to Gambians as a whole. Whoever is given the money needs to be monitored. Monitoring is a problem in The Gambia. We spend a lot of money on many projects and we do not even bother to monitor the contractors as they use the money anyhow they want. The country belongs to all of us so if it sinks, we will all sink too.

Honourable Speaker, I will take this opportunity to advise all of us and every Gambian. The act of people sending the slightest mistake[s] of the President on Tik Tok amounts to mockery of Gambians. We look very low compared to other nationalities when we go out. I have friends in Cameroon, Benin and Nigeria who do call and/or send me such videos of our President. This is not just a mockery of the President but Gambians in

general. I do not support the President, but I hate that attitude. Thank you.

**THE SPEAKER:** Thank you very much, Honourable Member for Foni Brefet. Honourable Members, I think I will constitute a committee comprising Minority and Majority Leaders and probably two senior NAMs to reconcile husband and wife. I now invite Honourable Member for Sabach Sanjal.

**HON ALHAGIE BABOU CEESAY [SABACH SANJAL]:** Thank you, Honourable Speaker, for giving me the floor. I want to acknowledge the presence of His Excellency the Vice President and our Honourable Ministers. We are very grateful for their presence on this important occasion. I would also thank the Honourable Member for Foni Brefet for that wonderful deliberation. She has said it all. To avoid repetition, I would like to be very brief.

Honourable Speaker, I think the topic on the floor has to be attitudinal change because we do not have to be mere consumers of good governance but active participants and co-creators. Anyway, the topic of discussion is the President's SoNA. In my view, the word 'state' is a particular condition actually happening in a particular period of time. Having read the SoNA, it clearly manifests some of the great achievements of the various ministries, but it does not actually capture the challenges faced by these ministries. It seems the ministries made the SoNA very colourful and presented it to the President without outlining some of the challenges. Various speakers mentioned some of the challenges Gambians

are facing; each of which affects a particular ministry. So, they should have been factored in the SoNA.

Concerning Basic & Secondary Education, the Honourable Member for Sami did mention Section 30 of the 1997 Constitution which deals with one of the fundamental human rights [*Right to Education*]. Section 30[b] clearly states: "*Secondary education, including technical and vocational education, shall be made generally available and accessible to all by every appropriate means, and in particular, by the progressive introduction of free education.*" However, this is a kind of dream in certain parts of the country as it has never been achieved since the inception of the Section.

The 30% salary increment tabled and approved a few weeks ago for the civil servants was as well mentioned in the SoNA since it was a political campaign promise by the President whose words should translate into policies. The 30% salary increment is a great achievement but it does not have any meaningful impact on the low-income earners. So, I am suggesting for a way of increasing their allowances to augment their monthly earnings.

Regarding Ministry of Health, the smallest amount some health officers in Ngayen Sanjal pay on rent is **D1500**. What are they going to be left with if that amount is deducted from their salaries? The President also mentioned the issue of community ambulances which is a very good thing but most of these ambulances are not being monitored. They are meant to be in the communities they were allocated, but we have been seeing some of them in the Kombos on private businesses. They should be stationed in the specified communities because that is the purpose. Also, my Constituency

*[Sabach Sanjal comprising 37 villages]* was promised a health centre or health facility. We are anxiously waiting for the Ministry of Health to do something about that because the President's promise should translate into an implementable policy. So, I hope that is put into consideration.

As regards Youths and Sports, the Minister should see that we have Gambia Wrestling Association [GWA]. Sport is not only about football but also includes other games. I do not know Messi because I do not watch football, but I do watch wrestling. That is what I know. In The Gambia, wrestlers are taken for granted. Muhammed Ndow *[Tyson]*, Senegalese wrestler, acquired his wealth through wrestling and has companies which employ lots of citizens. We can invest in wrestling, our own sport, to engage our youths as a way of creating employment. The former Government used to invest a lot in wrestling, so I am encouraging the Honourable Minister to work with GWA to reform and refurbish our own local sports which is very important.

Honourable Speaker, some people are not happy with the Honourable Minister of Sports, but I am personally very grateful to him because he accepted the criticisms against him and apologised immediately. It is always easy to criticize but extremely difficult to accept criticisms. When he was verbally attacked, he openly said: *"I am sorry, and here is the money you are talking about"*. This will at least encourage his colleagues, so I want to thank him for that. We should commend him for that. It is good to commend a person who has done something commendable.

**[Point of Order]**

**THE SPEAKER:** Can we hear the point of order, Honourable Member for Wuli East?

**HON SUWAIBOU TOURAY [WULI EAST]:** Honourable Speaker, you have already made a ruling that the man's name is not mentioned in the SoNA and it is not included in the debate. However, the Honourable Member is digressing to the same issue and I think it should not be allowed.

**THE SPEAKER:** Honourable Member for Wuli East, you are in order. Honourable Member, you may continue.

**HON ALHAGIE BABOU CEESAY [SABACH SANJAL]:** Thank you, Honourable Speaker. Attitudinal change would have resolved all the problems being discussed here.

It is always said that Ministry of Tourism contributes 25% of our GDP. Only two paragraphs were mentioned about Tourism in the SoNA. However, a multi-million-dalasi project coming to The Gambia was stated, but the sources of funding, the targeted beneficiaries, projects unto which the funds will be implemented were not indicated. Whenever we talked about Tourism during Covid-19, they would take Covid as an excuse for not doing so and so. Nevertheless, certain amount of money was allocated for travel and fuel in the same Covid-19 period. Was that money returned to the country? No. So, where was it spent? At least, the funds meant for travelling and fuel should have been returned to the Government coffers or even send some people on leave as we have seen it happened in other workplaces.



I worked with FTI International in the Tourism Industry. I was in Dakar with some tourists when Covid-19 broke out. We were called immediately to return since the company was shutting down because of Covid-19. All the resources we were supposed to spend for the remaining three days had to be returned to the company.

Similarly, if Tourism Ministry were supposed to spend about **50 million**, part of that money should have been returned to the Government coffers which could be used on Health or Agriculture. Honourable Amie Colley mentioned so many things which I do not want to repeat, but she did mention that as people of faith, we swore to the Holy Quran and the Bible to do the right things. So, if we do anything illegal, we will surely be accountable in the next world. *"Qul jaa alhaq walaw kala nuran"* [Even if you are to be killed, you should speak the truth]. So, it is always very important to put that into consideration.

About Ministry of Petroleum and Energy, this is also a dream to the rural areas. At least, we know that electricity is in phases, but it should have been captured and explained in the President's SoNA that this part of the country is in Phase I at the moment, but we will have Phase II in the future. This is the implementation method, so people should definitely understand that, the funds or monies they are paying are coming back to them. Only 3 villages out of over 57 villages in my constituency had electricity. Yalalba is a Kilometre or less close to Farafenni and needs 5 to 7 poles extension to have electricity supply from Farafenni. The same number of poles is extended from Farafenni to Ngayen Sanjal leaving over 37 villages within that area. Are we serious? We are not.

Concerning Fisheries, the focus is always on Tanje and Gunjur as far as fishing is concerned. The rural areas also need fish because we have "Yayi boyi" from Senegal after 7 or 8 days when we have the River Gambia which divides the country into two. We have some youths in the rural areas with limited resources doing extremely well to make fish available to us. Ministry of Fisheries should be able to support these youths engage in large-scale fishing. There are so many projects in the country, but the first priority of the officials is buying vehicles. The projects eventually phase out without achieving the set goals. The vehicles would then be auctioned improperly because friends are often called at night come buy the auctioned vehicles. Is that right? That is not what we need.

Pertaining to Ministry of Interior, the Select Committee on Defence and Security went on a tour to Police Stations and found them in deplorable conditions. If a Police Officer is renting in Ngayen Sanjal, he/she has to pay at least **D1,500**. The Police Officers need quarters just like the teachers. They have a wide piece of land that could be used to build quarters for them. Some of the camps used by contractors when constructing roads like the one in Saloum can be used by the Police Officers as quarters. The camps are equipped with air conditioners [ACs] and everything because those areas are very warm in March, April and May. The Police deserve the ACs and they need to be motivated with better allowances. It is very sad to say that they are receiving an allowance of **D250**. So, let their allowances be increased. They need it. I am just saying the truth.

Regarding Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the President talked about remittances received from the diaspora often during festivals, Tobaski or

Ramadan via Western Unions/exchange bureaux. However, we often receive deportees from the diaspora who significantly contribute to our economy in the form of remittances. Are we prepared to accommodate them? It is threatening because if these people do not have anything to do, they might attempt doing things which may not be to the advantage of the country. So, we should reintegrate the deportees and engage them in gainful economic activities. They cannot invest with the meagre token they are given at the airport. Consequently, it would be very good that we reinstate them in the system and socialise with them. Let us make good use of them since many of them are very smart and have acquired skills from abroad as some are engineers, technicians and so on. We should be able to share knowledge and experience with them.

Although Peace Corps are not deportees, we have seen them in the country learning and doing so many activities. The information they gather from here is what they develop and then sell to us at expensive prices. Similarly, we also learn best practices from Europe and America. We have our people who have been to Europe and acquire so many talents because they did integrate with the people there. So, whenever they are deported, we should make very good use of the many skills they have learnt rather than leaving them on the streets idle. They will end up drinking alcohol or using drugs and all other stuffs out of frustration.

As regards Ministry of Works and Infrastructure, we have recently seen Gambia Transports Union, one of the most important elements of development, having a rift with the Ministry. I was not the least expecting such a reaction from the Ministry: *"Bai len nyu deff lulen neh; nyun tamii*

*nyu deff lu nyu neh*" [Leave them to do as they wish and we also do as we wish]. This is not correct. The Ministry should have a dialogue with them instead of saying, "*The Police are going to supply us with their vans/buses.*" The purpose of the Police giving the vans/buses was to transport their own people to go to work. So, within that timeframe those people were allocated to remedy the situation, what impact would it have on the other people who were not allocated? Those two days, you saw Police officers standing on the street begging for lift because they could not have the bus service they used to enjoy. So, they were solving one problem by creating another.

I was not happy with the reaction of the Ministry. At least, the Ministry should have dialogued with them. If it were in the campaign time, they would never have reacted like that. The Ministry knew that it was not campaign time and that they were not needed at that time to bring people from Sami or Sabach Sanjaal. After two days, they would be frustrated and had to go back to the system. That is not what they were supposed to do instead they should dialogue with them to know their problems and try to find practical solutions. I was very much disappointed with that reaction.

Also, when awarding road construction contracts, the right people should be contracted and National Road Authority [NRA] has key role to play in this. You know, people will blame the Government regarding development. The funds are there and we have all the necessities, but they are not put into good use. NRA is the biggest problem in the country. How many millions of Dalasi are Gambians paying to construct roads? One or two years after construction, you cannot imagine the state of the road.

Honourable Member for Central Baddibu did mention the condition of Farato-Janburr Road which is being constructed from taxpayers' money. So, the corruption being talked about is right. Back in the early days, if a contractor saw a consultant coming, he/she would start to tremble because consultants put them on the right tract. Nowadays, a contractor and a consultant are seemingly of the same father and mother because they do not even care. If you go on stroll at night, you will see a consultant's vehicle parked at the gate of a contractor's compound. What are they doing there? There should not be any good relationship between them. The only relation they should share is to make sure that the specification of the contract is correctly implemented.

#### **[Point of Observation]**

**HON YAHYA SANYANG [LATRI KUNDA SABIJI]:** I know you are very hot. Anyway, you did mention that a contractor and a consultant should not have a good relationship but that can be very bad for the project. A contractor and a consultant should have a very good relationship throughout the project. Thank you very much.

**HON ALHAGIE BABOU CEESAY [SABACH SANJAL]:** Thank you. Okay, a good relationship should exist between them, but it should be based on the specification of the project and not otherwise.

I know what I am saying on corruption practices. We will never tolerate corruption in the country. I was a consultant working with GAMEX posted at Kaur. Go and see the condition of that road. Also, I was part of the consultants of the Sukuta-Jambanjelly Road Project. I do not have friends when it comes to work.

We have to work and move ahead as a nation. If we are to build a house and Honourable Njie may say the house should be built like this and you may feel that is not a good way rather it should be built like this. So, we may have different views, but the objective is to build a house. Eventually, if the contract is awarded to Mr. Njie, and you know exactly what Mr. Njie is doing is not correct, you should render him your ideas for the benefit of the project. This is what we need in nation building since we cannot all be President. One must be the President. If you need the country but you are not given the opportunity, that should not stop you from contributing to the development of this nation. We should synchronize everybody. Everyone here has heart for this nation. Honourable Member for Sami wanted to cry here because he felt the difficulties our people are faced with. So, let us be serious and move as a nation.

About the Office of the Vice President, the past floods did not only affect Banjul or the Kombos but across the country. This year, almost four people died in my constituency. Neither National Disaster Management Agency [NDMA] nor the Office of the Vice President visited or gave support to the affected people. So, after the floods, I was expecting that huge delegation from Kombo to Sabach Sanjal to see the people who lost their family members as a result of the floods. Decentralization should equate to equal distribution of state resources. It is very disheartening sometimes. During political campaigns or whatsoever, these people are the ones who will be clapping, jumping, and shouting. When it comes to development, they are always left behind. That trend has to change. We have to move as a nation for we are stagnant.

Honourable Speaker, I do not know how you will make sure the President gets the Finance and Public Accounts Committee [FPAC] report to take actions based on the expert recommendation[s] in it. Honourable Jawara said that the President does not listen to rumours, but he should listen to what is submitted to him. This is not a rumour because it is FPAC report from the National Assembly. He can act based on the report since that is what the President of the former regime used to do. The FPAC report indicates malpractices. We have heard stories that during those days when we had PAC/PEC [Joint Committee], the President did act based on its report immediately. So, the FPAC report should not be placed under the desk. Let the President act based on that report as nobody will blame him for that. If blamed, let him say that the recommendation is from the National Assembly. I have seen some malpractices happening, so nobody would blame him. Yes, I think that is very important.

The use of illicit drugs among our youths is a serious concern, yet we have seen some investors importing VODKA 22, Yagermeister, Red Wine and other illicit drugs into the country. It is quite pathetic to see 22, 18, or even 14-year olds with illicit drugs in the streets, and we are doing nothing about it. We should ban the use of all illicit drugs in the country. The Ministry has powers to make delegated legislation, so let them make it and we will support the banning of all those investors importing illicit drugs. If anyone is caught, he/she must be prosecuted. Nevertheless, this has to do with some of the business relations or some of the acts we are implementing for almost two decades now, for example: the Local Government Act.

For instance, Honourable Njie built one small house at the cost of **D5,000** for rent and pays **D200** tax. After 6 to 7 years, he will erect a big mansion from the rent thereby collecting **10 to 50 thousand Dalasi** every month whilst he pays only **D200** tax. Consequently, the tenants of that house would be littering the whole environment and the Municipal or Area Council is responsible of collecting and managing all those litters/wastes while the house owner is paying only **D200** for the whole year and making about **40 to 60 thousand** from each room. If he has about ten rooms generating **40 thousand dalasi each**, how much money is he going to generate? So, the Act needs to be reviewed so as to help the Councils collect more money for decentralisation to go on.

If we want to talk as Honourable Member for Central Baddibu did, we will be here the whole day and we will not move. On that note, I thank you all for listening to my deliberation.

**THE SPEAKER:** Thank you, Honourable Member for Sabach Sanjal. In fact, I was pleased when you stated your first statement that you would not take time, but the opposite happened. Anyway, it is a job well done. I now invite the Member for Kombo East.

**HON ABDOU SOWE [KOMBO EAST]:** Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker, for giving me the floor. First, I must acknowledge the presence of Honourable Ministers. My Honourable colleagues have said it all. I just have to elaborate on the areas left out.

