



SAHEL GOVERNANCE FORUM

The Future of Governance:
(Re)building Social Cohesion and Public Trust

PROGRAMME

 BANJUL
THE GAMBIA

 30 - 31
JULY, 2025



CONCEPT NOTE

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Background and Rationale

The Sahel region, situated at the crossroads of North, West, and Central Africa, occupies a key geostrategic position. Endowed with abundant natural resources, including oil, gas, gold, uranium, phosphates, vast underground water basins, significant agricultural potential, and immense solar energy capacity, the Sahel should logically serve as a driver of prosperity, innovation, and regional integration.

However, this promise remains largely unfulfilled. For more than a decade, the Sahel has been caught in a spiral of overlapping crises: chronic insecurity, the rise of armed groups, political instability marked by successive coups, weak institutional effectiveness, systemic corruption, a fractured social fabric, and eroding trust between citizens and the state. Though often addressed through security or humanitarian lenses, these dynamics are fundamentally symptoms of deeper structural governance dysfunctions.

Complex geopolitical dynamics further compound these issues. The Sahel has become a battleground of influence among regional and global powers, with a proliferation of state and non-state actors pursuing interests that are sometimes conflicting. Rising geopolitical tensions, particularly among former colonial powers, emerging nations, and regional actors, have fragmented international efforts and fueled a sense of external interference and distrust among local populations. In some cases, this has fueled narratives rejecting “imported” governance models and contributed to democratic backsliding.

Meanwhile, regional institutions such as ECOWAS, UEMOA, G5 Sahel, and the African Union stand at a crossroads. Often challenged or weakened, they are being called upon to reinvent themselves to play a more effective role in renewing the Sahel’s social contract. Political transitions underway in several countries, though framed as efforts to reclaim sovereignty, must be accompanied by credible, transparent, and inclusive governance frameworks capable of responding to the aspirations of citizens, especially youth and women.





The Future of Governance in Sahel

Given the interlinked nature of the Sahel's challenges, there is a pressing need to fundamentally rethink governance, not merely as a technical or institutional response, but as a political, social, and civic project rooted in local realities. Governance must become a collective endeavour, a platform for dialogue, listening, and social transformation. It should be seen as a lever for justice, equality, dignity, peace, and long-term development.

In this context, the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS), the Office of the Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel, and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) have collaborated to produce a flagship report on **the future of governance in the Sahel**. The result of over a year of research, regional consultations, comparative analysis, and peer review, the report lays the foundation for a new governance paradigm rooted in citizen participation, transparency, inclusion, social justice, and respect for political pluralism.

The forum will mark a strategic turning point. It offers a unique space for open, critical, and constructive dialogue on how to transform governance in the Sahel. It serves as a call to collective action to break with the fragmented approaches of the past, build institutions grounded in local realities, strengthen regional integration, and restore trust, an essential pillar of democratic resilience and sustainable development.

Objectives

The Sahel Governance Forum aims to provide a high-level platform for dialogue among governments, political leaders, technical experts, citizens, community leaders, the private sector, and international partners. The goal is to promote an integrated and context-sensitive approach focused on real governance, regional integration, and development needs. The Forum will be a unique space to exchange experiences, analyses, and practical solutions to the key challenges obstructing progress in the Sahel.

A major highlight will be the official launch of the first edition of the Future of Governance in the Sahel report, the culmination of a year of consultations, analysis, peer review, and expert input. The report comprises nine chapters that address the major governance trends and challenges in the region, offering actionable recommendations on justice, economic governance, digital innovation, regional cooperation, rebuilding the social contract, and combating impunity. It aims to inspire bold and inclusive reforms grounded in dignity, justice, and citizen engagement.

The Forum will serve as a space for collective reflection on how to restore public trust, strengthen social cohesion, and rethink the foundations of governance in a rapidly changing Sahel. Citizens' voices will be central, participants will be invited to share their aspirations, and the Forum will seek concrete political commitments to promote more just, effective, and locally grounded governance.

