Vision

The UNDP Gambia Accelerator lab (AccLabGM) works towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through rapid solution testing and experimentation, with actionable learning and network building. AccLabGM also provides semi-structured support for the over-arching development agenda in The Gambia. The team utilizes unconventional methodologies and innovative strategies to build and support ‘home-grown’ solutions towards sustainable development.

Global AccLabs

The Accelerator Lab fosters rapid learning about development challenges and design and runs quick tests using a portfolio logic that helps to understand the needs of local communities and government, but also UNDP and the entire UN System.

The lab accelerates learning about what works and does not work in development, pushing for more innovative, efficient and inclusive results on the ground.

The Accelerator Lab was designed as a space to try out and test new ways of thinking and working for sustainable development.

Founding investors

Partners

Government:
Office of The President; Office of The Vice-President; Ministries of Trade, Industry, Regional Integration, and Employment (MOTIE); Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs (MoFEA), Tourism, and Agriculture;

Ministries, Departments, Agencies:
National Youth Council; Gambia Bureau of Statistics (GBoS); Public Utilities Recovery Authority (PURA); National Disaster Management Agency; Gambia Chamber of Commerce and Industry;

Local Government:
Municipal Councils across the Greater Banjul Area (GBA) region i.e. Banjul, Kanifing, and Brikama.

Cross Lab Pollination

Since its launch, AccLabGM has worked with:

AccLabs in the global network

From the Regional Bureau of Africa
Local AccLab

AccLabGM was officially launched in November 2019 as a three-member team comprising Solutions Mapping, Exploration, and Experiment Leads. Shortly after its launching, AccLabGM became the first Accelerator Labs partnership with the UKRI - GCRF Hub, established in order to test the Accelerator/Hub partnerships model.

The Gambia Accelerator Lab team hit the ground running in September 2019 at an onboarding bootcamps in Kigali, Rwanda. The team was part of the third cohort of the global Accelerator Lab network bootcamps, and were able to pinpoint the recurring challenges around youth unemployment back home as a frontier challenge to explore under the Lab.

The team also minted the title AccLabGM and returned home to launch the Accelerator Lab and consequently, their first learning cycle, guided by action plan. Two experiments were designed under the youth unemployment challenge.

In 2020, AccLabGM developed a new action plan, this time around citizen data. The team explored this challenge in a multi-stakeholder-driven problem-solving approach that created new partnerships while encouraging effective data collection and analysis.

Among the key strategies employed by AccLabGM, exploration is the cornerstone of solutions designing under the youth unemployment challenge.

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Future exploration:

- Using GIS technology to map vulnerable households, communities, and community posts
- Installing green technology for the UNDP The Gambia Country Office and alternative uses for Solar energy in rural communities
- Captured drone footage of Country Office in Greening Initiative to assess feasibility of switching to renewable energy for country office
- Proposed coordination of renovations of various Ebola centers to be used as COVID-19 testing and treatment centers.
- Registered ~2000 data points in horizon scanning of Banjul City Council (BCC) in smart cities pilot project.
- Explore opportunities within the National Assembly such as Civil education and information sharing with the general public
- Proposed for the suspension of newspaper deliveries to UN House to avoid spread of COVID

Experimentation:

- Project piloted use of taxi billboards in
- Purchased 3 Jobs posting packages
- 100% increase in users over 5 months
- Example of Experiments conducted
  a. 3D printing Hackathon on Waste Management – 10 teams competed for a six-month incubation prize with the first 3D printing company in The Gambia, Make3D. The winners sustainably produced PPES and worked with mentors and rural community leaders. When COVID hit, the group explored and test the use of solar energy as a source of power for 3D printer under a remote incubation model.
  b. Job-Matching Media Campaign with GamJobs – a joint coordinated program with AccLabGM, private sector including the Mbolo Association of The Gambia, Networks like the Female Entrepreneurs Network (FEN), the Woman Boss program, and the Mbolo Association of The Gambia were identified as potential contractors for the Production of cloth masks in the UNDP COVID-19 response strategy mitigation measures.