In the interest of time, Honourable Speaker, we have heard the President, and I have to thank him for boldly fulfilling his constitutional mandate to address the Assembly and the nation on the state of affairs. The speech



was attractive and very touching, especially the concluding remarks where he advised the Executive and the Legislature to be much more patriotic and focused along non-partisan line and the interest of the nation. This is a lesson to be learnt and a tool to guide us in our operations.

Moreover, I would like to comment on the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs on Paragraph 3 of the speech where he stated that the revenues dropped by 14% in the first two months of last year. Here, he expressed the strategies and plans the Executive needs to take in its quest for a robust economy. The Ministry should consider the domestic borrowing strategy that it is applying since it could be a factor to the reduction of our revenues because commercial banks or financial institutions that provide those funds could be useful to the individual businesses the Government relies on to collect more taxes. In doing so, domestic taxation will encourage higher interest rate on loans for small-scale businesses and other farming enterprises. I would suggest the Government to look into the rate and volume of the domestic borrowings.

Concerning Ministry of Agriculture, I have heard him explained a lot, but the Livestock Subsector has not been highlighted in detail since only poultry farming was stated. To sustain food self-sufficiency, crop cultivation, livestock rearing and then dairy farming have to go together. Considering countries within the sub-region, I have noticed that farmers and herders are the cause of instability although not at highest rate in The Gambia. Farmers and herders normally share the same sector, but this did not feature in the Government's plan of action in trying to create boundaries and sectors for these. We have not seen any pastoral area for

herdsmen and livestock owners to utilise peacefully so that the demand for livestock products could be locally produced. We have cattle and small ruminants in the Kombos but then space is becoming worrisome. It is prerequisite for the Ministry to look into this and try to identify pastoral areas. We have seen in our local communities, Kombo Santotos, pastoral lands and ways for cattle and other ruminants are now becoming human settlements. People are occupying those areas and cattle owners are left with no choice but to migrate. We have seen how extremism emerges in other countries within the sub-region. So, the Ministry should work on strategies to mitigate that and to manage the limited land or space we have to create a specific area for pastoral farming and crop cultivation to avoid confrontation in the near future.

Regarding Ministry of Petroleum and Energy, we have heard very well from the President which sounds good, but we expected the rural electrification to be well elaborated to give hope to the Gambians because we know electricity is a necessity in human existence nowadays. In doing so, the rural electrification distribution should be looked into, especially within the Kombo Santotos which are emerging from rural to semi-urban settlements. The space we use to enjoy is no more due to congestion of people which could lead to outbreaks of some contagious diseases or pandemics. We know the world today is too risky as people are restricted and then the effect of contagious diseases could be very serious if we do not take our settlements seriously. We understand trying to make electricity available to Gambians, the high tension cables will be made within the settlements, but then affordability [the cost of transaction, paperwork and timing for one to get his electric meter in the house] seems too expensive. The Ministry

should look into ways of providing electric polls and other accessories to help communities [beneficiaries] have electricity supplies easily and within the shortest possible time.

About Ministry of Information, we are definitely emerging comparing Gambian standard to the world standard today. We have so many telecommunications, but our lives depend highly on internet communication. Our ACE cables are frequently disrupted which affects businesses and our daily lives, so the Ministry should work on means to remedy the situation so that we would also meet up to standard. As we know, we are in a global world and The Gambia is not an island. We may have a deal with a counterpart but we may not be able to get the required resources and the internet connection to communicate on time.

As regards Ministry of Transport, Works and Infrastructure, the President stated that some projects designed for the Greater Banjul Area will soon be operational. As indicated by the President's statement that activities are apolitical, so let these distributions be made wisely within the Greater Banjul Area, especially Kombo Santotos, because those are the emerging economies of the country today and most of the people there contribute immensely to our social-economic development.

With regard to Ministry of Trade, Industry, Regional Integration and Employment, it was said that the Ministry is working very well, especially in trying to encourage foreign investors into the country which is good, but in what way and form is the Ministry doing it? I do not know the angle at which the Government is considering these successes. However, I am seeing it in the area of revenue collection through taxation and other gains

rather than a source of employment. We encourage investors into our country by simply paying lower taxes and charges as compared to before. Nevertheless, having registered or established their companies, they tend to abuse our countrymen by not following the international labour standards in trying to give them jobs. Our people have no choice but to accept. Thus, the Ministry needs to work with or engage Trade Unions to come up with a strategy or an approach to engage both the employers and employees so that things would be mutually beneficial to all instead of being a safe haven for investors as they occupy our lands, have cheap labour and maximise profit. Our people realise nothing from them in return. It has been said here that our land space is limited. If we avail all these resources to investors, our people will then remain vulnerable since their farmlands are being occupied by industrialists and agriculturists. Consequently, they might not be able to take something tangible home to take care of their families or to grow to the standard of other people. It is like; we will remain to be primary producers. As a result, we will never progress to take over businesses in our own country.

Finally, on Ministry of Lands, Regional Government and Religious Affairs, we understand that The Gambia is a very tiny state with a limited land space, but the land management strategy is not being implemented as expected.

### **[Motion]**

**HON FATOU K. JAWARA [NOMINATED]:** Honourable Speaker, I rise to move a motion for the Assembly to sit beyond 6 o'clock in order to finish business.

**HON OMAR DARBOE [UPPER NUIMI]:** Honourable Speaker, I rise to second the motion.

**THE SPEAKER:** Honourable Members, it has been moved and seconded that the Assembly sit beyond 6 o'clock to finish the order of the day. Those in favour, please say "**Aye**"; those not in favour, please say "**No**". The "**Ayes**" have it.

**HON ABDOU SOWE [KOMBO EAST]:** Thank you, Honourable Speaker. As I have said, the Ministry should work efficiently to better manage the limited land space left. We have noticed that Kombo Santotos is the only area within the Greater Banjul with reserve lands for investors/companies. We understand that these lands are state owned but land tenure system shows that people were farming these lands for generations and are still farming them. In occupying these kinds of lands, there must be a consultative committee responsible to consult with the farmers before implementation. Normally, farmers would be occupying these lands and they would see people getting into their lands with machines and machineries. When asked, they would say that it is a directive from the top and the top is the Executive, so they have no power over it. This may lead to disgruntlement and some personal grievances between the Executive and the people of the area. Therefore, I would urge the Ministry of Lands, Regional Government and Religious Affairs to wisely look into this by establishing committees to come up with strategies to make land management system favourable to the farmers as Gambians and land owners. I thank you very much.

**THE SPEAKER:** Thank you very much, Honourable Member for Kombo East. I now invite Honourable Member for Lower Baddibu.

**HON KEMO GASSAMA [LOWER BADDIBU]:** Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker. I would want to acknowledge the presence of His Excellency the Vice President, Cabinet Ministers, my fellow Honourable Members, the security personnel, and the media.

Honourable Speaker, I would like to start my deliberation with Ministry of Agriculture. You can bear me witness that agriculture was the backbone of our economy, but I do not think that is the case now. The President has mentioned that 40% of our GDP comes from remittances. If that is the case, then remittances have now overtaken agriculture which used to be the backbone of our economy. I believed we are not gaining more in agriculture because we are not prepared to venture into mechanised farming system. Without farm mechanisation, I do not think we can achieve food self-sufficiency. Quite recently, I saw the distribution of modern farming implements to the farmers in Mali, one of our West African countries, by the Military Junta. On the contrary, our Government sometime back distributed donkeys to farmers in the Baddibus. We must venture into farm mechanisation if we want to achieve what we desire. It is only then, we will reach the promise land.

Another thing confronting the Agricultural Sector is the claim that we have more experts or graduates or PhD holders than any other department. Are these knowledgeable people actually trying to translate the knowledge acquired into our agricultural sector? I say, no.

Another problem is the inability of farmers to go in for mechanised farming implements such as tractors. So, the Government is duty-bound to provide tractors to our farmers as it happened in the Second Republic which we all witnessed. Farmers used to access tractors during the former regime. However, instead of allowing them to continue using the tractors in a more organized manner, the tractors were taken from them all of a sudden.

**[Point of Order]**

**HON OMAR DARBOE [UPPER NIUMI]:** Honourable Speaker, thank you so much for given me the opportunity. Scope of the Debate, Standing Order 30[1] states: "*Debate upon any motion or amendment to a motion or upon any bill, part of a bill or amendment to a bill shall be relevant thereto, except in the case of a motion for debate on the adjournment of the Assembly*". Therefore, the Honourable Member should confine himself to the State of the Nation Address by the President. However, he can express all these issues during the adjournment debate later. Thank you.

**THE SPEAKER:** Thank you. I think the same issue arose yesterday and Honourable Speaker made a ruling on it that the President's speech touched across all sectors of the country and we will still continue to debate based on those issues. Therefore, as the Honourable Speaker ruled yesterday, let us do our best to confine ourselves to what is on the agenda.

**HON KEMO GASSAMA [LOWER BADDIBU]:** Thank you very much, Honourable Deputy Speaker. Of course, the President's speech touched on Agriculture and the issues I am raising are actually part of Agriculture.

Also, the inability of our farmers to access fertilizers is a contributing factor to bringing the Agricultural Sector to its knees. If we want to achieve food self-sufficiency, we need to create avenues for our farmers to access fertilizers. We all know nowadays that the soil condition of most parts of The Gambia, especially North Bank Region where I come from, are not in good order because of deforestation which is hindering agricultural progress. So, for our farmers to have bumper harvests, they need fertilizers on their farms. I just want to ask the Minister of Forestry what plans they have in order to solve the issue of deforestation in our area. This issue is creating enormous havocs. A case in point is last year's powerful wind storm that struck the country and resulted in the death of large number of animals. Our people are still experiencing that problem.

Corruption in the country is indeed another serious issue. I would want to thank the Members who spoke about corruption before me. If we do not carefully curb corruption at the right time, it may threaten the very peace which The Gambia is known for. Corruption can lead to so many things which we do not want in the country. It can create anger and resentment among the population, especially the youth folk.

I would hold the President to task in eradicating corruption in the country because he is the Chief Executive Officer. People are saying that those involved in corruption must resign. How about if they do not want to resign? If I am a shepherd and a sheep from my flock happened to enter into someone's farmland then the person reported the matter to me. What do you think I should do? I should control that animal, but if I am unable to control it, I should sell or slaughter it. I believe in the China's Model of



curbing corruption. That is, if one is found to have tampered with public fund, he/she should be killed. That is exactly my stance on corruption because the culprits have been killing thousands of people in the country.

Recently, I saw a video of one Gambian officer in Senegal seeking for funds to pay for her medical bill. Corrupt officials are also contributing to the problem. If we have enough equipment and medicines in our hospitals, do you think that lady will travel from The Gambia to Senegal to seek medical treatment? No.

Honourable Speaker, we have to tell each other the reality that corruption is a key factor derailing our development so we have to cast it out with immediate effect. We need to arrest it right now. We think corruption is just only in monetary matters. No. There are civil servants who do not go to work on time and leave their offices before the actual closing time. All these things are part of corruption. We swore by the Holy Quran or Bible that we will do the job. Therefore, if anyone is not prepared to take it up, he/she should resign. As Honourable Jawara said, "If anyone does not want to hear the truth, he/she should leave the Chamber but we are going to tell you people the truth".

Regarding Security, I am very much concerned because we have been hearing numerous killings, stealing and breakings of public places within this month alone. I would not say the security forces or the Government is not doing anything about it, but I urge them to take drastic actions against the culprits. This issue is alarming because as I was sitting on this chair, I received information from Sanchaba that a 20-year-old boy was killed by two youths earlier today. I would urge His Excellency the Vice President

together with his Cabinet to formulate laws to reduce this menace in the country. Otherwise, if things get out of hand, I do not know what will be the outcome.

Security is paramount since no country can move without it. The reason why all of us are sitting comfortably is because the area is secured. If bullets were flying all over, would we be seated here peacefully? No way. So, I would urge the Government to critically look into this issue so that at least we can maintain the same standard as The Gambia is a peaceful country within the sub region. However, The Gambia recently registered the highest rate of crime in the sub region within a fortnight. That means the peace we are known for is now disappearing or vanishing. Honestly, Gambians need to take responsibility of doing what is right for the people.

As regards education, structures might be there but do we have enough materials in our school system? I have taught for some years before venturing into business and finally being a NAM. It is true that we need structures in our schools, but we also need qualified teachers, most especially in the up country. All the good teachers are being posted in the urban area, especially private schools. I think the existence of many private schools is seriously affecting our public schools. Most of us cannot afford to send our kids to these private schools. Teachers in private schools are forced to teach. This is why the results are always different. Of course, if I have the means to send my kids to the private schools, I will definitely do so because I want my kids to acquire better education. In private schools, you either teach or leave, but that is not the case in our public schools. I am sorry, but this is the fact because I experienced it before being a NAM.

I headed a private school at Tallinding. We put in mechanisms to organise ourselves in such a way that you either take up the job or we give you the matching order. This is why results in that school are always good and I know 98% of the private schools are like that. Why are public schools not like that? This was not happening before.

In the First Republic, public schools were doing well and the first 10 years of the Second Republic too. Nowadays, students who completed Grade 12 cannot simply construct a good sentence which is too serious. I think we should pay great attention to our public schools because most Gambian children are attending these schools as majority are from poor families. No wonder, we saw mass failure in the last WASSCE and I fear that the same thing might happen in GABECE as well. If I cannot afford **D5000** per term, my children have to go to a public school and this is what we are doing. It is the responsibility of Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education to correct the system. There are lot of combinational factors which we, as Gambians, need to solve to have a better education system. Thank you very much.

**HON ESSA CONTEH [JIMARA]:** Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I stand on all the existing protocols. I want to recognise the presence of the Vice President, Cabinet Ministers, Honourable Members, members of the Press and of course the general public watching this particular debate.

Honourable Speaker, I want to take this opportunity to thank the Government and His Excellency Adama Barrow, the President of the Republic of The Gambia, for fulfilling his constitutional mandate as stated in Section 77[1] of the Constitution: "*The President shall at least once in a year attend a sitting of the National Assembly and address a session on the*

*condition of The Gambia, the policies of the Government and the administration of the State."* Thus, we have the speech delivered by His Excellency Adama Barrow, GMRG and the President of the Republic of The Gambia. As a result, we are here to debate on the content of the speech.

Honourable Speaker, His Excellency the President has highlighted a lot of things or thematic areas showing the state of the country and also the development projects and policies the Executive has in place. I must say that I am very proud to participate in the debate and I am very proud of the Government for the tremendous efforts and achievements registered during the period under review.

Honourable Speaker, even the Badibunkas acknowledged that His Excellency and his Cabinet have really done a lot for this country. This is very rare because it is not very easy for Baddibunkas to acknowledge somebody's efforts. Today, we say thank you and bravo to the President and his team.

I have nothing much to say because Honourable Member for Central Baddibu has already touched on all the areas I have highlighted to talk about, so I even wanted to withdraw my request to speak at some point. However, I want to make my points on only two areas which he had not discussed in his deliberation.

Honourable Speaker, if you look at point three of the President's introductory remark where he talked about Gambia being a transformed nation, two or three Honourable Members expressed their opinions on how a transformed nation should look like, but I want to take a different dimension. In this Assembly, we are speaking English which is very tricky

sometimes. The meanings of some English words depend on the context. So, based on my understanding, I believe The Gambia is transforming if not already transformed as opposed to what has been said by my colleagues.