Expected Outcomes and Format

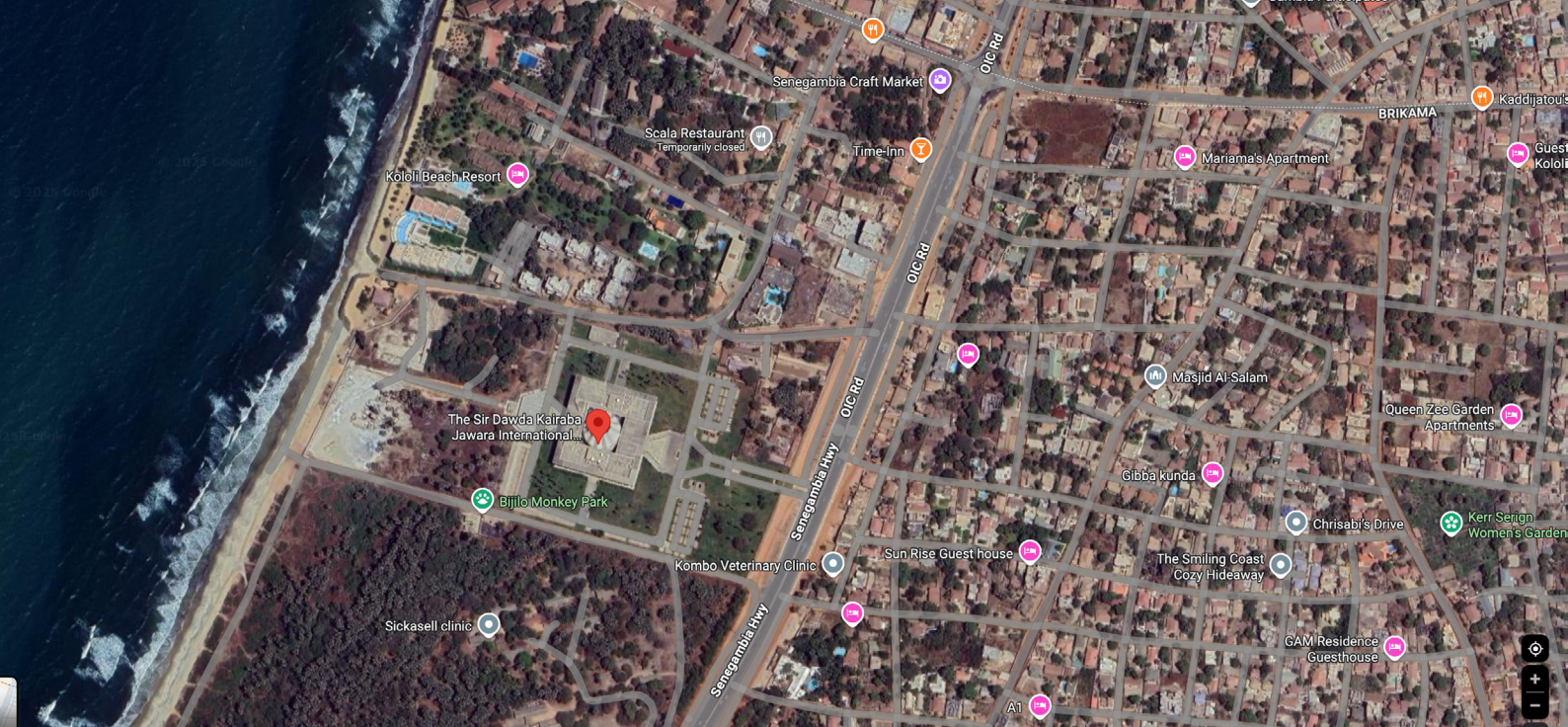
Held in person, the Forum will bring together approximately 150 participants from the region and beyond. The program will include plenary sessions, interactive discussions, and roundtables. Digital broadcasting and simultaneous interpretation in French and English will ensure wide access and dissemination. The event is organized by UN agencies, in partnership with the host government, the Goodluck Jonathan Foundation and International IDEA.

Noting the imperative to re/build public trust and social cohesion in the Sahel, this inaugural edition of the Sahel Governance Forum is expected to generate the following core outcomes:

1 Provide a valuable platform for participants to actively engage in meaningful dialogue, sharing lessons learned, innovative practices, and diverse perspectives on governance challenges and opportunities in the Sahel.

