



## COVID-19 SHOCKS AND POST PANDEMIC RECOVERY IN THE GAMBIA

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### Abstract

The global landscape has undeniably transitioned into a paradigm of the 'new normal,' catalyzed by the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic. In The Gambia, households and communities have grappled with unprecedented crises, compounded by the ever-evolving nature of the virus, resulting in the emergence of various COVID-19 variants. While the efforts of the government have been primarily concentrated on containment and curbing the virus's spread, there has been a conspicuous absence of strategic national shock-responsive gender-focused social safety nets, particularly in the context of post-pandemic recovery within The Gambia. To investigate this critical gap, the study employed a qualitative research approach, utilizing focus group discussions with participants from diverse backgrounds and structured interviews with key institutions for primary data collection. The population encompassed stakeholder consultations and engagements at various levels, including the national, regional, and ward levels. Data were collected over a ten-week period and subsequently subjected to descriptive analysis. The assumption was rigorously examined through content analysis. The findings unveiled the adverse impacts of COVID-19 shocks on post-pandemic recovery in The Gambia. Notably, it illuminated the concerning lack of awareness and inadequate attitudes toward the COVID-19 virus. Furthermore, the research exposed a critical void in the nation's approach, revealing the absence of a strategic national shock-responsive gender-focused safety net for post-pandemic recovery within the country. These findings substantiate the research's initial assumption that the administration of shock-responsive gender-focused social protection safety nets during the COVID-19 pandemic in The Gambia has been ineffective. The study strongly recommends that the government, in collaboration with relevant ministries, establish specialized task forces or committees dedicated to formulating a comprehensive recovery plan with a national scope, specifically tailored to implement shock-responsive gender-focused social safety nets for post-pandemic recovery in The Gambia.

**Keywords:** COVID-19 Mutations, Shocks, Safety Nets, Social Protection, The Gambia.

## **1. Introduction**

Since the initial outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic coupled with series of waves and mutations of the corona virus, there has been an unprecedented disruption in social dynamics, peoples' lifestyles and the conventional way of doing things. The effects of the pandemic have been profound on the global space socially, economically, politically, and otherwise. Millions of COVID-19 cases have been reported in more than 160 countries due to virus mutations and several waves of the corona virus disease (GCE, 2020). COVID-19 mutations have adversely affected the progress made by governments, nations and peoples after the first outbreak in 2019. This has become a global crisis requiring urgent attention and collective action by all. For example, Africa as a continent, and the Gambia in particular, have witnessed remarkable changes in its economy without any plan of shocks-responsive gender-focused social protection safety nets in the face of the global pandemic.

According to UNDP report (2020), the Gambia has experienced stagnant economic development and increased food insecurity because of the COVID-19 global pandemic. Although the COVID-19 pandemic is over, the World Bank (2022) report stressed that the impact has caused a severe setback to poverty reduction in The Gambia. The report revealed that during the pandemic in 2020 the national poverty rate climbed to 53.4 percent as against 45.8 percent in 2019. Currently the economic conditions in the country has been exacerbated by the current crisis in Ukraine coupled with rising energy, food, and other commodity prices. These necessitate the need for governments to evaluate the impact of the crisis on food security and people's livelihood at all levels through focused data collection and analysis instruments with a view to strategizing on appropriate social protection safety nets.

According to Abatan, Agboghoroma, Akemoke, Antonio, Awokola, Bittaye, ..... and Wariri (2021), the first COVID-19 case detected in The Gambia was reported on the 19<sup>th</sup> of March 2020. In response to this, the government immediately closed its international land, sea, and air borders and in March 27<sup>th</sup> 2020, the Gambia government declared a state of emergency, which included closing schools, non-essential shops, places of worship, hotels and many workplaces. Similarly, the Gambian people have embraced the 'new normal' with official statements on the use of face masks in public spaces, restrictions on social gathering, total lockdown of market places, schools, and offices, to mention just a few (Olagbaju, Awosusi & Shaib, 2020).