Mbolo, a group which AccLabGM worked with in other capacities throughout the year, was selected as project grant recipient to coordinate on the production and supply of 200,000 cloth masks. They worked with a network of 10 tailors from across the country to meet the order under the supervision of AccLabGM and ITC as an example of systems mapping in action.

Exploration:

In order to fulfil its mandate, the AccLabGM has also focused on four core skills to create partnerships in communities and foster civic participation in Lab activities. The team’s “below the radar screen” activities with local actors and solutions, are a result of actively trying to identify, visualize and communicate emerging development issues, trends and patterns, at the edges of development.

By seeking out this data, AccLabGM has tried to present new insights in accessible and comprehensive ways to enable sense-making and analysis at the grassroots level.

In the exploration of new methods and approaches and indigenous knowledge tackling development challenges, through experimentation, the team positions itself to turn these into learning options for addressing specific policy issues in the country, which others can also learn from. Several training sessions were held for partners around issues of lab methodology and findings.

Solutions Mapping:

Ethnography demands a solid understanding of the dynamics of local communities, a commitment to local solutions to local challenges, and support for a bottom-up approach to policy-making and implementation. AccLabGM has developed a database of 45 solutions from across The Gambia.

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The AccLab journey

- Onboarding
- Bootcamp
- First short learning cycle (5 months)
- Continuous learning cycle (repeat every 6 months)
Tackling Complex Challenges

Sense-making:
Is the process by which people give meaning to their collective experiences. Sensemaking is used by AccLabGM The Gambia as an engagement tool used to discuss and understand underlying issues behind local challenges. AccLabGM successfully established and strengthened its partner base and established networks with the UN Agencies, both the public and private sector, CSOs as well as with academia. This was achieved while adjusting to complexities and challenges due to COVID-19.

Collective Intelligence:
Is shared intelligence that emerges from the collaboration, collective efforts, and competition of many individuals and appears in consensus decision making. AccLabGM is committed to community engagement and the implementation of local solutions for local problems.

Horizon Scanning:
A technique for detecting early signs of potentially important developments through a systematic examination of potential threats and opportunities, with emphasis on new technology and its effects on the issue at hand. This technique allows for the capturing of trends and patterns that can become challenges that require timely and effective mitigation.

Piloting Virtual Court to Support Continuity in Judicial Sector:
At the onset of the pandemic, AccLabGM proposed a suspension of charges for petty crime offences in favor of community service for perpetrators, such as recruiting offenders into public disinfection and fumigation teams. This was in consideration of the hundreds of individuals held in remand. Together with the UNDP The Gambia, Rule of Law unit, the feasibility of a novel Virtual Court concept was piloted with judicial system actors to much success and rave. In the scale up consideration of the program, all stakeholders are currently considering a proposal to install IT infrastructure at prisons to conduct virtual trials and meetings. This work was undertaken in partnership with The National Agency for Legal Aid (NALA) which provides legal services for accused persons and specialised support for the Justice Department and the judiciary.

Furthermore to the scaling considerations, exploration activities also resulted in the development of a framework for the creation and administration of a national case management dashboard system within the judiciary. Finally as part of the enhancing IT infrastructure and systems within the judiciary, the NYC network of mappers are now supporting the mapping of community police stations across the country to bolster community policing safety improvement efforts.
Covid-19 Response

AccLabGM remains deeply committed to providing support for national and regional development challenges that fall within its mandate. The global Covid-19 pandemic presented unique local challenges and AccLabGM was able to make significant contributions towards mitigation efforts at the UNDP and inter-agency levels:

**CMS Platform for Agency Leads:**
In the wake of the COVID pandemic and in response to UN Country Teams’ (UNCT) need for a workflow efficiency and communication tool for all agencies, AccLabGM launched a 48-hour prize challenge for the development of a Content Management System (CMS).

UNDP The Gambia and AccLabGM convened a Core Team of IT professionals and Communications to supervise the development of the CMS platform. It was officially presented to UNCT in November 2020.