2 Participants renew their commitment to a better future for the people of the Sahel by adopting a joint declaration that outlines concrete actions to strengthen democratic governance, promote inclusive development, and enhance regional cooperation.

3 Develop an action plan to serve as a roadmap for stakeholders, as well as a proposed follow-up mechanism to ensure effective implementation of commitments.



Date and Venue



The Forum will take place over two days, from 30 to 31 July 2025, in Banjul, The Gambia, at the Dawda Kairaba Jawara Conference Center, which will host all plenary and parallel sessions.

Forum Contacts

For more information, please contact:

- Nadine Umutoni Rugwe (nadine.rugwe@undp.org), UNDP Sub-Regional Hub for West and Central Africa
- Dominique Kabeya (dominique.kabeya@undp.org), Office of the Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel
- Edem Blege (blege@un.org), UNOWAS
- Ikechukwu Eze (ikechukwu.eze@gej.ng), Goodluck Jonathan Foundation
- Maurice Mboula Jean-Claude Didier Enguelegue (M.Enguelegue@idea.int), International IDEA

For operational and logistics-related queries, please contact Doris Agazie (doris.agazie@undp.org) and Carole Modobe (carole.modobe@undp.org).

AGENDA

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DAY ONE, WEDNESDAY 30TH JULY 2025

08:00 – 08:30

Arrival and Registration of Participants

08:30 – 10:00

Opening Session

Introduction by Master of Ceremonies

- Ms. Mandisa Mashologu, UNDP Resident Representative to The Gambia
- Ms. Ann Iyonu, Executive Director, Goodluck Jonathan Foundation

Official Welcome Remarks

- H.E. Ambassador Lang Yabou, Permanent Secretary I - Ministry of Foreign Affairs, International Cooperation and Gambians Abroad
- Mr. Karl Frédéric Paul, UN Resident Coordinator in The Gambia

Interlude: Artistic Display by Brahama and Mariam

Opening Remarks (5 Minutes Each)

- **Dr. Roba D. Sharamo**
Regional Director for Africa and West Asia, International IDEA
 - **Dr. Omar Alieu Touray**
President of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)
 - **Ahunna Eziakonwa**
United Nations Assistant Secretary-General, UNDP Assistant Administrator and Director of the Regional Bureau for Africa.
 - **Leonardo Santos Simão**
Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for West Africa and the Sahel and Head of the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS).
 - **Excellency Goodluck Jonathan**
Former President of Nigeria and Founder of the Goodluck Jonathan Foundation
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Launch of 'Future of Governance in the Sahel'

(Re)Building Social Cohesion and Public Trust' Report (Brief Overview By Editors)

Launch of Report By:

- **Ahunna Eziakonwa**
United Nations Assistant Secretary-General, UNDP Assistant Administrator and Director of the Regional Bureau for Africa.
 - **Abdoulaye Mar Dieye**
United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel
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Introduction of the President - *Honourable Sering Modou Njie, Minister of Foreign Affairs, International Cooperation and Gambians Abroad*

10:00 – 10:15

Keynote Address

By His Excellency Adama Barrow, President of Republic of The Gambia

DAY ONE, WEDNESDAY 30TH JULY 2025

10:15 - 10:45

Health Break/Group Photo

10:45 - 11:30

Official Forum Press Conference

An opportunity to discuss about the 'Future of Governance in the Sahel' (Re)Building Social Cohesion and Public Trust' Report as well as the expected outcome of the first edition of the Sahel Governance Forum.

11:30 - 12:30

High-level panel 1: *The State of Governance in the Sahel - Looking back and setting foundations for a transformed Sahel.*

This session will provide a comprehensive overview of the state of governance in the Sahel, drawing on historical context, factual analysis, and lived experiences from across the region and beyond. It will explore governance through multiple lenses: political, economic, local, environmental, and administrative, to offer a clear conceptual framework, facilitate experience sharing, and highlight good practices. The discussion will underscore the centrality of people-centred governance, emphasising accountability, public trust, and social cohesion as foundational pillars. It will also examine the critical role of policy, legal, and regulatory frameworks, the effectiveness of public institutions, and the agency of citizens in shaping governance outcomes.