Honourable Speaker, during the past 22 or 27 years, The Gambia and Gambians were caged, but we are now enjoying democracy, rule of law, justice, freedom of speech and freedom of expression, yet we say The Gambia is not a transformed nation. Previously, this particular Assembly used to be "I concur" National Assembly but today, it reflects the aspirations and serves as a beacon of hope for the people of The Gambia. This is simply because of the enabling environment created by the Government of His Excellency for everybody to participate or exercise his/her constitutional rights.

Honourable Speaker, we cannot bring out the realities to make our points very valid if we do not make some comparisons. About 27 years ago, it was almost impossible for an individual to win a case against the sitting President as the Executive ensured that nobody challenged them. Today, we have seen in some cases where the President or the Government lose cases against individuals, yet we say The Gambia is not a transformed nation.

I have been told that most of the points I have can be addressed during our adjournment debate, so I will not take much of your time.

Honourable Speaker, the Security sector has made great achievements in terms of trainings and implementation of policies but my problem is in the Upper River Region. I had opportunity to work with the security fraternity

in Upper River Region for the past two years. Honourable Speaker, the way and manner these people are living in that particular area will surprise you. Accommodation is a problem as far as the Security Sector is concerned in Upper River Region. Looking at the nature of URR sharing borders with parts of Senegal, we have only 2 or 3 official entry points with more than 50 unofficial entry points.

As we all know, the role of the security is to protect the lives and properties of the people but they can contribute in the health sector as well. The URR borders are very porous and the securities are finding it very difficult to patrol the area. As a result, counterfeit medicines are smuggled into the country and then sold to our mothers, sisters, and brothers thereby causing unidentified diseases. I urge Ministry of Interior to look into the welfare of the security personnel as far as URR is concerned.

Mobility is a problem wherever you go in the country, and many Members talked about it. The security cannot perform effectively and efficiently in patrolling around the borders without mobility. When you just cross the boarders, you will see the Senegalese Gendarmerie and Forest Guards well equipped with mobility patrolling anyhow. That is why it is very difficult to escape even with a cup of sugar in Cassamance but it is a problem in The Gambia. I could recall two years ago that Senegalese Forest Guards entered into The Gambia in pursuit of somebody accused of transporting timber to The Gambia. They even opened fire in the community called Gambisarra. This should not have happened if we had the police, army or any other security apparatus patrolling the border line.

We understand that The Gambia has bilateral relationship and agreements with Senegal. I think the National Assembly passed something called "*Hot Pursuit*" but its content is not known to the general public. I think the Senegalese are misusing this "*Hot Pursuit*". This is something I would urge Ministry of Interior or Defence to carefully look into for I do not know which one of them it falls under. One day or the other it is going to cause a problem between the two countries. Gone are days when people are scared of armed robbers or even officers. Before, members of the general public are being trampled upon by armed robbers from Cassamance end, but we have cutlasses, axes or even guns in our houses nowadays. It is not going to be business as usual.

Before I take my seat, I want to concur with the deliberations of the Honourable Members for Sabach Sanjal and Foni Brefet. According to them, The Gambia is experiencing an attitudinal problem which is across the board including the Executive, Judiciary, National Assembly Members and the general public. It is only in this country where civil servants, who are appointed and paid by tax payer to take care of the needs and welfare of the people, do nothing in the offices other than foot dragging and undermining one another.

Honourable Speaker, I have fear looking at the nature of the laws in the 1997 Constitution. Maybe, we will have the Constitutional Review Commission's report and recommendations here on the table by next session. Looking at the politics of self-centredness, self-interest and selfishness among Members, I fear that we may one day or the other fail the general public whom we represent here. The President said it in his

concluding remarks. I want to refer you to Page 63, Paragraph 15 where it states: *"In whatever you do, let the interest of the Nation come first. To deliver, it is imperative that you work along bipartisan line."* As alluded to by the President and emphasised by some Honourable Members yesterday that we should work along bipartisan line in fulfilling the people's aspirations and safeguarding their honour.

However, the reality on the ground is far from what the President advised us to do, so I want to urge all the Members to take this seriously. We are here on political tickets, but to represent the Gambian people in general. We, as Honourable Members, need to behave in accordance with and to uphold the core values of the National Assembly. The title "Honourable Member" is not out of the blue, but based on the trust and confidence bestowed on us by the vulnerable people of The Gambia to speak and act on their behalf in legislating good laws for the betterment of the country. We are about to fail our people taking into consideration the personal and political interests we started to display which I think is not honourable.

On that note, I want to seize this opportunity to thank the people of Jimara Constituency for electing me to speak on their behalf. Jimara has been neglected and under-represented for the past 52 years so these are things that we can discuss at plenary. Thank you.

**THE SPEAKER:** Honourable Member, thank you for your generosity in time management. When you started, I thought you would speak for more than five minutes. Anyway, thank you and I hope those coming will be more generous than you are. I now call on the Member for Sanimentereng.



**HON FATOU CHAM [SANIMENTERENG]:** Thank you for giving me the floor, Honourable Speaker. First, I have to acknowledge the presence of the Vice President of the Republic of The Gambia and the Honourable Ministers for fulfilling their constitutional mandate and being with us since yesterday on behalf of the President, but the way they are seated is not gender-balanced. Fortunately, Honourable Minister for Gender, Children and Social Welfare is with us whom I have to give special thanks because she is the only woman with us since the first day.

I will start with issues of land. Honourable Speaker, we all know that Salagi is part of Sukuta and this is exactly the community I belong. A month and a half ago, the Salagi Market [owned by women I guess] has been demolished which led to chaos in that particular market. So many malpractices were done to women like throwing of tear gases to disperse in order to demolish the market. This is not fair to the women of this nation. Therefore, I hereby ask the Honourable Minister of Lands, Regional Government and Religious Affairs whether his ministry has any place to be allocated to the women of that particular area to do their normal businesses so as to support their families and husbands.

Honourable Speaker, I suggest for the Honourable Minister of Lands or the Physical Planning to dialogue with or engage the people whose places need to be demolished if need be to solve problems and prevent violence. What dialogue fails to solve, I think chaos cannot solve that.

Honourable Speaker, due to a tear gas thrown by the Paramilitary, a man from Salagi sustained injury on his ear then he was rushed to the Serrekunda Hospital for treatment and up till now nothing absolutely has

been done about it. As I said earlier, dialogue should have been the best practice to maintain peace. Honourable Speaker, lands have been claimed by people who do not even know how they were inherited, yet the Minister of Lands or Physical Planning gives such lands to those people. I have evidences of those particular lands.

**[Point of Order]**

**HON SAINY JAWARA [LOWER SALOUM]:** Thank you, Honourable Speaker. Content of Speeches, Standing Order 29 [1] states: "*Every Member shall restrict his or her observations to the subject under discussion.*" I guess the Member for Sanimentereng is deviating.

**THE SPEAKER:** Thank you, Honourable Member. For speed of time, I will advise the Honourable Member to concentrate on the President's statement which touched on all sectors as I indicated earlier on. Thank you. Honourable Member, you may continue.

**HON FATOU CHAM [SANIMENTERENG]:** Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker. I think this is about constituency matter and there will not be a country or Nation without the combination of these constituencies. Basically, I think these problems not only affect Sanimentereng but other constituencies as well. Nevertheless, thank you very much and I will proceed.

Honourable Speaker, regarding the issues of the victims of April 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> together with the victims of July 22<sup>nd</sup> [our own sisters, brothers, aunts, daughters and sons], I think ***D50 million*** reparation was distributed among these victims, yet some are complaining that they neither have

places to live nor benefited from the medical treatments. I am appealing to the line ministries to look into that properly. These people deserve good health and living.

Honourable Speaker, concerning the issue of women gardeners country wide especially in Sanimentereng constituency, we have all heard from the President during his campaign that women will no more use wells and robes to water their gardens rather they will use the internet services. On the contrary, women even lack water in their gardens. Honourable Speaker, according to the SoNA, a lot has been done in the women sector. However, I am appealing to the President to properly consider supporting women in their gardens.

Honourable Speaker, I know the issue has been in court, but the remains of Solo Sandeng have to be given to the family at least for a proper burial.

Honourable Speaker, about the security sector, we were seriously attacked by the PIU on our nomination day at West Coast Region and still nothing has been done about that. I think the line ministries have to come up with something to that effect because maltreatment of people on their nomination day must stop. Our own brothers and mothers were seriously affected and nothing has been said about it and these are citizens of The Gambia.

With regard to road connectivity, my constituency is benefiting from the OIC Project. Notwithstanding, the roads from Brufut Gamtel through Ghana Town to Madiana and also from Hydera Kunda Junction to Tintinto are in very terrible conditions. Some houses were demolished and there was no compensation, so I am urging the line ministries to compensate those

affected to have very good living which they deserve and to properly look into the project timeline so that it will not go beyond the stipulated time because the roads are actually in very bad conditions, especially during the rainy season.

Some of the Honourable Members have already spoken about maternal mortality. Thus, I thank Honourable Amie Colley [Member for Brefet] for elaborating on the conditions women go through during labour. I definitely urge the Honourable Minister of Health to look into this properly because women are dying day in day out. I do not know what measures can be taken to reduce this as I know we cannot stop it. When a woman is pregnant now, her husband will not sleep at all because of the prevailing circumstances.

Honourable Speaker, there are taxes and policies here and there but I urge Ministry of Finance to come up with a Tax Expenditure Bill or Policy for it to be introduced in The Gambia because as far as there is a Tax Collection Policy, there should be a tax expenditure policy as well.

Honourable Speaker, the National Development Plan should address political, social and economic challenges. There is extreme low representation of women at all levels. Also, there is lack of adequate affirmative action in the enforcement, implementation and monitoring of laws and policies. Besides, social norms, values and needs are challenges. On the economy, we have inadequate funds and difficulty to access them.

Women accessing and having ownership of lands are absolutely lacking, Honourable Speaker.

Honourable Speaker, disasters occur in the form of fire outbreaks and also floods during the rainy season. One of the Honourable Members has already spoken about that, so I do not need to reiterate that but then I just want to concur with him that we need to solve these problems or put them in consideration prior to the rainy season. We should not just wait for flooding to occur then we start to remediate the situation. Therefore, I want the line ministries to properly put in place preventative measures. Also, the ministries should be ready to support the disaster victims on time rather than wait until they are not able to have food for their families, to pay school fees for their children and/or to support their husbands in order to receive the much needed support.

Honourable Speaker, I would like Ministry of Lands, Regional Government and Religious Affairs to collaborate with the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education to give special support to the girls who graduate from the Arabic schools because most of them either get married or teach in schools upon completing Arabic education and nothing more for them like becoming ministers, ambassadors and so on.

Honourable Speaker, we have all seen the company which gave some buses to the Government of The Gambia. I expected Ministry of Transport, Works and Infrastructure to explain to the general public how those buses came into The Gambia. Were they given on loan bases? If so, how much does it amounts to and what will be the terms of payment?

Concerning Ministry of Trade, Industry, Regional Integration and Employment, the Trust-based Secure Routing Protocol [TSRP] has not been respected by Senegal. In this regard, I expected the said Ministry to

seriously discuss with them to make sure that this protocol is respected in our countries and beyond.

Also, when one is travelling to either Senegal or Guinea Bissau, there are high charges of CFA franc in every station on the way. I do not think this is fair to our people. There is already an agreement that a citizen of one ECOWAS country need not pay anything to enter into another ECOWAS country like Senegal or Guinea Bissau, yet they levy charges all over. I think the Ministry has to look into this properly through collaboration to stop this because it is not taking us any further.

As regards the Ministry of Fisheries, Water Resources and National Assembly Matters, we have all seen the Chinese, Senegalese and people from other countries catching fish in our waters and taking them to their various countries or selling them here at exorbitant prices which most people in The Gambia cannot afford. So, I urge the Ministry to look into this properly so that fish can be affordable. I thank you very much.

**THE SPEAKER:** Thank you very much, Honourable Member for Sanimentereng. I now invite the Honourable Nominated Member, Kebba Lang Fofana.

**HON KEBBA LANG FOFANA [NOMINATED]:** Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I would like to acknowledge the presence the Vice President as well as all the Honourable Ministers here present, and I thank them for being with us since yesterday. Also, I would like to specially thank the President for fulfilling his constitutional mandate.

Honourable Speaker, we are here to debate and analyze issues as well as give our suggestions on the SoNA which is supposed to tell us the state of

affairs of the country regarding Government policies and programmes as at a particular period. Of course, the report under review is presented in 2022 but it is for 2021, the year that ended.

Without wasting much time, I will start my deliberation with the Ministry of Finance. I want to make a little clarification by highlighting some of the strategies the Government was implementing during post Covid-19 period because this is a concern raised by many Honourable Members. To do justice to that, I would like to refer the Assembly to page 7, Paragraph 3 of the report. I will read the entire paragraph and then highlight my area of concentration. It reads: *"Revenue collection for the first two months of 2022 declined by 14% against the same period in 2021. Prompted by this development, the Government resolved to formulate robust policies which would set buffers against such an enhanced domestic resource mobilisation."*

Honourable Speaker, I would like to deliberate on the sound economic recovery strategy which the Government formulated by emulating or embracing policies and principles which would strengthen the domestic resource mobilisation. When we say domestic resource mobilisation, we signify ways and means countries generate their own local funds to be spent on their own developments.

If you look at the current report, you would realize that the total debt payment of the Government stands at **5.01 billion** out of which **1.9 billion** is for external borrowing and **3.1 billion** for domestic borrowing. Meaning, the Government is confronted with inadequate resources. So, the Government is not only trying to borrow but also to enhance the revenue we mobilise locally.

If we support the Government in this strategy, it would yield so many dividends. One of these dividends is domestic resource mobilisation which is the most reliable source of public funding because it is in our hands. Through this, we will not be relying on developmental partners or donor agencies and/or grants. Besides, we would not pay any interest on it and we would be at liberty to prioritise where to inject the funds at the end of the day.

So, let us imagine of the ideal situation whereby this strategy worked in 2021 for instance and we have acquired adequate resources which warranted the Government not to go for any borrowing. It would mean that our external debt payment of **5.01 billion** would have been readily available to be injected into other priority areas of the economy. However, the **3.1 billion** domestic borrowing would imply that the Government would be competing with the private businesses over the little available resources from the commercial banks. So, imagine of the ideal situation where we support the Government in its domestic resource mobilisation efforts and we are able to raise ... [Interrupted]

**[Point of Observation]**

**HON SUWAIBOU TOURAY [WULI EAST]:** Thank you very much, Honourable Member. You are talking about **1.9 billion** for the external borrowing and referring to the **3.1 billion** as also borrowing, but the 3.1 is for the service payment instead.

**THE SPEAKER:** Honourable Member, can you use the microphone?

**HON SUWAIBOU TOURAY [WULI EAST]:** He talked about the 1.9 billion which is for external borrowing. According to him, the 3.1 billion is also borrowed domestically, so I am saying that the 3.1 is not the



borrowing but service payment. This is referring to the payment not the borrowing.

**HON KEBBA LANG FOFANA [NOMINATED]:** Honourable Member, I just want to remind you that you will never pay if you do not borrow. We are paying those debts because we borrowed them. The payment is over a period of time not in a lump sum. It will be paid based on the contractual agreement. So, I think I am on point, but thank you for enhancing my deliberations.

Honourable Speaker, as I was saying earlier, let us imagine of the ideal situation where the country's domestic resource mobilisation efforts are enhanced and we are able to raise our own funds to the point that we would not depend on external funds in the form of either grants or loans. I would like to carry on with this, but let us save it for the future.

**[Point of Observation]**

**HON YAHYA SANYANG [LATRIKUNDA SABIJI]:** I am on my knees because this is very important, please. You are trying to convince National Assembly to help Government on its local resource mobilisation by way of local lending which has fatal consequences.