**Mapping Solutions for Production of 90,000 Cloth PPE facemasks with ITC Gambia:**
Through a low value grant to the Mbolo Association, together with ITC, AccLabGM was able to coordinate on the production of 90,000 facemasks as a result of community-based solutions mapping.

**Administering Cash payments to the vulnerable:**
AccLabGM mapped local mobile money solutions and identified suitably equipped vendors to facilitate cash transfers using mobile money platforms. This effort was in support of the UNDP Coordination Group’s Social Protection Pillar, which included cash transfers to a social registry of vulnerable women-headed households, people living with HIV/AIDS, and those experiencing food stress and undernourishment as a result of the pandemic.

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**Innovation in crisis: some other proposals:**

- **Conceptualising:** around the use of e-Commerce company delivery network to distribute food and cash transfers to the vulnerable.
- **Exploring:** last mile internet connectivity for rural zones to ensure continuity within the education sector and K-12 levels in particular.
- **Transformation:** of Ebola Crisis Management Centers into COVID19 Situation Rooms.

**Enhancing Remote Work Capacity of Government Partners:**
AccLabGM supported the UNDP Recovery Group in mapping 12 government Ministries, Department, and Agencies to provide Zoom teleconferencing access in their telecommute.

**Communication and Coordination:**
1. Published monthly blogs on the UNDP The Gambia webpage
2. Shared Weekly Reflections on activities and learning outcomes on AccLab global team space
3. Hosted quarterly Information Sessions with the UNDP The Gambia Innovation Group on integrating AccLabGM activities within Programme units
4. Held Quarterly Learning Sessions with Country Office on local interventions

**Mapping of vulnerable individuals and households:**
AccLabGM contributed to the UNDP Recovery Group by developing local mapping capabilities of national structures. 56 young people were identified in the National Youth Council’s (NYC) regional youth network chapters, and AccLabGM contracted Google’s local national affiliate, Finding Gambia, to provide GIS mapping training to this network in order to position them to support the national health actors in conducting contact tracing with other implications still being explored as income generating activities for the trainees.

**Enhancing community-based solutions around COVID-19:**
In line with the commitment to community-led interventions, AccLabGM provided support to the Kanifing Municipal Council (KMC) for the development of an Innovation Challenge in the largest district in the The Gambia.
Regional and International Partnership

Regional Bureau of Africa:
In the AccLabGM cross-pollination efforts across the global lab network, which aims to share learnings, findings, and seek best practices from SDG interventions, the following topics are being explored:

a. The viability of national universities as potential handover partners after the lab funding cycle expires (Uganda & Tanzania).

b. Scaling virtual courts within the African sub-region (Zimbabwe & UNDP Burkina Faso)

UKRI GCRF Accelerate Hub:
The UNDP-UKRI collaboration was established to test the Accelerator/Hub partnerships model and marked an exciting new academic partnership across Africa. In February 2019, the wider UNDP has also signed a partnership with the UKRI, expanding the possibilities for cross-learning and partnership. AccLabGM became the first Accelerator Labs partnership with the UKRI-GCRF Hub. The UKRI Accelerate Hub supports the AccLabGM with evidence to improve adolescent wellbeing across the Gambia. The partnership has been put to use in both major experiments conducted by AccLabGM.

Singapore Global Center for Technology, Innovation, and Sustainable Development:
In February 2020, AccLabGM was selected as one of four winning implementing countries in Africa, in the Global Center for Technology, Innovation, and Sustainable Development Smart Cities Pilot project.

Since then, AccLabGM has worked with the Singapore Global Center to conduct field visits and research around the three municipalities in the capital city administrative region; develop a design canvas and questionnaires, and reach the stage of preparing a user journey map before the penultimate stage of building a pilot terms of reference prior to implementation.

The University of The Gambia research arm was also contracted to provide analysis on approximately 2000 datapoints collected on the Council vendors. The pilot base will be at the capital city municipality with a view to scale out to the remaining two municipalities at which point the team would have assessed the feasibility of introducing a GIS (street-mapping) element into the project.