Moderator: Dr. Ozonnia Ojielo, UN Resident Coordinator, Rwanda

Moderator: Mr. Cheikh Tidiane Gadio | President of the Pan-African Institute for Strategies, Former Minister of State, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Senegal

Panelists:

- H.E. Traore Dioncounda | Former Head of State, Mali
 - H.E. Fatoumata Tambajang | Former Vice-President, The Gambia
 - H.E. Kadre Desire Ouedraogo | Former Prime Minister of Burkina Faso and Former President of the ECOWAS Commission
 - H.E. Abdou A Barry | Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Central Africa and Head of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa
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12:30 - 13:30

Plenary Session 1: *(Re)building public trust - Strong institutions and transformational leadership in the Sahel*

This session will explore the pivotal role of public trust in reimagining governance in the Sahel. Anchored in the interplay between traditional leadership systems and contemporary governance models, participants will reflect on how responsive and impact-driven state–citizen relations can drive development, justice, peace, and long-term stability in the region.

DAY ONE, WEDNESDAY 30TH JULY 2025

The discussion will critically examine the constitutional governance frameworks promoted by Sahelian states in relation to citizens' evolving expectations, particularly in light of the region's complex social, economic, security, and political realities. The session will also underscore the urgent need to restructure and revitalise the social contract, with a strong emphasis on accountability, transparency, and inclusive governance as cornerstones of sustainable peace and development. Furthermore, the panel will address the issue of 'alternatively governed' spaces in the Sahel, emphasising the importance of promoting legitimate, people-centred governance as a pathway to restoring state authority and territorial integrity in affected areas.

Moderator: Dr. Joseph Asunka, CEO, Afrobarometer

Framing: Christopher Formunyoh, Senior Associate for Africa and Regional Director at the National Democratic Institute

Panelists:

- Dr. Thomas R. Ouedraogo | Executive Secretary, Center for Democratic Governance
- Huguette Akplogan Dossa | Coordinator AWLN West Africa
- Patasmaneba Irène COMPAORÉ | President of Association Amazones de la Démocratie, Burkina Faso
- Bukar Atiyaye | Chair, African Youth Advocacy Team

13:30 - 14:30

Lunch Break

14:30 - 15:30

The Art of Leadership

A Conversation with H.E. Goodluck Jonathan, Former President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria" moderated by Ahunna Eziakonwa

15:30 - 16:30

Plenary Session 2: Cohesive society for stability in the Sahel *- Building lasting security and peace in the Sahel*

This session will examine the state of peace and security in the Sahel, with a particular focus on its impact on social polarisation and cohesion. It will explore the challenges to building cohesive societies across the region, critically assessing the limits of security-centred approaches and emphasising the need for inclusive, community-based solutions. Participants will identify key enablers of unity, solidarity, and social cohesion at local, national, and sub-regional levels. The session will underscore the central role of communities and local governments as anchors of stability, and the importance of leveraging the Sahel's rich cultural and social values to foster a shared identity in the face of common threats such as terrorism and violent extremism. The discussion will also focus on rebuilding trust, both between governments and citizens and among communities themselves, as a foundation for sustainable peace and resilience in the Sahel.

DAY ONE, WEDNESDAY 30TH JULY 2025

Moderator: Levinia Addae-Mensah, Executive Director, West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP)

Panelists:

- Amb. Mamman Nuhu | Executive Secretary of the Lake Chad Basin Commission
- Hon. Daouda ALIO | Minister of Justice, Niger
- Fatou Baldeh, Founder, Women in Liberation and Leadership
- Ms. Bineta Diop | Founder of Femmes Africa Solidarité and former AU special envoy of the president of the African Union Commission for women, peace, and security

16:30 - 18:00

Plenary Session 3: *From transitions to sustainable peace and development in the Sahel*

This session will explore the diverse forms of political transitions in the Sahel and broader region, examining both their challenges and potential to catalyze meaningful change. It will analyze how transitions, whether driven by popular demand or emerging from crises, can serve as turning points for reshaping values, institutions, leadership, and governance. Drawing on recent data and experiences, the session will highlight the contrasting public perceptions of political transitions: while some view them as opportunities for positive transformation, others raise concerns about the erosion of democratic norms and the rise of unconstitutional changes in government. Participants will reflect on the conditions under which political transitions can lay the groundwork for a return to constitutional order, and ultimately contribute to sustainable peace, inclusive governance, and long-term development.