**HON KEBBA LANG FOFONA [NOMINATED]:** Sorry, can you take your seat? You have missed the point. Kindly sit down.

I am not convincing National Assembly to help the Government in its local borrowing efforts. On the contrary, I am telling the National Assembly to applaud the efforts of the Government by kick starting a domestic resource mobilisation policy to be self-reliant. So, I am trying to tell what we stand to benefit as a people. These benefits include having more savings and

additional resources which we will be in a position to redirect into our priority areas.

So, I would continue with what I was saying. If at all we are able to improve our efforts on domestic resource mobilisation, the Government will not be borrowing from commercial banks. Through this, private banks will have too much money at their disposals with less interest rate and funds will be available to promote small and medium size enterprises which will create greater employment opportunities.

Honourable Speaker, the Government is on track since the policies are good. However, sound policies must be accompanied by efficient and collective monitoring mechanisms. I fervently believe that if we can harness our potentials which are readily available in the domestic resource mobilisation, the situation will be different since we do not need to borrow money or even operate on a budget deficit.

Honourable Speaker, Government can formulate great policies or have great ideas but at the end of the day implementation becomes a serious issue. The domestic resource mobilisation will come from taxes and custom excise duties, but the collection process must be accompanied by an efficient control mechanism. If you look at all the collection processes in the country today, we can easily say that 90% involves human interface which has inherent risks of leakages. So, I would urge the Government to speed up the digitalisation programme more so when it comes to the collection of public funds. By doing so, we will be able to account for funds in totality and invest them to address the needs of our people.

Honourable Speaker, another strategy I would definite like to highlight with regards to the way the Government has been operating during the post

covid-19 period as highlighted by the report of the President on page 9 is the public management reforms. Basically, Government tries to come up with strategies which would definitely make sure that public funds operate in an accountable and transparent environment with special emphasis on the Local Government Authorities [LGAs]. This is very important. Many a time, we talk about the decentralisation policy which should start from the Local Government [communal level] – i.e. the village, the ward, and the regional levels.

I just wanted to really limit my contribution to the merits of the report, but if you would permit me, I would just take this specific example. During our orientation meeting in the National Assembly here, our experienced Members include the Honourable Member for Upper Saloum who is a member of Finance and Public Accounts Committee [FPAC], one of the questions or concerns of the FPAC which he raised with regards to the LGAs was that the LGAs always demand for more money, but they are not totally accounted for. Therefore, the public finance mechanism has come at the right time because the LGAs have their autonomy and are collecting revenue. How much are they collecting? What systems do they have? What are the mechanisms for verification?

The funds they do collect together with whatever the Central Government collects forms the total available funds for the Government to invest in the Health, Education and Environment Sectors as well as our infrastructural development.

So, if at all the Ministry of Finance has currently adopted the Public Finance Management Strategy to really address weaknesses in the public finance management of the Local Government Authorities. These weaknesses

might not only be limited to clerical errors which cumulate into leakages and every leakage deprives Government the opportunity to invest in the social needs of the citizenry.

Honourable Speaker, not everything can go to the Government, so I think at this point we need to do our oversight responsibilities in all the line ministries as National Assembly Members because if you look at the Constitution of The Gambia, there are very good laws but some need to be changed. Many a time, we make laws, but we do not enforce them.

With the domestic resource mobilisation, the Government will be in a position to collect a lot of revenue. There comes the responsibility of the National Assembly. I want to highlight one weakness which we need to improve on as an institution that is controlling the expenditures because we approve the budget so we need to know how the Government spends it. However, what we forget to know is part of Government money comes from the local funds which are collected by state agents whom we did not engaged in the audits of revenue for once.

So, if at all it is a legislative gap, I would urge this Assembly to come up with the necessary legal instruments which will ensure that the same emphasis we are placing on auditing the expenses is placed on the auditing of revenue generation. If I am wrong, someone from the floor can correct me. I believe this country does not have a problem of expenditure. Ministry of Finance was able to cut over **1.3 billion** from the 2022 Approved Budget as the Revised Budget which was presented to this august Assembly for approval in July, but we realized that there was a reduction in revenue of almost **3.3 billion**. Our greatest problem in the revenue aspect is that we were able to reduce our expenses, but unable to add a single

Dalasi to the revenue. As a result, the deficit rose up from about **2 million** to almost **5 billion** which means we have to pay greater emphasis on the revenue as well. I applaud the Ministry of Finance for the effort as the mechanisms are great. The initiative will give us economic independence but its attainment will not be easy as it requires being selfless, principled and effective. Also, the National Assembly must play its part.

Honourable Speaker, I would just want to conclude on the issue of Finance Ministry with a little contribution on the Public-Private Partnership Initiative the Government is coming up with. It is realised that the Government cannot do it alone. Many countries are able to develop and move ahead through Government-Private Sector Partnership. The National Assembly would not hesitate to really give the Government the required support to that particular bill when presented to the Assembly.

Honourable Speaker, as regards the Ministry of Agriculture in accordance with the report of the President which should be on Page 12, it is remarkable to note that there have been significant improvements in both crop and poultry productions but much of these can be attributed to the previous year because the 2021 SoNA report indicated that the Ministry did distribute dozens of tractors as well as seeds to farmers. So, with the right investment, we can have improved results.

However, I was hoping to see in the report value addition and the Ministry's plan concerning market analysis and development to address farmers' needs. There was an increment in crop production which can only bring substantial value to the farmers if the post-harvest losses are reduced significantly. So, the investments in Agriculture are really significant and it is refreshing to note that they are yielding great results.

We should now move to the next stage which is value addition to the vegetables women are producing. How do we transform the mangoes into something else instead of exporting them as raw materials or allowing them to perish? How do we expose our small farmers to other markets whereby they will have opportunities to add value to their produce?

Also, it was reported that over **6000** hectares of rice was cultivated which is significant. Nevertheless, what is the benchmark and how does it help towards our drive for food self-sufficiency? This would have helped the National Assembly to know the gaps and where Government needs our help the most. So, I would urge the Ministry to include benchmarks in the reporting so that moving forward we will not be in limbo when we receive statistics regarding their interpretations.

Going by the President's SoNA, I believe Ministry of Agriculture is really improving, and we are confident that with the current leadership...

[Interrupted]

***[Point of Observation]***

**HON KEBBA LANG FOFANA [NOMINATED]:** I will allow you if it is in connection to the point I am discussing if not kindly allow me to proceed. It is on the point I am discussing? Ok. You can observe me but do not make a statement.

**HON KEBBA T. SANNEH [FONI JARROL]:** Thank you Honourable Member. This report is very important because it pertains to the Agricultural Sector which 70% of the population depends on for income and sustenance. The reason for my observation is that they mentioned the increase in production but by what percentage we do not know because it is not indicated.

**HON KEBBA LANG FOFANA [NOMINATED]:** That is exactly what I am saying. I said we need benchmarks and know how the 6000 hectares of rice help us towards attaining our vision of food self-sufficiency. So, thank you for enriching my point.

To conclude, I would urge the Ministry to provide us with the relevant statistics so that we will be well informed to complement Government's efforts in making sure that this Ministry is duly given what it requires. A lot has been said about the Ministry which I would not dwell on. Some of them might not be pleasant but they are the reality. We are all part and parcel of the society, and we know better. Regarding the issue of capacity, the Ministry has it. So, we are confident that they would deliver.

Honourable Speaker, I would like to talk about Ministries of Basic & Secondary Education, and Higher Education Research, Science and Technology. It is gratifying to know the significant improvements registered during the past 5 years and key among them are the transformation of GTTI and MDI, the construction of numerous schools, the provision of enough classrooms for students as well as the laying of the foundation stone for the construction of a new complex at the University of The Gambia Campus in Brikama.

Honourable Speaker, I am a runaway teacher commonly call *RAT*. I taught for five years at Senior Secondary level. The teaching environment is not only about the classroom but also other very important factors.

The Education system needs to start from homes [the society] to the schools. At the school level, I would urge the Ministry to consider retaining Gambian Teachers because the school I was teaching before, almost all the native teachers left in succession which seriously affected the performance

of that school. Honourable Speaker, this country belongs to all of us, so no one will develop it for us. I am not saying that the foreign teachers lack qualifications, but I know for certain many of them do not have the required qualifications yet they are in the system.

Honourable Speaker, the other issue is the curriculum. Many a time, we witness situations where students graduate from Grade 12 and would not have the opportunity to further their Education, so they would be without any professional skills in any field since they are not exposed. Thus, there is expressed need for career-based curriculum in order to expose students to entrepreneurship and leadership courses at an early age which will guarantee that anybody who has undergone 12 years of acquiring mandatory education will be able to efficiently engage into doing something meaningful.

Honourable Speaker, it is unfortunate that social media often paint negative picture about the Education Ministry as having more schools, better structures yet performing badly. Let us ask ourselves, why? As a parent, I think I am qualified to answer it since every student comes from a home. There is no more corporal punishment but I know in life wherever there is no balance of reward and punishment, the possibility of having the desired results would be hard to come by. I am not saying we punish students but we must surely believe that one is rewarded for doing well and punished for doing badly.

Let us look at these reforms collectively to see whether they are giving us the desired results. Reforms should be progressive but today a teacher cannot even look at a student eye to eye, talk less of shouting at him/her.



If anyone does, the parent of the student will visit the school the next day. Nowadays, every student in Upper and Secondary Schools has a mobile phone acquired from homes and often log into Face book and/or Tik Tok. So, parents and equally the society as a whole have a big role to play. What the state can do is to provide an enabling environment, good policies and beneficial programmes.

To conclude, I strongly believe we have a lot to do at home, in the society and at the level of Government as well. If the Government through the Education Ministry authorises review of the curriculum to incorporate skill development, it will pay dividend for Grade12 graduates and will go a long way towards reducing unemployment, crime rates and social disparities confronting the society.

As a Member, I am not allowed to take questions, but you can contribute to what I am saying. If you want to contribute, you may go on.

**HON LAMIN CEESAY [KIANG WEST]:** I want to enquire whether Grades 1 to 12 is mandatory education or not. That is what I want you to clarify.

**HON KEBBA LANG FOFANA [NOMINATED]:** Sorry, I forget about the nomenclature I used. All I wanted to say is passing from Grade 1 to Grade 12 if that would help all of us to better understand it. I would rather stick to that description.

Honourable Speaker, I will move to the Ministry of Trade, Industry, Regional Integration and Employment on Page 43 of the report. This Ministry is very important as it is responsible for investment promotion in

the country. Gambia Investment and Export Promotion Agency [GIEPA] is tasked with the responsibility of attracting investment and creating the enabling environment by giving incentives to investors to encourage them. Some of these incentives come as expenses to the State. It is quite refreshing to note on Page 44 of the President's SoNA that GIEPA during the year under review generated investment amounting to **154 billion Dollars** and also created **2,274 jobs**. This is very important because without investment in the priority sectors, The Gambia would continue to be a consumer nation. Our quest is to graduate from that level and start producing the key commodities that we need.

The Honourable Member for Sanimentereng talked about tax exemption which means the wavers that Government gives. These wavers constitute reductions from the revenue to be generated. Most of these investors usually come with a business plan or proposal with an attached budget indicating the total intended value of their investment. It will also disclose the number of jobs the investment can create. Honourable Speaker, I would like to note with concern that the threshold of **\$100,000** to qualify for a special investment certificate in The Gambia is very minimal compared to other nations.

Honourable Speaker, I was fortunate to be part of a team that went to Rwanda and I can report to you for certain that the threshold in Rwanda to be qualified for a special investment certificate is **\$50 billion** but the most worrying aspect is not only the threshold but also the promissory note. This is worrying because we are reporting **154 billion** which was given to the President. How sure are we that all these investments would materialise? If

at all the Ministry of Trade through GIEPA would really serve its purpose, everything should be fine. There should be a sound monitoring and evaluation system, especially when investors come with a very beautiful business plan. They are given incentives not to pay taxes and duties which should have been revenue to be invested in priority areas of the State. The Government is giving them such opportunity because it is believed that the proposed investment will yield dividend that will supersede whatever tax they are supposed to pay. Many a time, proper follow-up is not done to ensure that the actual value of those investments are realised.

Honourable Speaker, I would like to submit to the Office of the Vice President to reconsider the issue of companies which have benefited over the years from the special investment certificates through evaluating their performance level. If you refer to Section 39 of the GIEPA Act, it states that the Agency will evaluate the performances of those companies so that if they fall short, the certificates will be revoked. We believed that the enabling business environment has been created. The Ministry has the strategies, programmes and policies but, we need all Hands-on deck moving forward to tighten the loose ends together. It is worth noting that having strategies alone is not sufficient to propel us to the next level.

Honourable Speaker, I will conclude my submission with the Ministry of Youths and Sports. First, I would congratulate the Minister for he is the most fortunate Youths and Sports Minister within the past 50 years since the country has been yearning to participate in the African Cup of Nations for far too long. Eventually, we got there during his tenure. We are telling

him “Jigk nga nyu, yalana yallah arr” [He is good for us. May Allah protect him].

Regarding Ministry of Youths and Sports, the President highlighted in his SoNA that both National Youth Service Scheme [NYSS] and President’s International Awards Scheme [PIAS] have been imparting skills in the Youths. I think NYSS has able trained about 152 youths and PIAS also trained about 252 youths. Honourable Speaker, a greater recognition should be given to the youths because they constitute over 60% of the population and it is a universal fact that they form the future leaders of any country.

I believe every individual is good and could equally be productive when given the opportunity even boys out there with dishevelled hairstyles, those brewing ‘*Ataya*’ in the streets or those sitting at the Ghettos.

Most problems confronting the youths are home-oriented because our society values ‘pen and paper’ too much to the extent that if a child is sent to school and he/she does not have good results at Grade 12, such a child is at the receiving end of common negative remarks such as “*Iteh barakala or "yow doh tekii*” [You would not achieve anything in life]; not knowing that ‘pen and paper’ is just an art to give one a profession. Such a child is deprived of proper counselling at a very tender age, woe betide him/her if he/she happens to fail at Grade 12. The society calls that child an outcast as well as a drop out. Collectively, we should not fail them. That is why I am happy for the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education [MoBSE] coming up with the Second Chance Project.

Again, I believe part of the strategies of the Ministry should be to embark on an outreach programme targeting those zones and hotspots that youths usually camp to counsel them. Part of our drive also should be to expand the current skills transfer programmes that we have started because if not crime will be on the rise. Currently, we are all blaming the Ministry of Interior for the crimes, but we should establish the causes. The Society should not reject anybody because it may lead to mental problem which is prevalent among the youths.

Honourable Speaker, many people are going to office every day but they earn less than the 'Café Toubá' vendors at the end of the month. What we need as a people is career and professional development. So, it is time we inculcate that sense of responsibility in our youths which must start with a paradigm shift requiring greater advocacy from homes to the schools. Thank you.

**THE SPEAKER:** Thank you, Honourable Kebba Lang Fofana [*Nominated Member*]. Honourable Members, we still have about 20 Members to take the floor. I now invite the Honourable Nominated Member, Fatou K. Jawara.

**HON FATOU K. JAWARA [NOMINATED]:** Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker, for giving me the opportunity. I would also like to join my colleagues to commend the President of the Republic of The Gambia for the eloquent speech. I also want to acknowledge the presence of the Vice President and the Cabinet Ministers.

Honourable Speaker, my intervention will focus on the Minister of Gender, Children and Social Welfare on Page 28. Honourable Speaker, with your

permission, I would like to quote the first paragraph of the President's speech where he stated, "*We will remain Steadfast to enhance the capacity of women in Small and Medium Scale Enterprises [SMEs] by scaling up the Women Enterprise Fund.*" Honourable Minister, KMC is the most densely populated area, and all our lands were occupied by settlers. So, we have no land for agriculture, but we conduct our agriculture through our market vendors or small businesses.