Overall, the project is underpinned by the rationale that digital financial solutions can improve business for vendors and enhance revenue collection by local authorities in the councils.

Key moments

Q4 2019
- Attended AccLab onboarding bootcamp in Kigali, Rwanda.
- Recruitment of first female driver in overall UN System in The Gambia
- Meeting with VP of The Gambia, and local Change D’Affairs of the German and Qatari Consulates in The Gambia.
- Short-listed for two proposals submitted under the joint UNDP/UNICEF Call to Action

Q1 2020
- Hosted collective intelligence workshop with mapped innovations from across the country.
- Participated in the Voluntary National Review of the SDG localization and implementation which included solutions-mapping across the 7 administrative regions.
- Selection for Smart Cities Project by Global Center for Sus, Tech, & Innov.
- Attended the UNDP-UKRI Knowledge Partnership Workshop in New York.

Q2 2020
- Presented the AccLabGM Digital Transformation of MSME Strategy at Consultative Forum with national partners.
- Two incidents of UNDP Administrator retweeting blogs by AccLabGM.
- Presented prize challenge to UNCT on CMS dashboard.

Key Successes

The UNDP The Gambia Accelerator Lab has successfully developed a solutions database of 45 proposals drawn from all across the nation, and is currently in the process of expanding its partner base and establishing a new action plan. The AccLab model has proved resilient to crises such as the COVID 19 pandemic; more accurately the AccLabGM has shown itself to be essential to recovery and response efforts. UN Agencies are increasingly turning to AccLabGM to learn lab methods and insights as we collectively pursue the sustainable development goals.
The AccLabGM is a strategically important resource for continued development efforts in The Gambia.

The fragility of both formal and informal economy exposed by the inability of MSEs to sustain shocks has shown that the AccLabGM model can provide balance and sustainability as it is a flexible model that is easily adaptable to changing conditions. This is due in large part to AccLab’s model of engaging communities in mitigating local challenges.

Another key learning has been the need for innovation in engaging with the public sector as digitization efforts are not universally applicable. Digitization across most sectors in the Gambia requires careful planning and possibly several iterations of projects.

The overall literacy rate and tech literacy rate present significant challenges to digitization efforts.

AccLabGM has faced significant challenges in its year of inception, with the global outbreak of the novel coronavirus Covid-19 being the most impactful. Ways of working have been dramatically affected quite possibly forever. Resiliently, AccLabGM has been able to pivot and has remained a relevant driver for development in The Gambia. The AccLab model has proven successful and its flexibility is a key aspect of its ability to be sustainable and scalable. The key challenges faced by AccLabGM amid a climate of poverty and under-developed infrastructure remain The Gambia’s high youth unemployment rate and the vulnerability of women and the youth.

AccLabGM is thinking into the future and will continue to build new partnerships and strengthen existing ones across the country, region and internationally. The challenges are becoming increasingly complex and that is why in the second and third year of AccLabGM, the team is open to more partners, ideas and opportunities.

Lessons Learned

Looking Ahead

Penetrate the current innovation ecosystem and explore what roles Labs and hubs can play to enhance coordination at the development agency, Civil service, universities, and private sector levels.

Seek new opportunities within the key pillars of the Gambian economy such as Tourism and Agriculture and push the boundaries of innovation within them.

Empower new and unconventional partners such as local government and the National Assembly.

Vision 2021: Building on our Knowledge
Omar: UNDP Accelerator Lab was a calling for me. I get to do what I love every day in a fast-paced high-intensity environment that is hungry for change, which seeks to ultimately make our world a better and healthier place.

Abdoulie: My deep passion for social development is what inspired me to join the UNDP Accelerator Lab. To this end, I work as a Solutions Mapper to impart the desired changes in the wellbeing of local populations, particularly in deprived communities.

Yahya: Part of the reason that inspired me to join the Accelerator lab is that it creates new culture of tackling developmental challenges and inspire new types of interactions, building new knowledge and synergizing individuals with creative potentials.