Moderator: Dr Jide Okeke, Director, UNDP Regional Programme for Africa

Lead Speaker: Mr. Yacoub El Hillo | Director, UNDCO Africa

Panelists:

- Honourable, Dawda A Jallow | Attorney General and Minister of Justice – the Gambia
- Kholood Khairl Founder and Director of Confluence Advisory, Sudan
- Oury Traoré, ISS Regional Director | Regional Office for West Africa and the Sahel

19:00 - 20:00

Cocktail/Reception Dinner

09:00 - 10:15

High-Level Panel 2: *Governance for prosperity- from potential to shared prosperity for the people of the Sahel*

The Sahel is richly endowed with both human capital and abundant natural resources, including oil, natural gas, gold, phosphates, and critical minerals, as well as vast water reserves such as the Niger River, Lake Chad, and some of Africa's largest aquifers. The region also holds immense potential for clean energy, particularly solar power, positioning it well for a sustainable and inclusive economic transformation. Yet, despite this wealth, the Sahel has struggled to convert its resources into broad-based development outcomes. Governance and management shortcomings have not only hindered progress but, in some cases, have fueled conflict, insecurity, and deepened social and economic inequalities. This session will focus on economic governance as a critical driver of political sovereignty, economic resilience, and inclusive development in the Sahel. Participants will examine how to unlock the region's economic potential by strengthening institutional capacities, improving revenue generation and management, and ensuring that natural wealth is equitably and transparently harnessed to benefit all citizens.

Moderator: Mr. Alassane Gueye, Director, Good Governance, Ministry of Justice, Senegal

Panelists:

- Nane Sissako, Vice President of the Women Leaders' Platform of Mali
- H.E. Bala Mohammed | Governor, Bauchi State
- M. Lamin Barrow | Directeur général African Development Bank
- H.E Annadif Saleh Mahamat | Former Special Representative of the Secretary-General & Chad's Former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Chad
- Mustapha Njei | CEO and Founder of TAF Africa Global

10:15 - 10:45

Health Break

10:45 - 13:00

SESSION 4: PARALLEL SESSIONS

Parallel Session 1: *Future- smart governance in the Sahel- Leveraging demographic and modern technology dividends*

Venue: Plenary Hall

This session will highlight the unique opportunities emerging in the Sahel, particularly the rapid spread of modern technology and the region's vibrant, empowered youth population. Together, these trends offer a powerful foundation for building strong human capital and a dynamic knowledge economy essential to driving innovation in participation, service delivery, and accountability across all levels of governance.

The discussion will emphasize that the future of governance in the Sahel cannot be fully realized without leveraging digital transformation and fostering meaningful youth engagement. Participants will explore how digital tools and youth-led innovation can reshape governance and development, making systems more inclusive, transparent, and responsive to the needs of the region's growing population.

Moderator: Ms. Amaka Okoye, Programs For Africa, Deutsche Welle (DW)

Lead Speaker: Olatokunbo Ige, Serial Entrepreneur/Personal Development Expert, Livingstones Ecovillage & Utrader

Panelists:

- Mr. Hassan Jallow | Assutech – The Gambia
- Ms. Zeinaba Narabene of Reseau de Jeunes Saheliens pour le Climat, Mali
- Mr. Siriki NAON, Executive Secretary of the Association Jeunesse Espoir d'Afrique

Parallel Session 2: *Women leadership for inclusive governance in the Sahel- From intention to actions*

Venue: *Thematic Room 1*

Recognizing the vital role women have played in governance in the Sahel since the pre-colonial era, this session will explore how historical legacies, good practices, and emerging opportunities can be harnessed to strengthen women's leadership from the community to the regional level. Rather than focusing solely on barriers, participants will be invited to engage with practical strategies, accelerators, and innovative approaches that countries can adopt to advance inclusive governance. The session will highlight how promoting gender equality and empowering women are not only moral imperatives but also essential drivers of resilient, responsive, and sustainable governance across the Sahel.