However, the Women Enterprise Fund is being diverted to the women in the rural areas. I do not think there is any women group in the KMC that benefited from the enterprise fund. So, I am appealing to your noble office to kindly cater for KMC women in case there is Phase II. As earlier alluded to by the Honourable Member for Sanimentereng, a market is lying idle. I believe we need to know the fate of this market and I think it is the Market of the Federation of Gambian Women that is already constructed and there is no work being done.

Honourable Speaker, I will proceed to another ministry because all the submissions are inter-ministerial which are read by the Head of State. Focusing on Tourism Ministry, we had tremendous achievements through the diversification of the sector. However, I believe the exploitation in the Tourism Sector needs to be addressed as it is a cause for concern. Our children are subjected to serious drug abuse in the Tourism Development Area [TDA] which the Ministry needs to address.

Honourable Speaker, regarding Health, tremendous achievements have been registered by the Ministry of Health such as the provisions of community ambulances which my former constituency [Tallinding Kunjang]

benefited from. Unfortunately, the ambulance is no longer in use due to its involvement in a serious accident and it was the ambulance that has been providing services to both Faji Kunda and Tallinding. I have already spoken to the Minister and he promised to act, so I want to know his decision on the issue.

As the former Vice Chairperson of the Select Committee on Health, Children and Social Protection, a lot needs to be done in our Health Sector which the report did not capture. I think we need to introduce banking payment system in the Sector and reports to the Assembly quarterly to enable us know what is happening there. Also, we should have proper procurement procedure in identifying equipment in our hospital because when they get broken, we cannot fix them because their parts are not available. So, that also needs to be addressed by having a specialist to help us ease the problem. Honourable Speaker, I have spoken about the revenue being generated to be paid through banks. Also, we spoke about the illegal dumping of waste during our site visit. We need to relocate it from where it is.

Honourable Speaker, on Transport, Works, and Infrastructure, we heard about the Minister's mission but it is a general notion that what belongs to the Government should not be accounted for. I raised a Parliamentary question during the Fifth Legislature that we have a bus lying idle in one of our auto mechanic garages in Lartrikunda and the Minister promised to take it upon himself to look at what transpired, yet there is nothing that was done. I think the Ministry needs to check that as well.

Honourable Speaker, most of our submissions were cantered on the construction and rehabilitation of roads, but I think one of the burning issues today is high cost of transportation which the Ministry needs to address because it seems there is no control mechanism in the sector. The current sit-down strike by the Transport Union is a cause for concern. I appeal to the line ministries and the Head of State to see how best they can bring Gambia Transport Services Corporation [GTSC] under the Office of the President because The Gambia Transport Union is not paying dividend and I believe it needs to come to the Office of the President to be properly monitored.

Honourable Speaker, Members also dwelt on the issue of corruption. Yes, there were some forms of corruption being practised in the system which no genuine Assembly Member would remain aloof.

Honourable Speaker, Gambians need to know how far the Ministry of Local Government has gone as per the alleged corruption scandals at the KMC. How far has that investigation gone? Moreover, the District Tribunal needs to be reconsidered because there are lot of abnormalities taking place in and it was set up to help Gambians. However, sometimes these badge Messengers and Alkalos connive to abuse the files of the victims of land disputes. So, Honourable Minister we need a serious intervention to address such issues.

Honourable Speaker, regarding the issue of Defence and Security, there is a general outcry of Gambians continually losing their lives. This is quite true, and I think it needs a proper attention. Moreover, perpetrators of these crimes come from homes and none of them were born criminal, but



they learn from the society. So, it is a collective responsibility of parents and NAMs to serve as game changers through guiding our children so that the country can move forward. The security personnel also need to be equipped with mechanism to be able to track crime zones and map out signals of crimes before they occur.

Other Honourable Members have also dwelt on the presence of foreign troops. Sometimes, I wonder how human behaviours change so suddenly. It could be recalled that during the impasse, every Gambian was crying for foreign troops to come to The Gambia to strengthen security in the country. By then, everybody lost confidence in our Security personnel. Honourable Speaker, these foreign troops came here through the mandate of ECOWAS, and we also have Gambian soldiers in sister countries providing security there. So, when did these foreign soldiers turn to be enemies of the country? As Members of National Assembly, we should stay away from certain statements such as "*We do not need foreign troops here.*" They are our brothers and sisters because they belong to the ECOWAS family. The foreign troops will leave when their mandate expires. On that note, I beg to take my seat. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

**THE SPEAKER:** Thank you, Honourable Nominated Member, Fatou K. Jawara. I must commend you. You have said a lot. You did not make any repetition and you were able to complete within a short time. I now invite the Honourable Member for Tallinding Kunjang.

**HON MUSA BADGIE [TALLINDING KUNJANG]:** Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker. First and foremost, I would like to join my

Honourable colleagues in acknowledging the presence of His Excellency the Vice President and the Cabinet Ministers.

I would like to begin by adding my voice to the debate, especially on the description of the country as a transformed nation. I do not agree in toto with the point of view that it has transformed because we have emerged from a dictatorial system in which the mode of operation no longer exist. In my own view, it is a journey that has begun since that justification is just not enough. It is like we are setting the bar too low. For me, we cannot also say, it is not transforming because we are not where we were 5 or 6 years ago. So, it is a journey in progress, and we are all on the path to make sure we attain that transformation.

I could not agree more to the submission of the Honourable Kebba Lang Fofana [*Nominated Member*] with regards to Finance. I just want to add that with the formulation of robust policies, domestic revenue mobilisation would be enhanced, but that alone is not enough. Mobilising resources must involve making sure that we do not have leakages. It is interesting to hear people say there is no money in the country. I tend to disagree. There is money in the country but the question is, where does it go to? The revenue being collected is going to individuals rather than the State. So, if the Government formulates policies to enhance domestic revenue mobilisation and matches them with measures to minimise leakages in all the institutions collecting revenue, it will be good for the economy. Sometimes, there are institutions assigned with tax collection, but then the people overseeing those institutions are the problems because they play oversight on other agencies as well. So, Ministry of Finance should ensure

that all the revenue collections are digitalised to minimise leakages. If we enhance that domestic resource mobilisation, it can go a long way towards financing our own projects.

Some tariffs supposed to be revised. At the airport, some tariffs give a range and this is a window for corruption because the liberty is given to the officer in charge to decide. For example, when an item costing **D10,000** is ranged from **D1,000** to **D10,000**, corruption is being encouraged. So, the officer concern may decide to charge the person **D2,000** and then gets some favours from him/her. These tariffs also exist at crossing points and should be revised. It is a challenge to tackle leakages, so I would not deliberate much on Finance, but I would like to know why the Public Financial Management Strategy 2021–2025 is specific to councils. I think the idea is fine. It is laudable but why councils alone? I have not seen any Public Financial Management Strategy for the Central Government, SOEs and Parastatals. Do we know the degree of revenue leakages in those institutions or agencies? So, why is it only limited to the Local Government/area councils? It should be across the board –i.e. Central Government institutions, SOEs and parastatals.

Many people have also spoken about the issue of deportation. I just want to quote what someone said: *'We have revenue, and expenditure is not the problem'*. I beg to differ with that position because if we misplace our priorities, it affects our expenditure which ultimately becomes a problem. How can you explain a government that wants to develop agriculture and attain food self-sufficiency while budgeting little above **D300 million** for agriculture and over **D1 billion** for Foreign Affairs? How can a country

with 60% youth population most of whom are unemployed budgets **D123 million** for the Ministry of Youth and Sports yet aiming to empower, develop and create jobs for them. If you consider the expenditure of youths on personal emolument, it is **D100 million** and the development of youths and sports is just **D23 million**. So, **D100 million** is all recurrent and only **D23 million** is for development. How can we do that as a country? The budget allocation is too small for that. The breakdown of recurrent expenditures include: emolument, fuel, allowances and even per diems indicates that we have spending problems. I believe if at all we are yearning for resource mobilisation, we should make strategic spending in sectors that would revamp our economy and not just for spending sake.

Also, we must recognize the tremendous efforts Ministry of Health has made in relation to infrastructural development. This could be attributed to efficient service delivery because sometimes in Africa, especially in The Gambia, it has been the trend to concentrate on edifice structures. We build a **D100** or **D200 million** facility which would be in ruin after 2 years of service. The intended service is more important than the structure itself. How can we spend **D200 million** on a hospital and after 1 year, there is still no service? So, it is time we focus on service delivery than using millions to build massive structures without delivering quality service to the people.

I have seen the performance of the medical personnel throughout the length and breadth of the country, so we must commend them, especially those in the hard-to-reach areas. These are competent officers serving our people in the provinces. We know that every Government sector is

constrained with resources, particularly Health. Somebody said that everything is health and anything without it is nothing. In my view, Health is not everything but anything without it is nothing. Health is important, so we should focus on quality health service delivery. The quarters for our staff in the provinces are very important and should be well maintained.

Sometimes, I do not understand the attitudes of Gambians. This is not about the Government but the people we serve. Trained nurses or doctors are not ready to go for postings. Even if they go on postings, they always complain about the hard conditions and eventually return.

It is time for Gambians to change our attitudes in order to serve our people better. If anyone is posted at any place in The Gambia, he/she should just go and serve people with sincerity. I was amazed by the changes I saw in Kiang, Gambisara and other places where the officers in-charge of the hospitals are all from Kombo and are doing well.

However, it is a challenge sometimes to retain these nurses at their posts. Therefore, we must encourage Gambians to take up that responsibility as people are sick and the distance from one health centre to the other is too far. So, if we managed to have a health post somewhere, the personnel should be ready to stay there. This is something we must recognise.

However, I am disappointed in some aspect of the speech because health is doing a lot in certain aspects, yet those aspects are not captured. We want to know what the Health Ministry is doing about the alarming doctor-patient ratio. I believe it is a sobering issue which should be captured in the President's Speech. We know there is scarcity of human resource, but what is the essence of the training programme? How many doctors are we

training in the different specialisations? These are national concerns which should have been mentioned in the speech.

Also, the rates of diabetes and hypertension are concerns. Just recently, Health Ministry has discovered instances of acute kidney problem and they are doing every effort to know the cause. Diabetes and high-blood pressure are diet-related ailments as a result of food importation.

We should look at the bigger picture. If at all what we are eating is causing these problems, we should eat healthy food to decrease the cost of medical expenditures. So, we should know the correlations. It is important for the President's Address to capture that.

So far, the Health Sector is moving forward, and we encourage them to continue the path they have adopted. However, I disagree that the Birth Registration Exercise is a success story. The idea is laudable though, and we must recognise the innovations from the Ministry of Health. When everybody gets insurance cards, we should ensure that the long-term objectives of accessing medication with those cards are realised. Sustainability is always a problem in Africa.

Honourable Speaker, we recognize the tremendous efforts being done to increase the power supply, especially renewable energy in form of solar system and the number of villages targeted to benefit is good. Also, I commend the Executive for separating the electricity sector from the water division. The idea of dividing NAWEC into 2 corporations: the water and the electricity sectors independent of each other is good because NAWEC is overwhelmed with issues. For the past 6 to 7 months, we have been experiencing perennial water shortage which the President indicated that

efforts are being done to remedy the issue. People are taking their own initiatives to solve the water problem by drilling boreholes everywhere in their communities. However, we do not know whether that borehole water is fit for consumption or not.

The Department of Water Resources should come up with a Water Bill to ensure the borehole water is portable and fit for consumption. The funniest thing is that people are being billed for what they have not consumed. While waiting for the intervention of Government, the problem continues. There is no water in the Greater Banjul. People have to wake up at 3 or 4 a.m. to fetch water. So, I think Government's intervention should be expedited.

Concerning Education, people have also spoken about the WASSCE results, and I have seen people measuring performance based on time. I am not saying the performance is not bad, but I do not think the measuring technique is a good practice. I think MoBSE has set standards with regards to credits and passes in the respective subject areas as well as the overall passes in terms of enrolment and gender. So, just to say there is an increment of 400 students is not clear and should not be regarded as achievement. The target is not clear and the measuring system is not correct. We should measure based on yardstick, especially in relation to where we want to go [destination]. Are we moving towards our destination? Do not just say we are better now than yesterday. That is not a good measurement. It is fine and excellent that schools are being constructed everywhere. I am not sure whether these constructions include libraries and science labs which are the most important elements lacking in

public schools. We have to adopt the culture of reading in schools and students must be able to access materials. Moreover, the Ministry should have budgets for libraries in the schools. If you go the only National Library we have, you tend to wonder what the Ministry is doing with regards to the library in Brikama and in other schools. It is important that we look at the issues of libraries and science labs when planning for the development of education.

In addition, if we are to transform GTTI to a university of applied sciences, we should also prepare the ground at the level of the high schools to feed that university. However, the technical departments of certain schools in The Gambia are weak and students find it difficult to specialise. It is our responsibility to encourage students to go in for the specializations they desire.

Focusing on the Ministry of Sports, like I said, we have to give prominence to this Ministry to ensure that they take the lead in bringing programmes designed to give jobs to youths. Yes, there are other programmes needed but it is not sustainable to depend on donor funding for budget support to fund our crucial sectors. It is worthwhile monitoring the implementation of National Enterprise Development Initiative [NEDI] and the TEKKI FII Projects so as to know whether individuals who can do justice to these projects are chosen to implement them because it is funny sometimes to see project workers build storey buildings and drive flashy vehicles within a short time, so oversights should be strengthened.

Besides, National Disaster Management Agency [NDMA] which has its own budget line has been widely talked about. However, I want a long-term



solution because we cannot have a budget line for just disasters. To me, it would mean that we are expecting disasters every day. There are disaster spots where anytime it rains, disasters always occur. We cannot keep funds and only gives **D7000** to victims every year that is neither sustainable nor desirable. We should establish the cause of disasters. For example, if people's buildings are blocking water ways, they should be demolished. Sometimes, it is also caused by newly constructed roads where the engineers do not survey the landscape of the environment. Such scenario can be seen at Churchill's Town, especially when it rains, the traffic is obstructed. The fact that we know the root cause of the disasters in some places, we should provide funding to mitigate or eradicate floods in those areas.

I would like to quote Paragraph 4 [Page 43] of the President's Speech which says, "*To promote stability, the Ministry is working with importers to increase importation and supply of essential commodities and stabilise commodity prices*".

During the Corona Virus pandemic, we have all seen the impact on the cost of commodities. So, it is laudable to ask importers to increase what they are importing but drastic measures must be taken at the level of that Ministry. We have few people monopolising this sector, and it creates what they call "Barriers of Entry" for common Gambians to enter that sector. This is something you may not see. It is not in the laws, but they have the support of the Ministry and sometimes people in the trade. Sometimes, people will tell you that they want to import rice and they try by all means

but they could not penetrate because institutions are helping people to monopolise this sector which is wrong.

Government must make sure that trade is liberal and there is high competition so that prices can be lowered. Those importing sugar and rice are few. So, Government must encourage Gambians to participate in this kind of business which has limited competitors. This is something we must recognise. Again, as indicated in the President's Speech, there are lot of markets being built, but what strategies and policies have we adopted to make sure that those markets are filled with Gambians and resourced to make business viable? Go to our markets and see who the sellers are. In the markets, the women traders called "Njendeng Njie" would import from the neighbouring country not less than **D200,000** to **D300,000** worth of vegetables for sale in our markets every 2 weeks. What is the Ministry of Agriculture doing in terms of production to feed the markets? What is Trade Ministry doing to assess our market needs in terms of local produce? We should be thinking of investing in agriculture to feed our markets.