Several studies have examined the impact of COVID-19 Pandemic globally. In a study on the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on Asian scholarly journal editors' daily life, work, and opinions on future journal development, Chung, Kim and Huh (2020) revealed that COVID-19 appears to be a source of anxiety to editors, which may be related to the increased time they spend on the internet. Some editors reported an increased workload among others; American Psychological Association (2020) found that the corona virus pandemic is an epidemiological and psychological crisis. They reported that the enormity of living in isolation, changes in our daily lives, job loss, financial hardship, and grief over the death of loved ones has the potential to affect

the mental health and well-being of many. The study stated that even in this time of physical distancing, it is critical to seek social support and connection with others.

However, efforts by the government to resuscitate the nation's economy have been through massive campaign on vaccination and how citizens can protect themselves from contracting the COVID-19 virus. These interventions have largely been in the compulsory use of mask in the public spaces, presentation of COVID-19 result before leaving or upon arrival in the Gambia, and other forms of restrictions. As laudable as these activities have been, the Gambia has not fully recovered from the pandemic and there are no concrete strategic plans for the post-pandemic recovery to mitigate future emergencies with planned social safety nets. Considering the reality of life after the pandemic, it is important that the Gambia, like other nations of the world, should have a strategic recovery plan. Therefore, this paper examined the need for a supplementary effort to provide evidence that can help translate the results generated from this study for a strategic national recovery plan, policy framework and guide government's response planning for post COVID-19 recovery shock-responsive gender-focused social protection safety nets in The Gambian.

### **1.1 Statement of the Problem**

COVID-19 took the world by storm and the Gambia has had her fair share of disruption in the global economic meltdown. The outbreak of COVID -19 has compounded the plight of businesses, and citizens in the country and led to increasing poverty rates and massive unemployment. Efforts by the government have largely focused on motivating people to get vaccinated and prescribing restrictions to reduce the spread of the virus. Little or nothing is being done towards the formulation of a strategic national recovery plan and shock-responsive gender-focused social protection safety nets for the post pandemic recovery era in the Gambia. Despite the effort of the Gambian government to normalize the situation, the country seem not to have fully recovered as expected. It is against this backdrop that this study seeks to examine the effects of COVID-19 shocks on post pandemic recovery in The Gambia.

### **1.2 Research Questions**

- i. What is the nature of shocks experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic in The Gambia?
- ii. What is the effect of the post pandemic recovery programmes on the COVID-19 shocks-responsive gender- focused social safety nets in the Gambia?

### **1.3 Objective of the Study**

The broad objective of the study is to provide evidence based data that can support the development of strategic national plan on shock-responsive gender-focused social protection safety nets for post-pandemic recovery.

The specific objectives are to:

- i. examine the nature of shocks experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic in The Gambia;
- ii. assess the effect of COVID-19 shock on post pandemic recovery programmes of social protection safety nets in the Gambia.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 An Overview of the Impact of Covid-19 Pandemic on The Gambia**

In the Global space, the pandemic has been of grave impacts. It has affected day-to-day lives of people and impairing the global economy in an unprecedented manner (Haleem et al. (2020). Ozili and Arun (2020), for instance, ascribed the comatose state of economy in most countries of the world to the increasing number of lockdown days, poor monetary policy decisions and prolonged international travel restrictions which severely affected the level of global economic activities and the closing, opening, lowest and highest stock price of major stock market in Africa. They observe further that, the imposed restriction on the internal movement of people and higher fiscal spending had a positive impact on the level of economic activities. Kuckertz et al. (2020) state that the spread of COVID-19 led many governments to take drastic measures which grounded the economic life came and created an exogenous shock to many economic actors and innovative start-ups. Given the gross loss of jobs especially in 2020, the overseas remittance dropped by 9% in 2020 and 6% in 2021 (Benton et al, 2021). Zhang et al. (2020) state that COVID-19 affected financial markets all over the world. It created an unusual level of risk, causing investors to suffer significant losses in a very short period of time. Similarly, the drop in the volume of overseas remittances globally came with impacts on not only developing countries, but also specifically on migrant families in terms of lack of food security, access to health care, education and other basic services.