Moderator: Nicole Kouassi, Resident Representative, UNDP Niger

Lead Speaker: Mrs. Rohey Malik Lowe – Mayor of Banjul, The Gambia

Panelists:

- H.E. Aminata Samate Cessouma | Honorary President of AWLN Burkina and former Commissioner for Political Affairs of the AU
- Ms. Fatou Jagne Senghore | Centre for Human Rights and Leadership, The Gambia
- Justice Anne Afong | President of Fako High Court, Buea Cameroon

Parallel Session 3: *From Aid to Assets: Rethinking Natural Resource Governance in the Context of ODA Decline in the Sahel*

Venue: *Thematic Room 4*

This session will explore how countries in the Sahel can strengthen natural resource governance as a strategic pathway to sustainably finance development and build resilience in the face of declining Official Development Assistance (ODA). It will focus on promoting transparency, accountability, and climate-sensitive approaches to resource management, ensuring that natural wealth becomes a driver of inclusive and sustainable progress across the region.

Moderator: Nirina Kiplagat, Coordinator, Governance and peacebuilding, RSCA/ UNDP

Lead Speaker: Prof Gibril Faal, Visiting Professor in Practice, Firoz Lalji Institute for Africa London School of Economics

Panelists:

- H.E. Abdul Samed Rabiou | Chairman, BUA Group
- Professor Serge Théophile BALIMA | Special Advisor to the Presidency, Burkina Faso
- Mustapha Njie | CEO and Founder, TAF Africa Global

13:00 - 14:00

Lunch Break

14:00 - 15:30

Plenary Session 5: *Towards Governance Compact in the Sahel- Multi-level Governance, Regionalism(s) and Cross-Border Cooperation for the Sahel*

Countries in the Sahel face shared challenges that require a renewed sense of unity and collective action. While threats such as insecurity, climate shocks, and economic hardship transcend borders, so too do the aspirations of the Sahelian people, who have long moved across countries in pursuit of opportunity. When neighboring nations fall short of delivering hope, illicit migration and instability often fill the void. This session will explore practical options and mechanisms for enhancing cross-border collaboration and regional integration while navigating shifting geopolitical dynamics and ongoing humanitarian crises. Participants will also reflect on how to forge a common alliance to address the key recommendations emerging from earlier sessions, strengthening solidarity and coordinated action for a more stable and prosperous Sahel.

Moderator: Njoya Tikum, Director of the UNDP Sub-Regional Hub for West and Central Africa and Resident Representative for UNDP in Senegal

DAY TWO, THURSDAY 31ST JULY 2025

Panelists:

- H.E. Dr Omar Alieu Touray | President of ECOWAS
- Mr Hass Thierno Diallo | Former Minister of Religious Affairs, Mali
- Dr. Isatou Touray | Former VP of the Gambia
- Ms. Marthe Wandou | Gender Equality and Women Empowerment Specialist, Cameroon

15:30 – 16:30

Closing Session

Moderator: Honourable Sering Modou Njie, Minister of Foreign Affairs, International Cooperation and Gambians Abroad

Poem - Jainaba Touray/ African Story

Closing Remarks

- **Sory Ibrahim Cissé**
National Youth Council, Mali
- **Abdoulaye Mar Dieye**
United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Special Coordinator for Development in the Sahel.
- **Ahunna Eziakonwa**
United Nations Assistant Secretary-General, UNDP Assistant Administrator and Director of the Regional Bureau for Africa.
- **H.E. Goodluck Jonathan**
Former President of Nigeria and Founder of the Goodluck Jonathan Foundation
- **H.E. Mohammed BS Jallow**
Vice President of the Republic of The Gambia



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In partnership with