There are lot of farmers in the Baddibus and Niumis who produce variety of crops, but then having markets around to sell those produce is a problem. People from Senegal come with trucks to buy from Niuminkas and Baddibunkas and take them to their country depriving our markets of potential profits. The reason is that we produce onions in abundance while importers are also importing which always results to a glut in the market. We must have a policy or regulation as to how many local producers of onions we have in the country and the quantity they can produce at certain time of the year. This will inform us as to when we should stop importing

onions until local produce are finished. Our neighbours are adopting such policies. How can we promote gardening if our local onion producers are producing and at the same time allow importers to also import?

The other issue is lack of storage facilities which prevents certain produce to be kept for long. So, to avoid the produce perishing, producers sell it at give-away prices. We should consume our products before we import.

The President's speech failed to inform us about the Labour Force Survey which was done in 2021, and we need to know about it as representatives of the people.

Aside from the above, I honestly believe that the composition of the Cabinet is good as the President stated that he relies on the expertise of the ministers and the permanent secretaries he appointed. So, he is a good listener. I want to acknowledge that this time his selection is good.

However, the Ministry of Local Government has not been prioritised from the 1<sup>st</sup> Republic to date. All the problems we are facing including the floods and poor planning of the landscape are as a result of neglecting this Ministry. One can conclude by saying that The Gambia is not planned at all since independence. We cannot still boast of good road networks and we cannot continue to remain like that. Let the Ministry take its rightful position towards the development of the country as we cannot continue to pay lip-service. It should come up with land policies rather than saying that it is in the pipeline. Let us expedite issues because time is not on our side.

This Government is widely hailed for being democratic and adherence to rule of law. We expect every chapter or section of the Constitution to be

respected. However, we have seen an act of the National Assembly being violated here which should stop. Honourable Speaker, When an Act of the National Assembly states that 25% of the development budget of council should be approved and given, it has to be honoured if at all we respect rule of law. Again, for councils to be answerable to the people they serve would depend on the mechanism put in place. We cannot say that councils are receiving this amount; therefore, we should dictate how they spend it.

If you go to certain regions, you may think that you are not in The Gambia. The President's statement highlighted a possible projection of the rural electrification, but he did not tell us any plans in terms of water resource apart from NAWEC initiatives. If you go to Kuntaur and other regions comprising 365 villages, only 60 villages have portable drinking water. What is the Department of Water Resources doing to provide portable drinking water in those communities? What is stopping NAWEC from drilling boreholes? It is obvious that boreholes are becoming expensive. We have seen councils spending **D6,420,000** on boreholes. What is stopping NAWEC from competing in these efforts to make it cheaper for people in the constituencies? It is very important to promote decentralization otherwise we will not progress. It is also very important to respect what the law says.

When it comes to development, I believe it should be community- driven or in accordance with what the communities prioritised. We are from a tour and the amount of wells we saw is significant. Some communities are still drilling boreholes while others are constructing feeder roads and bridges. So, if we want to develop the Councils, we need to give their budget the

necessary support although some are doing well. I can tell you that all the Councils are trying with the minimal resources, especially Basse Area Council. How else do you think they can mobilise resources if Central Government do not support them?

Honourable Speaker, we should support the government. Our role is to support the President and that support is to tell the truth because the Government's achievements and failures concern all of us. So, we must be truthful to one another. The President said in his opening remarks that NAMs should champion development initiatives and programmes in their constituencies.

Some activities are happening constituencies which you are not aware of and that is wrong. The Constituency Development Fund [CDF] that has started here and meant to empower NAMs has been very effective. Some MPs were re-elected because they implemented the CDF properly. Even if the CDF can be increased to **1 million** worth, it is a good practice but should be followed by checks and balances to ensure the implementation is done properly and that the taxpayers receive the benefits. Thank you very much.

**THE SPEAKER:** Thank you very much, Honourable Member for Tallinding Kunjang. I now invite Honourable Member for Jarra West.

**HON ALIEU BALDEH [JARRA WEST]:** Thank you, Honourable Speaker, for giving me the floor. I want to seize this opportunity to thank the President for fulfilling his mandate of coming to the Assembly to address the nation on matters of his government's development agenda and policies. I also want to thank the Vice President and the Cabinet Ministers

for taking their time to stay with us since yesterday to listen to the Members' submissions. I would also like to thank my colleagues Honourable Members.

Honourable Speaker, I also want to add my inputs regarding the President's speech. However, almost 99% of the issues I want to discuss have been dealt with by my colleagues, so I will be brief as I can still see lot of Members want to speak.

Honourable Speaker, the President talked about infrastructural development which is very crucial in our country. During his deliberations, he said that his administration has rolled out massive reconstruction of markets and roads which is a fact.

Honourable Speaker, regarding our own Regional Headquarters, Jarra Soma, which is a renown provincial town in The Gambia, everybody can attest that it has a new and well-built market. However, we are appealing to The Government to bring developments like that because if we have them in such strategic locations, it can bring about lot of investment opportunities for the country.

Honourable Speaker, still on infrastructural development, I would like the Minister of Works and Infrastructure to consider the road network that connects the villages of Kabada. We want to see the roads of Kabada being mentioned in the next SoNA. These villages are on the right-hand side of the Trans-Gambia Road when coming from Banjul to Jarra Soma and are linked to one another. The people living in this part of the country are all relatives who always visit one another and they also need to travel from their villages to Jarra Soma to buy commodities. According to my findings,

the Government has it in its plans but it is not only plans that we want to see. We want a road from Kiang up to the last village of Jarra East where Kabada stops.

Honourable Speaker, still on the issue of Infrastructure, while on a tour with the Regional Government Select Committee, I enjoyed very good roads in faraway places after Basse. The people used to find it very difficult to travel within those areas, but we have significant infrastructural development in the country recently. People of Suduwol used to suffer very much because of bad roads. I was there these days and I was very happy. I want to thank the Government for that achievement. We need infrastructural developments like this. When we have them, we can develop our country. Without good roads, we cannot move anywhere. So, I thank the President for the intervention.

Honourable Speaker, I will elaborate on the issue of Health. I want to seize this opportunity to thank the President and his Health Minister for the major achievement registered through the introduction of the National Health Insurance Scheme which is very important for a country because it is a relevant data.

Honourable Speaker, I would like the Minister of Health to consider the affairs of the Soma Health Centre. We want it to be upgraded so that major cases can be referred there instead of Farafenni General Hospital or to Edward Francis Small Teaching Hospital. We want major cases to be attended in Soma Health Centre. We need the personnel and equipment, so we are asking and pleading to the Ministry to make them available.

I believe it is the only major health centre in the whole of LRR, so it has to be put into consideration so that we can also feel safe without moving to the North Bank or to Banjul. Honourable Speaker, I would also like to thank the President for giving us a brand-new ambulance which is serving my community. This is something commendable. You know...

***[Point of Order]***

**THE SPEAKER:** May I hear the Point of Order, Honourable Member.

**HON ALFUSAINY CEESAY [SAMI]:** Honourable Speaker, Standing Order 28 [1]: *"A speech should not be read. A Member shall not read his or her speech but he or she may read extracts from books or papers in support of his or her arguments"*.

**THE SPEAKER:** Ok, it is 28[1] not 28. Honourable Member, can you take your seat. You were reading from a paper which you must desist from. Just listen, Honourable Member, you can quote and refer to documents, but you cannot read from them. You can continue.

**HON ALIEU BALDEH [JARRA WEST]:** Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I am very sorry. I do not want to go back but I believe all the previous speakers wrote something to guide them when they were speaking. It is the same thing I am doing. I did jot down what I wanted to speak about. Other Members did that, so leave me to go ahead.

**THE SPEAKER:** Please, Honourable Member, you can have your jottings. There is no problem with that, but you cannot be reading as in the case of a prepared speech. So, if you are only making reference to your jottings, you can go ahead.



**HON ALIEU BALDEH [JARRA WEST]:** Thank you, Honourable Speaker. According to the speech of the President regarding education, the Government has done tremendously well in building good classrooms and teachers' quarters in the regions. This is very important because in the recent past, teachers struggled in rural Gambia to get good houses to lodge, but they are now enjoying good quarters which we can all attest to.

Honourable Speaker, I would like to appeal to the Minister of MoBSE concerning the issue of Kabada. We have almost 64 villages in that region without a Senior Secondary School, and we want to have at least one there.

Aside from that, I have a message for all of us as citizens of The Gambia. I always appreciate it when people brag that they love the country. Honourable Speaker, I do not know how one can see good development in a country, yet do not want to acknowledge them. A Member said that some people in leadership positions always want to sabotage just to see that the leader fails which is not correct. Yesterday, my honourable colleague said that somebody called for the country to be set on fire. Such a remark is potentially dangerous because if the country is on fire, who will be safe? Let us be very careful with our remarks.

***[Point of Order]***

**HON YAHYA SANYANG [LATRIKUNDA SABIJI]:** Honourable Speaker, Order 29[5] "*No Member shall impute improper motives to any other Member.*" I think the Honourable Member is inclining to that end. Every Honourable Member in this Assembly is very genuine. He said we should be genuine. This means some Honourable Members are not genuine and I

am putting it to him that every Honourable Member in this Assembly is genuine.

**THE SPEAKER:** Please, Honourable Members, how many times do you want me to remind you? We have travelled all around the world. I do not think the Honourable Member is out of order. So many statements were made on the same issues. In fact, people said here that Gambians are corrupt. It is a general statement. Those are very common. Just go ahead, Honourable Member.

**HON ALIEU BALDEH [JARRA WEST]:** Thank you, Honourable Speaker. Let me put it to you that we are all equal here. I respect every person's opinion. I said that we as Gambian citizens.

**THE SPEAKER:** Honourable Member, please continue your debate. A ruling has taken place.

**HON ALIEU BALDEH [JARRA WEST]:** Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I want to stop here. Thank you very much.

**THE SPEAKER:** Thank you very much, Honourable Member for Jarra West. I now invite the Honourable Member for Old Yundum. Is he not here? Then, the Honourable Member for Banjul Central can take the floor.

**HON ABDOULIE NJAI [BANJUL CENTRAL]:** Honourable Speaker, thank you for giving me the floor. Firstly, I would like to recognise the presence of distinguished Honourable Ministers in our midst. It is a pleasure having them here since morning which demonstrates their commitment that we have to really acknowledge.

Having heard that the Minister of Tourism has travelled to UK to console with the Royal Family, I would just like him to raise the possibility of reparations for the 400 years of slavery and exploitation that our forefathers suffered in the hands of the British. I think that is of paramount importance to us.

I would also like to say that we really appreciate the State of the Nation Address [SoNA] by His Excellency the President. It was well articulated as part of fulfilment of his mandate under Section 77[1] of our Constitution. The Address highlights the policies and Programmes of his Government as well as the challenges in terms of project implementation among others. Also, I would like to acknowledge that there is nothing like a perfect document, but everything does look good on paper. However, do they sometimes reflect the current realities? That is a question we must answer.

Scrutiny is among our core Assembly functions/roles and responsibilities. We should at least be able to extract the cherry from the chaff to help the Government accelerate its efficiency. One thing I have also learnt in this Assembly is not to speak last because if National Assembly Members are given time, they would say everything that you have noted down. So, to save time, I will just highlight few things that I have jotted down. Some Members such as Honourable Sarr are almost dozing off.

I would start by quoting from the President's Speech regarding Local Government and Lands, "*Rolling out the IFMIS to local councils to improve fiscal management.*" This is quite important and I would just like to elaborate a bit. My fellow Members did mention that we recently conducted a provincial tour to get first-hand information regarding the level of

implementation of the projects and programmes by the local councils. We have to say that most of them are really doing great. However, we have seen that the lack of subsidies from the Government is really taking a toll on their capacity to implement projects which is really hindering the efficiency of their work.

Also, we have seen that rates and licenses are currently the only revenue generating streams. Apart from that, the current sand mining processes taking place within their areas is a source of revenue. Others have been saying that the revenues generated from local camps goes directly to the Tourism Ministry. So, the local councils' query is that the multiple revenue generating streams that can be tapped could not be explored because they do not have the autonomy. So, these are areas that we need to reconsider.

Concerning the Local Government Areas, I would like to say that Banjul City Council is arguably a bit privileged in many things because most of our development processes are done within the Greater Banjul Areas. I would just like to highlight that when it comes to development in any country, the capital city is the microcosm. So, Banjul, small as it may be, is really of great importance to the socio-economic development of The Gambia. We, Banjulians, also have our challenges in as much as this road rehabilitation programme is concerned. Spaces for housing are not available. If you would pay notice, you would realise that a lot of people are leaving the capital city to find housing in Kombo and other areas which is really taking a toll of the residents in the capital.

Furthermore, we are having problems with the stores being built all around Banjul and the spatial demarcation separating the residential areas from

the commercial areas is adding to the problem. In most countries, the commercial areas are usually in the outskirts. For example, if you are coming from the Kombos towards Banjul around the Mile 2 areas are all potential commercial areas that can be utilized so that at least the inner area of the city is habitable. The Government should partner with the local councils in creating a housing project that will at least house certain number of people particularly those residents in the capital.

We are really having problems in terms of allocation of these spaces, especially to foreign nationals. I could remember an incident involving our local councillor and a foreign national over the location of a store. The foreign national told the councillor that "*fi nii man maa la fi opa cadu*" [I have more voice here than you do]. Can you imagine a foreigner making such remarks to a citizen of the country? It is too disheartening. So, these are issues making it even more necessary for us to revisit our Act, especially in terms of giving out contracts and too much space to certain individuals. We really need to consider such sensitive issues. We should all have a share of the national cake. Additionally, I believe that the Local Government Act needs to be revisited but I will talk about that in the adjournment debate to avoid wasting much time.

Honourable Speaker, I think the recent house demolition exercise was a big mistake on the side of the authorities considering the fact that these individuals have gone through the normal land acquisition processes and acquired their lands with legally binding documents from the SSHFC, a government entity.

If you refer to The Gambia Physical Planning and Development Control Act in Clause 22[4] which states "*No person shall enlarge or alter an existing use without first applying and obtaining a development permit in accordance with this Act.*" This means that these people did not just randomly settle there, but they went through all due processes in acquiring these lands. Their houses were demolished upon giving them short notices, and the query from the Ministry was that these houses were constructed along water ways. These common people do not have any technical knowhow of exactly whether their houses were constructed on water ways or not. So, I think it is the duty of Physical Planning to make proper findings to establish whether prior to acquiring these lands, they were told that the area cannot be used as residences since it is a water way. Giving them residential permits and then demolish their homes is really a kind of double standard. It therefore makes no sense. This really needs to be reconsidered as their rights have been violated to the maximum.

Personally, I believe negotiation to find temporal relocation zone for the people concerned should have taken place before anything whilst working on a compensation model so that an agreement can be reached. It would be far better than giving them a three-day notice to just demolish their homes. I think that is a big violation of their rights and this is something that we really need to work on.

As regards Education, Honourable Speaker, we have all mentioned the need for the erection of new educational facilities and the increment of the number of teachers which were highlighted in the President's speech. They are very good initiatives to be honest.

I think our main cause of action should be the core curriculum being delivered to the kids. We lack Afro-centric subjects in our curriculum because most of the things our kids learn are usually from external sources. The sense of nationalism needs to be incorporated in them at a very tender age. When I visited China in 2019, it surprised me to see a small Chinese child singing their national anthem with tears dropping down because the sense of nationalism was inherent in them at an early age. Therefore, it is neither easy to corrupt the Chinese nor manipulate them. It is China first before anything. So, the sense of nationalism like that of China should be incorporated in our curriculum at a very early age. Let the youths know the history or background of the country and where we are heading. As they grow, they will be nationalistic in their outlook and the way they view things will really help the country to move forward.