The Gambian economy, like that of most African states, has been seriously affected by COVID-19 outbreak and mutations given the fragile status of the economy, which relies heavily on tourism, re-exportation and oversea remittances. According to the UNDP report (2020), for instance, it was estimated that the Gambia might lose about US\$ 108.5 million (0.07% of GDP) from tourism if the pandemic was not contained. The pandemic affected households, communities, tourism and business travels, truncated labor migration, inhibited cross-border movement at all stratum given the border and restriction approaches. Households, communities and the economy of the country became weakened given the drop in overseas remittance. Specifically, in Africa, and the Gambia in particular, has experienced the grave impacts of COVID-19 on its economy and other aspects of the peoples' lifestyle (Olagbaju, Awosusi & Shab, 2020).

In a recent study, Ceesay (2020) revealed that the pandemic has so far had a negative effect on the Gambian economy in terms of unemployment, consumption, investment and energy. The study projected that poverty, food insecurity and hunger in households and communities will be on the rise as a result of poor agricultural output, reduction in the domestic and international migration,

reduction in remittances and those left behind will be seriously affected in terms of health, food security, education, energy and so on especially women, children, elderly and the disabled. Fornaro and Wolf (2020), using a simple model, showed that the COVID-19 pandemic triggered a negative supply shock. They suggest that drastic policy interventions – both monetary and fiscal – might be needed to prevent this negative supply shock from severely affecting employment and productivity. Ramelli and Wagner (2020) showed that the health crisis transformed into an economic crisis which was amplified through financial channels.

## **2.2 Theoretical framework: Systems Theory**

The study employs the system theory as a framework. This theory was developed by Ludwig Von Bertalanffy in 1937 during the presentation his idea of a “General System Theory” in a philosophy seminar at the University of Chicago (Von Bertalanffy, 1968). However, this theory was adapted and popularized by David Easton in (1953) into political system theory. According to David Easton’s, the main thrust of the system theory is anchored on the fact that national policy/decision making should be viewed as a process which involves interactions of interdependent variables within the environment (i.e. emanating from the demands of the environment).

The theory looks at the relationship between COVID-19 shocks as environmental input and post pandemic recovery policy/decision during the pandemic as the output (both are dual directional). The post pandemic recovery policy/decision during the pandemic are based on inputs received from the environment (COVID-19 Pandemic and its mutations in the country) and reacts by generating outputs in the form of post pandemic recovery policies and or decisions.

In the viewpoint of Bunge (2004) a system is a complex object whose parts or components are held together by bonds of some kind. These bonds are logically linked in the case of a conceptual system, such as a theory; they are materially linked in the case of a concrete system, such as an atom, cell, immune system, family, or hospital; they are globally linked in the case of globalization such as the inter-relationships between and among nations of the world. The work of Churchman (1968) acknowledged the need of a country to interact within its internal and external components/states/provinces and other countries through bilateral and multilateral relationships within the globe, as opposed to what were proposed by the classical school theorists like Max Weber, F. Taylor and Fayol who viewed a country as a closed system.

The Gambia as a country is among the comity of nations in the globe. When the COVID-19 pandemic started in China, the globe was in shock and panic because of the Corona-virus effect on humans. The effect of the COVID-19 pandemic in (China, Wuhan) one part of the globe affected the entire globe in no distant time because we all are interconnected, economically, politically, religiously, technological etc. The effect of the COVID-19 pandemic in The Gambia was widespread.