I also think career guidance should be incorporated in the Educational System. When I say career guidance, I am taking myself as an example because most of the courses students pursue are because of peer influence. They are not properly guided regarding what they are good at or the direction they need to take pertaining to their expertise. So, these are areas we need to work on. Also, there is need for parents to be counselled. I remember when we were kids, I attended a private school which periodically convened Parents' meeting and during such meetings, the Head Mistress do brief Parents on the trajectory of the school and the status of the pupils. I think such initiatives should be accelerated in all schools to bring the parents [vital stakeholders] closer towards the development of the schools.

Regarding the issue of Environment, Honourable Speaker, I would like to congratulate the Government on its recognition for being on track with the demands and requirements of the Paris Agreement. This is really a milestone that needs to be acknowledged. I would also like to say that a large portion of the recognition has to be given to the CSOs, environmentalists among other Groups who have really pushed day and night to be at the forefront in the fight against climate change to ensure that The Gambia registers progress.

Honourable Speaker, despite we have set a benchmark on global stage, we have lingering internal wars and nobody is talking about them. We have seen the commercialisation of the Tambi Wetland, the dubious sand minding taking place along our coast lines, dry logs being laid on top of water ways, and parks and wildlife species being destroyed especially the monkey parks.

Banjul is a meter above sea level and what does this mean? God forbid, if there is a wave just a meter or above from any direction right now, we will all sink. This is the danger we are facing. So, the groups fighting tooth and nail through tree planting activities, advocacies and so on are initiatives that really need to be highlighted. I do not think we are giving them due diligence.

Moreover, I would like to join Honourable Members to ask one important question. That is, what are the foreign soldiers still doing in our country, especially in the State House? I would say it is quite risky to have foreign nationals inside the oval office of any sitting President. I believe I do not have to be a security officer to know whether it is quite unsafe or not. In



addition, the deployment of foreign troops in the country compromises our security. I do not know if there is a security treat in the country but whatever the case, it is better to deploy our forces. Our military have been demonstrating the highest possible level of maturity, discipline and courage which make them earn international respect, especially during the impasse. We need to reconsider the presence of the troops in the country.

I do not mean to be sarcastic, but have you ever watched the movie, "Money Heights?"

**THE SPEAKER:** Are you questioning me? Honourable Member, put yourself in order.

**HON ABDOULIE NJAI [BANJUL CENTRAL]:** Honourable Speaker, I am sorry for being sarcastic. I was just making a point that there is something called "*The Great Gambian Heights*" which is our Banjul Rehabilitation Project. Honourable Speaker, the Banjul Project is dubious [not transparent] and it has deficiencies in every other way that you put it. I think it is a big lapse on the Government for singly sourcing the project, pre-financing as well as the commencement of the project even before the contract was signed. The first time in history to have heard of a project without any blueprint is typical of the Banjul Rehabilitation Project. I would not go to the specifics, but I would just like to highlight it.

Honourable Speaker, there was an audit query about this project, and we all know that the National Audit Office is a key component of the Government. They came up with a query stating indicating some deficiencies spotted in the project. So, I just cannot understand. I will quote that query if a presser or a press conference were to be called and it

would entail calling the contractors and the consultants whereby they will be asked questions regarding the audit query in order to at least enlighten the people about it. I am convinced that if a press conference were to be convened, you will see Cabinet Ministers and Government Officials defending the Project with just slides and pictures. However, nothing regarding the specifics of the project will be mentioned.

Honourable Speaker, when it comes to projects, dimensions and types of materials to be used all matter in project specifications. So, these are usually highlighted in the project grouping and the project contract. The fact that the project did not take cognizance of these things really proves that it is illusive. We are in a dilemma right now, and I really think the Government needs to make sure that this project is properly scrutinised rather than just defending the contractor or those involved in it. Honourable Speaker, it is not bad to sometimes acknowledge our faults and rectify them. I think that is what makes us human. So, the Government should take accountability seriously concerning Covid-19 because it is very important to know or follow where our resources are utilised.

Honourable Speaker, the Government promised to pay the victims of the TRRC an amount of **D150 million** from the 2022 Budget. By our statistics, **956 victims** were identified for reparations and to be paid around **D205 million**. In addition, **32.4 million** was also put aside for the families of the **54 West Africans migrants** who lost their lives. These payments were not included in the **D205 million** catered for under the 2023 Budget Estimate. Honourable Speaker, only **D100 million** is indicated under the

centralized services budget line items which show a deficit from the presumed amount. So, I think these are these fiscal lapses we really need to reconsider.

**THE SPEAKER:** Honourable Member, I think the budget passed through your hands and you rightly said that there are issues affecting your areas, so you should leave them for the Adjournment Debate.

**HON ABDOULAI NJAI [BANJUL CENTRAL]:** That is the reason why I decided to wait till the Adjournment Debate. So, I am just speaking holistically now.

Honourable Speaker, regarding Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs, it is highlighted under the national debt servicing that **1.9 billion** was an external debt payment and **3.1 billion** as domestic debt. So, the debt service increment is said to be at 11.1% which is quite high. This means that the percentage will increase this year. I think, Honourable Speaker, we need a debt ceiling as a country. Also, focus should be given to the local authorities or the local councils in making sure that revenue generating streams are set up to be able to cater for certain areas to pay dividend to the Government.

Honourable Speaker, it is alarming that 40% of our total revenue comes from remittances. Meaning, the diaspora zone is really a sector of itself as it constitutes 40% of our total revenue. It has outgrown most of our sectors. So, I think the diaspora community really needs to be considered. Honourable Speaker, we always advocate for the diaspora to be the seventh region. Therefore, the rekindling of the Draft Constitution would have been better because it makes provisions for such things.

Honourable Speaker, I would really like to applaud the Government for highlighting that Performance Management System initiative will be formulated to help assess workers in which workers efforts will be recognised and incentivised. I think this will really accelerate the push towards motivating workers and getting the best out of them.

I would like to conclude by saying that the flash flood has really showed lapses in terms of contingencies. Personally, I was one of the few Members who took off National Assembly Member's suit and joined my fellow colleagues to curb the impact of the flash floods in Banjul. The Honourable Member of Banjul North and I did our best to at least mitigate the impact on a certain section before the Government intervened. So, I think this should serve as a lesson for such unforeseen circumstances. I think there should be an accelerated and proper disaster management strategy as well as a contingency framework so that disasters are responded to with immediate effect. On that note, I would rest my case. Thank You.

**THE SPEAKER:** Thank you very much, Honourable Member for Banjul Central. At the beginning, you made me believe that you were taking 5 minutes but you end up spending almost 30 minutes. Honourable Member for Niamina Dankunku, the floor is yours. He is out. Then, let us have Honourable Member for Basse.

**HON SAIKOU BAH [BASSE]:** Thank you, Honourable Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to contribute to the debate. Firstly, I must thank the President for upholding his constitutional mandate of appearing before the Assembly once in a year to address the nation on the state of affairs. I would also like to thank the Vice President for honouring the constitutional

provision of Section 77[3] which mandates him to step in or represent the President on national matters or matters affecting the President and his Cabinet Ministers. I believe that the Cabinet Ministers are better equipped at least technically to support the Vice President in responding to issues raised.

Honourable Speaker, I have to look at the most demanding ministries which are the Ministries of Agriculture & Health which have a direct impact on the citizenry hence they are called the social sectors.

Honourable Speaker, in the Agricultural Sector, I think the Ministry has done a great job by prioritizing projects that are very meaningful to the society. Honourable Speaker, Number 5 of Page 12 states: *"To boost the income of farming households, the Government has invested heavily to modernize or transform the Agricultural Sector during the past 5 years. Through donor funding projects, the sector was able to give **600 thousand hectares** of land for rice production to **300 communities** and **400 hectares thousand** for vegetables".* I think these are the major areas in the country. That was indeed a very good step taken by the Government through the Ministry.

Honourable Speaker, other steps which the Ministry has taken to improve the Sector include the provision of storage facilities and the construction of feeder roads. In fact, the concerns of most of the women cultivating vegetables have been the issue of accessibility to the market. Despite that they have the zeal and commitment to farm and harvest lot of vegetables, but their concern has always been access to market on time to sell their produce. I witnessed a situation in Foni Bintang where the farmers initially

asked for support in the form of boreholes and other things. When we went there to provide the boreholes, they said that they can manage with the issue of boreholes, but their main concern was feeder roads connecting their gardens to market outlets. They complained that they at times had difficulties travelling to Brikama market. So, by the time they arrive at the market, they would have found the wholesalers already occupied their places thereby spoiling their business potentials. They would be left with no other choice but to sell at give away prices or even loan them out until the following day or week. I think the Ministry of Agriculture has made a very good initiative by connecting the feeder roads to make sure these women have easy access to the market.

Honourable Speaker, I also want to remind the Minister of Agriculture about the storage facilities in communities in those days which used to address most of the disasters happening right now. Farmers keep all their produce in those facilities which have now faced out. That is why when flood or fire disasters occur, all their produce would perish. So, the Ministry should come up with measures to revitalise the local storage facilities in these communities.

Honourable Speaker, Health Ministry is a key sector of Government, and people can attest to the fact that there is improvement in the Sector, especially, in terms of infrastructure, capacity, and human resource compared to the previous regime. So, we should applaud the Government of the day for the improvements.

Nowadays, there are day-care centres, clinics, and hospitals in all the regions. The Government has eased the burden of travelling from one region to another to access medical facilities.

Previously, the people of URR had to make major referrals to Bansang Hospital which proved difficult at times, but such problems have now been addressed nowadays.

Honourable Speaker, I beg to differ with one of my colleagues that the maternal mortality rate is increasing day by day against childbirth because there was childbirth on the very day the President gave his speech. In those days when the infant mortality rate was alarming, WHO and others had to step in to conduct a survey of which I was involved. Our survey team went to URR under the supervision of my brother Fallou Njie. Comparing those days and now, I think there is a huge improvement.

***[Point of Observation]***

**HON FATOU CHAM [SANNEHMENTERNG]:** Please, can I observe you?

**HON SAIKOU BAH [BASSE]:** Allow me to continue because there is no time and people want to go. Honourable Speaker, I think the Health Sector has improved a lot. Again, the President's statement on capacity building indicated that one can now obtain a higher certificate in nursing or being trained as a doctor in The Gambia. In those days, if you are not from a rich family or you do not have a parent or a relative who is well connected to the Government to help you secure a scholarship, you cannot be a medical doctor. Nowadays, you can be in the country and whatever level you want

to acquire, you can have it. The Government of the day must be applauded for that.

On the issue of Human Resource, foreigners previously occupy our hospitals in URR and CRR where most of the communities cannot express themselves in English to the doctors for diagnosis in order to get the right treatment. It was a big problem because the foreign doctors also could not speak our languages. Nowadays, any hospital within the country has well qualified Gambian nurses and doctors who can attend to our medical needs. Thank you, Mr. President.

One concern I also want to draw the attention of the Minister to is the issue of ambulances. It was very timely and has made a big impact in terms of transport-related problems in certain areas. Moreover, the vehicles supplied are very durable considering the nature of our roads, but my concern is that these ambulances are without logistics or operational policy. Probably, it could be an oversight. It would have been very good to have a policy to guide the people as to how these ambulances will be used in terms of their routine maintenances and fuelling system. As we speak, the lack of policy is affecting some of the communities. I know the Minister will address it because I spoke to him.

The other proposal I have for the Ministry is to establish a supervisory or a monitoring unit like that of the Education Ministry because people must be monitored constantly given the day by day increase of laissez-faire attitude affecting people's output. This is the reason why some of our colleagues are advocate for attitudinal change. Instituting such unit will help inspect most of the major clinics and other areas to have first-hand information



regarding the medical facilities, equipment and the medical stores. Some hospitals may have medicines, but doctors and nurses would tell patients that certain medicines are not available, so they must be bought outside. This also explains the reason why certain people capitalise on the situation to establish pharmacies right opposite hospitals. I think the Ministry should fasten its belt to open the said unit as soon as possible because it will help monitor the services of the doctors especially those far away. So, the monitoring unit can address such issues.

Honourable Speaker, Minister of Justice was here few weeks ago in connection to the Labour Act and I told him when reviewing it, we should make sure that citizens are protected because as far as I am concerned, they are not.

Foreign investors exploit our citizens who work for them because there is no clause in the Act which protects them. In other countries' Labour Laws, there are specific provisions stating that certain key positions must be occupied by their citizens. For example, if the investor is the CEO, then the General Manger must be a citizen of the host country so that they will make decisions in the interest of their country. Any genuine person looking for a job, he/she should consider job security because a person can be working in certain institutions for 10 years, yet he/she is neither recognised nor promoted. Such unfair treatment must be addressed as a matter of urgency. Also, instances of sole proprietors employing workers today and sacking them the following day without giving notice are happening. People have been petitioning through the Labour Department but to no avail. If this clause is in place, it will protect and serve their interests.

Honourable Speaker, the employment of Honourable Bakary Badjie as a Minister of Youth and Sports has paid dividend because the he who feels it knows it since he was a youth activist that is why he is able to register a progressive development.

However, there is one unit within the Ministry which is severely behind or are not doing some of their mandate as expected. As we speak, the Ministry is training or building the capacity of youths to acquire entrepreneurship skills after which they are provided with loan opportunities. Sometime ago, so many youths were given full scholarships including stipends at the Arch 22 whereas it was previously difficult to get such opportunities because of nepotism. So, I applaud the Ministry for judiciously awarding the scholarships. I do not even think the Director knows where the scholarship awardees come from as they just applied and succeeded.

Honourable Minister, the attention of the Ministry should now be focused on the Sports Council which serves not only as a regulatory body but also responsible for promoting sports in the country. However, the Council is stagnant because it could not even regulate most of the institutions under its purview hence most of such institutions are seeking subventions from donors in the name of the country and are spending such funds without audit. According to the Act, all the associations under the council must conduct AGM at least every year to account for the money subvented to them by international organisations.

Some institutions often complain that they are not subvented but they get their funds from outside which is not the case. When the name of The

Gambia is used to get funds within and outside, that entity or person must be audited and a report submitted to that effect. The Sport Council should control by monitoring the incomes and expenditures of satellite institutions. I would like the process of reviewing their Act to be done as quickly as possible for enactment.

Honourable Speaker, the Honourable Minister of Justice should know that justice delayed is justice denied. There are backlog of cases in most of the magistrate courts. Also, the way some magistrates operate is unacceptable at times. They come at any time they wish and close court/sitting at any time they wish. There was a time when all my rams had been stolen and the matter was reported to Brusubi Police Station which was then taken to the court, but I ended up forgetting about the courts because every time a sitting is scheduled, the magistrate would not turn up. This is daily occurrence at the courts which needs to be addressed by the Ministry.

The current Minister has really done well regarding the revenue policy instituted recently. I believe it will help us a lot because this country is a tax-based economy since almost 80% of our day-to-day expenditure is from tax.

However, there are so many leakages within the tax collection regime. So, GRA needs to come up with strategies to curb the leakages so that the country can have good savings to minimise receiving grants and contracting loans. All we need to do is to strengthen the control mechanism to collect the right revenue and invest wisely.

Your Excellency the Vice President, I also think that the National Disaster Management Agency [NDMA] needs a risk management unit within the

Agency because there is none. Such unit will be able to assess the level of risk exposures within the communities and advise the Agency on what action to take because averting risk is cheaper than managing it. So, I would advise the Minister to recommend to the NDMA Management to set up a risk unit as other institutions did such as Ports, GRA and the like.

I will now shift attention to the issue of road construction under the purview of the Ministry of Transport, Works and Infrastructure. National Road Authority [NRA] should really help in ensuring that we are provided with very good and sustainable roads. We have problems with engineers as in the case of the contract for the construction of the Basse-Wellingara road under the ECOWAS Project. The ECOWAS Committee only hired the company to construct the road, but every country must provide...

*[Interrupted]*

***[Point of Observation]***

**HON YAHYA SANYANG [LATRIKUNDA SABIJI]:** Point of Observation.

**HON SAIKOU BAH [BASSE]:** No, allow me to learn. This is your game to distract people, but you will not succeed.

So, in the case of Basse-Wellingara road, the engineer compromised the specimen that is why we are facing difficulty of road congestion. I want to offer advice to the Honourable Minister of Works to be very strict with those engineers attached or directly working with the contractors on road constructions because the Gambia Government goes all out to get these grants or loans to construct roads. So, we want the value of that money spent to benefit the community. So, I am appealing to the Honourable

Minister to put those things into due consideration. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

**THE SPEAKER:** Thank you, Honourable Member for Basse. Honourable Members, I want us to look at the way we approach issues. Individual Members are making recommendations to the various ministries and your recommendations are even different. I suggest that we look at this from a holistic policy programme perspective so that any recommendation for the Ministry of Health will come through the Health Committee which will be debated on and then finally come out with one recommendation to be presented to plenary. However, if everybody wants to come with a recommendation based on their thoughts, the Minister will not know which one to take. So, let us reconsider that approach because it is more of wasting time than helping us. I now invite the Honourable Member for Upper Saloum.

**HON ALHAGIE MBOW [UPPER SALOUM]:** Thank you very much Honourable Speaker, His Excellency the Vice President and the Ministers in attendance to listen to our debate on the SoNA.

Before I begin, I want you to register my name number one on the list for the adjournment debate next week because it is not easy to talk last. So, Table Office should take note. I am going to start with the Office of the Vice President as "the Alkalo" and then to the other sectors. I do not intend to cover many sectors but just a very few.

We were told on Page 33 that the Office of the Vice President has created a new ministry and I quote: "*Ministry of Public Service, Administrative Reforms, Policy Coordination and Delivery to take over the responsibility of*

*the entire Civil Service including the supervision of PMO so as to achieve my administration's Public Service Reform Agenda and Vision."*

Honourable Speaker, this is the best thing the Government has ever done as far as I am concerned. The success of any ministry or institutions has a lot to do with the policies they have in place. As a government, I think policy coordination is one of the areas we have been suffering from. To put that in perspective by allowing a particular ministry to take charge of policy coordination across all ministries is a noble initiative by the Government, and I would like to thank them for doing so.

A policy cannot be created in any sector just like that rather it must go through certain steps in terms of review as to what one intends to do in a particular sector. Having reviewed and come up with a policy, somebody also needs to look at exactly what kind of policy it is and whether it is going to solve the issue it seeks to remedy. I think we need to have a total review of all the policies in the country to ensure that they are fit for purpose and change those that are not. So, effective coordination becomes central and I think the said Ministry has a lot to do. I commend the Government for coming with the foresight to create this very important Ministry for policy coordination.

Furthermore, it is important for a sector policy to be reviewed, signed and also taken to cabinet for approval. Right now, if the various Government institutions were to be asked about copies of the General Orders, believe me different versions will be presented. I am trying to indicate that once a sector prepares its policy, it must go through certain stages for scrutiny

and approval by Cabinet before accepted as a policy document for the Government.

Besides, good coordination is helpful to other ministries as it avoids duplication of efforts. At times, I am confused seeing Ministry of Agriculture having projects like road construction as well as digging boreholes which should have been under the Ministry of Transport, Works, and Infrastructure. In terms of water supply and facility, Ministry of Fisheries and Water Resources should be the custodian instead of the Ministry of Agriculture.

So, the process of coordination becomes very important. The importance of the new Ministry cannot be overemphasised as it plays a very key role in ensuring that policies are synchronised and scrutinised at all levels to get a desired effect for the Government.

Regarding the 9-year Civil Service Reform Agenda 2018-2027, it is important at this stage to have mid-term review because we need to assess the achievements and major challenges encountered given the fact that we are almost getting into the fourth year.

Honourable Speaker, we were also informed in the President's Speech that revenue collection for the first 2 months has declined by 14% against the period in 2021 and we are in September, so what happened to the other months? Overall, I think by the time the speech was being written, it would have been better to make a comparative analysis for the first 6 or 8 months of the year as compared to the previous year. With that, somebody can give a very good analysis of what really happened.

On Page 9 where it says: "*The debt service payment increased by 11.1% from **D4.5 billion** in 2020 to **5 billion** in 2021.*" However, I am not too sure exactly where the actual problem is but 2021 SoNA did clearly indicate that our external creditors were engaged in negotiating debts deferral for at least 5 years. Most of external creditors have granted us principal repayment deferral which is estimated to yield **D4.8 billion** from 2020 to 2024. That means the debt deferral on average may save **D1.2 billion** per year for the Government.

Notwithstanding, we have also seen an increase in the 2022 SoNA of which under normal circumstances is not adding up. If a country is granted debt deferral, it means no payment is required on the principal but the interest must be paid. At the same time, if the debt service payment is increased by 11.1% which is almost from **D4.5 billion** in 2020 to **5 billion** in 2021, then we need to reconcile to ensure that we have proper figures for that.

Honourable Speaker, I think we are all aware of the economic situation in the country, specifically the rise in prices and the inflation which is about 8%. However, the President projected very modest economic growth of 3.6% for 2022. When I look at institutions like the African Development Bank, they are almost talking about 4%. In our economic growth, we are talking about 3.4%, yet inflation is about 8% which is exactly our problem. So, the cost of goods and services in the country will go up. Essentially, Honourable Speaker, I expected us to be informed about the cause of inflation in the country and its impact on the region and the continent.

***[Point of Observation]***



**HON SUWAIBOU TOURAY [WULI EAST]:** Honourable Speaker, the Member said that inflation is at 8% but during the budget review, the Minister informed us that... *[Interrupted]*

**THE SPEAKER:** Honourable Member, is it a point of order or an observation?

**HON SUWAIBOU TOURAY [WULI EAST]:** It is an observation. When we were dealing with the revised budget, the Minister told us that inflation is at 11% not 8%. Thank you.

**HON BILLAY G. TUNKARA [KANTORA & MAJORITY LEADER]:** Thank you very much for giving me the floor. I think the Minister did indicate that they are anticipating the inflation rate to be at 11% in the next quarter of the year.

**HON ALHAGIE MBOW [UPPER SALOUM]:** Okay, thank you very much. When you look at the inflation across the continent, you would realise that there are different institutions that make predictions for a particular country or region, but the one I give due consideration is that of the African Development Bank. Like I said earlier, I am not going to consider the version of the Minister which I made very clear at the beginning of all my conversations.

Now, what can we do as a country to help reduce inflation so that the prices of commodities can be more affordable to the people? We should tackle head on the problems causing inflation such as the high cost of food and energy [petroleum]. These are the main driving forces, but situations actually vary in other countries. The importation of food items coupled with

the high energy cost result to the high food prices in The Gambia. So, these two factors are causing lot of problems for us.

The Ukraine-Russia war is just an additional factor making it even worse. Somebody may think that we have nothing to do with the war but if you look at transport sector, Russia and Ukraine are the two leading countries in the aviation industry. Also, they are leading in the agricultural sector in terms of fertilizer, grain and flour production. So, if these countries are at war, the world will be affected. So, I expected this economic problem to happen. Gambians can understand that there is something we can do as a nation to help control inflation, but there are certain things beyond our control.

Honourable Speaker, I think I do not need to go through the entire Domestic Revenue Mobilisation because it has already been said by other Honourable Members. If we want to depend too much on outsiders in terms of loans and/or grants, it is also going to affect us. So, strategies or policies must be put in place as quickly as possible to increase Domestic Revenue Mobilisation.

Again, from 2015 to 2016, the total revenue the country mobilised was about **7.6 billion** but we are now talking about **12** to **13 billion**. This means that something is working. Whatever effort Ministry of Finance or GRA is doing to almost 100% revenue increment should be redoubled to prevent us from taking more loans.

The only aspect the President did not touch regarding Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs is about the audit queries. You know, public funds must be audited to ensure that they are judiciously utilised as approved by

the Assembly. If one looks at the audited accounts of Government for the past two years, one would realise that the auditors rated them adverse opinion. It means that they are not very comfortable with what was presented to make an informed decision. It also means there is high level of material overstatement or misstatement in terms of figures which is very bad. I think the President should pay attention to this particular area so that the highlighted areas in the audited accounts of Central Government would be resolved because unqualified adverse opinion of unaudited accounts can also affect a country in getting further funding from international organisations.

So, let us try to reverse that adverse opinion from our audited accounts. It is not really good for the country, and I think the President needs to pay lot of interest in the audited accounts of the Government. When one wants to make an investment, these are some of the areas that one should consider.

For Energy and Petroleum, I think we are clear about that institution. I am just going to talk about the Rural Electrification Project on Page 6 which says: "*Works on rural electrification to attain 2025 universal access goal set by the Government is in high gear where access will be given to 685 more villages...*" I have one of the constituencies that never had electricity since independence together with my neighbours [Nianija and Niamina Dankunku to name a few]. This is a very serious matter. The entire Constituency of Upper Saloum is sidelined. What is the reason for that? It seems to me that we are not part of The Gambia. So, when I saw cables

being extended to my constituency, it makes me feel good because I already know that this time around something must happen.

People also talked about the back way syndrome and rural urban migration which are some of the factors hindering development in the villages. Because of electricity, carpenters and welder men either move to the towns or other places around Wassu to be able to work.

Honourable Speaker, other countries do land appropriation without compensation, but I want the Government to consider compensating villages in Upper Saloum, Niamina Dankunku and then Nianija that never had electricity since independence by giving us free meters. Let us make that as one of the recommendations.

Honourable Speaker, I am really very happy and grateful with the various interventions in Upper Saloum as far as health is concerned. Upper Saloum Constituency has almost 83 villages with a population of about 30,000 people. Our constituency has only one health post and no wonder, the area is the worst in terms of infant mortality rate. However, there are interventions earmarked for the construction of minor clinics. A minor police station is also at an advanced stage and a health post is already being built by philanthropists. So, we are just waiting for electricity and furniture to be handed over to the Government. We are also given three ambulances located at strategic places to transport the patients to the nearest hospital. So, I think the interventions by the Ministry of Health are commendable and I want to register my sincere thanks to the Minister.

I was lucky that there are lot of interventions in the provision of water supply. The construction of 10 boreholes has been completed by the

Government of The Gambia to enable people have clean drinking water. However, when I look at the document being presented here, they only talked about fisheries and not much was said about water supply.

The JICA Project from the Japanese and other Projects are going on right now but when you look at the document, nothing of such can be seen in it. So, I do not know whether it was an error from somewhere or not. There are lot of water interventions across the country under the African Development Bank amounting to **142 boreholes** which has not been featured in the document and I know work is in progress. So, I think that really needs to be captured in some way.

Information and Communication Technology is one sector that brings lot of revenue to the Government. Look at the telecom industry in the country, how much money are they paying to the Government? Surprisingly, this Assembly has approved the Gambia Information and Communication Technology Agency [GICTA] Act. Essentially, this Agency is supposed to promote the optimal use of ICT, introduce of new technologies and invest in the transformation of the ICT sector. Basically, the Agency is supposed to empower the Government but right now, most of the Government workers be they Ministers, Permanent Secretaries or National Assembly Members use Gmail, Yahoo or Hotmail email addresses to actually communicate among ourselves and internationally even information relating to our Government. Who own yahoo, Gmail and Hotmail? We are transmitting highly sensitive information via these networks. We do not even know where the servers are and who own them. We need to do better than that and I thought this Agency was supposed to do just that.

In fact, we were able to put a budget of almost **10 million Dalasi** for the Agency but after the inauguration of the board, we have not heard anything about it. It was almost two years ago that GICTA was approved by the Assembly yet nothing is done. Additionally, the Assembly also approved the Access to Information Bill which should help minimise rumours because when certain information is requested about any entity, they are supposed to provide it. So, we are passing laws to create agencies, yet implementation is lacking. I think we need to do better than that.

The President also talked about the ICT 4M Master Plan which refers to the National Broad Band Cyber Security from the Ministry. Where exactly are we in this regard? We are not told in the document, and I think the President should have given us more information about where exactly we are.

Besides, in the last SoNA and that of this year, it was indicated that the country was working on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection, yet the African Union Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection has not been ratified by The Gambia since 2004. That should have in fact set the benchmark. As Members of the African Parliament, sometimes we do not feel good when we go there because certain conventions are not ratified and signed by our own country. The Gambia does not have the laws that will help us in the Assembly regarding Cyber Security. Therefore, we always depend on the ICT Act of 2009 which is not comprehensive enough. The world is moving as far as ICT laws are concerned, but this country is not. We need to do better because we are

moving into the information age and the Ministry must be at the forefront of every other sector. We have a lot of work to do when it comes to agriculture, youths, women, science and technology, and even engineering. We do not have enough information along these lines needed to put the country on the right track.

Few years ago, the Assembly approved almost **130 million Dollars** for the broad band network and to create a data centre. So, what happened to the network? I was one of those that stood to defend that. We need a proper broad band network to make connectivity across the country. Cables are laid and everything is done, so what next? This should be an area where the Private Sector can even utilise for a fee.

Regarding the data centre, we have core location where the private sector can house their servers for fee, but everybody stands alone. We approved 130 million Dollars [**1.5 billion Dalasi**] and now Government ministries pay for internet services from different sectors. We have ISPs around here and Government has its own band width, yet it pays somebody else to provide internet service. I do not understand that. If you look at the Ace cable, Government has the most controlling stake in terms of boundary, yet it is the same government that will go pay somebody else to have internet service. It does not make sense. Let us ensure that MoICI has the right infrastructure to be able to provide internet services for all Government institutions. Internet is becoming very expensive despite we have the band width. Why? We need to do something about it.

Honourable Speaker, the last issue I want to talk about is gender and polygamy, but I will reserve that one until the adjournment debate during

which I will bring some of the things we need to really resolve our problems.

Honourable Speaker, generally, the SoNA has indicated what they are doing, what are lacking and the challenges they have. I know all the sectors have challenges, so we need to know them so that the Assembly can see how best we can work together. When we talk about the Government in constitutional terms, we refer to the Executive, but I think to a larger extent we are part of it, so we should be part of the solutions. However, we must first know the challenges in the respective sectors so that we can work together as a team to ensure desired resolution. On that note, I thank you.

**THE SPEAKER:** Thank you very much Honourable Member for Upper Saloum. Honourable Members, it is almost 10:00p.m, so we have to break up for Members to have some food because we may end around 6 to 7:00a.m by my estimation. I must thank His Excellency the Vice President and Honourable Ministers for staying with us up to this time. Therefore, let us break for 15 minutes and reconvene at 10:30p.m. What is your opinion, Honourable Majority Leader?

**HON BILLAY G. TUNKARA [KANTORA & MAJORITY LEADER]:** Thank you very much. I think we can take 20 minutes break and come back because we have lot to do. I also want to bring it to your attention that some Members approached me that they want to see Table Office to withdraw their submissions until the adjournment debate. We will see you during the break, thank you.



**THE SPEAKER:** Honourable Members, we agreed on 20 minutes break. So, let us all be here in 20 minutes time, please. I understand that some of my Jaranka friends could not withstand the hunger so they will go out to have food before we come back.

***The Assembly Suspends***

*The Assembly is now suspended until 10:15pm.*