### 3. Methodology

The paper employed a qualitative research method that utilized focus group discussions with open-ended structured questions for primary data collection. The study's population encompassed selected stakeholder consultations and engagements at the national (key institutions), regional, and ward levels. This included senior and middle management staff of the National Social Protection Secretariat (NSPS), senior and middle management staff of the Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Welfare, senior and middle management staff of the Ministry of Health, the Association of Non-Governmental Organizations (TANGO) and its registered members, senior and middle management staff of the Department of Community Development (DCD), representatives of the Multidisciplinary Facilitation Team (MDFTs) at the field level, Regional Social Welfare Assistants (RSWA), representatives of the Children's National Assembly (CNA) at the regional level, Youth Chamber of Commerce representatives, representatives of the Regional Technical Advisory Committees (RTAC), Ward Development Committee representatives (WDC), Village Development Committee representatives (VDC), ward councilors, and Mothers' Club representatives.

The use of focus group discussions facilitated the collection of relevant and accurate data. Using a simple random sampling technique, four (4) senior and middle management staff of the National Social Protection Secretariat (NSPS), seventeen (17) senior and middle management staff of the Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Welfare, eighty-seven (87) senior and middle management staff of the Ministry of Health, seven executive members of the Association of Non-Governmental Organizations (TANGO) and its fifty-nine (59) registered members, fifteen (15) senior and middle management staff of the Department of Community Development (DCD), six (6) representatives of the Multidisciplinary Facilitation Team (MDFTs) at the field level, three (3) Regional Social Welfare Assistants (RSWA), two (2) representatives of the Children's National Assembly (CNA) at the regional level, five (5) Youth Chamber of Commerce representatives, four (4) representatives of the Regional Technical Advisory Committees (RTAC), eight (8) Ward Development Committee representatives (WDC), eight (8) Village Development Committee representatives (VDC), three (3) ward councilors, and twenty (20) Mothers' Club representatives, totaling two hundred and forty-four (244) samples, were selected for this study.

The study covered all administrative regions of The Gambia, including the Upper River region (URR), Central River region North (CRR North), Central River region South (CRR South), Lower River region (LRR), North Bank region (NBR), West Coast region (WCR), Kanifing Municipality (KM), and Banjul City Council (BCC). Both primary and secondary sources of data were employed in this research. Primary data were obtained through focus group discussions conducted with participants of both genders in each region. Additionally, data were sourced from secondary materials, such as official publications. The data collected were analyzed using content analysis, as well as descriptive statistical methods like simple percentages and graphical representations for illustrative purposes.

### 3.1 Variables in the Study

COVID-19 shocks serve as the independent variable, while post-pandemic recovery in The Gambia functions as the dependent variable. The primary focus of this study was to examine the impact of COVID-19 shocks on post-pandemic recovery programs in The Gambia.

### 3.2 Research Instrument and Validation Procedures

Two research instruments were employed in this study. The first instrument consisted of a self-designed set of 6 open-ended questions for discussion during the desegregated focus group sessions. This instrument was divided into two parts, labeled as Part A and Part B. Part A was dedicated to capturing the demographic information of the respondents, while Part B encompassed three (3) positively framed items concerning the impact of COVID-19 shocks on post-pandemic recovery programs in The Gambia. The second instrument utilized in the study consisted of three (3) structured interview questions related to the independent variables. To ensure the reliability and adequacy of measuring respondents' opinions, the instruments underwent a validation process. They were meticulously designed to include clear and pertinent questions to eliminate any potential ambiguity. Experts in the field of study carefully scrutinized the content, and a pilot test was carried out to assess the validity of the questions. Necessary adjustments were made to align the instruments with the objectives of the study. The data collection process, including instrument administration, spanned a period of 10 weeks.

## 4. Results and Discussions

Table 1 provides an overview of the participants from the eight administrative regions in The Gambia, presented in a desegregated format. It offers a comprehensive breakdown of the individuals involved in the study, highlighting their representation across different regions. This table serves as a valuable reference for understanding the geographic diversity of the participants.

**Table 1: DESEGREGATED PARTICIPANTS IN THE EIGHT ADMINISTRATIVE REGIONS IN THE GAMBIA**

Region /Location of Focal Group Discussion	F	M	Planned Targeted Total	Actual Total of Respondents	% F	% M	Total Percentage
Upper River Region	15	20	30	35	50	67	117%
Central River Region SOUTH	13	12	30	25	43	40	83%
Central River Region NORTH	15	15	30	30	50	50	100%

<b>Lower River Region</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>130%</b>
<b>West Coast Region</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>116%</b>
<b>Kanifing Municipality</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>129%</b>
<b>North Bank Region</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Banjul</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>150%</b>

**Source: Fieldwork (2023)**

Table 1 provides a comprehensive overview of participant categories based on sex across the eight administrative regions of The Gambia. In Upper River Region, the results indicate the presence of 15 female participants, representing 50%, and 20 male participants, representing 67%. The percentage exceeding 100% suggests the unexpected attendance of additional participants at the focus group discussion in this region. For Central River Region South, the study found that 13 female participants, or 43%, and 12 male participants, or 40%, were present. However, the percentage is less than 100%, indicating that 5 participants, constituting 17%, were absent from the discussion in Central River Region South.

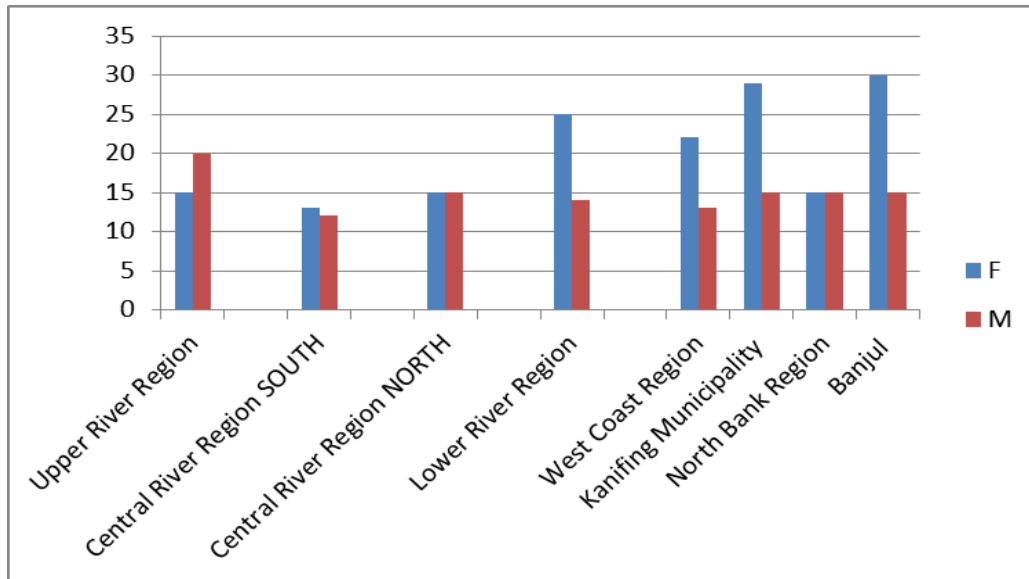
Central River Region North saw an equal representation of participants, with 15 females, or 50%, and 15 males, or 50%, resulting in a total percentage of 100%. All invited participants attended the focus group discussion in this region. In Lower River Region, the data revealed the presence of 25 female participants, accounting for 83%, and 14 male participants, representing 47%. Similarly to Upper River Region, the percentage exceeding 100% suggests the unexpected attendance of additional participants during the focus group discussion in Lower River Region.

In the West Coast region, the findings indicated the participation of 22 female participants, or 73%, and 13 male participants, or 43%. As in the previous cases, the percentage exceeding 100% suggests the presence of other uninvited participants during the focus group discussion in the West Coast region. Kanifing Municipality reported that 29 female participants, or 85%, and 15 male participants, or 44%, were present. Similar to other regions, the percentage exceeding 100% suggests that uninvited participants attended the focus group discussion in Kanifing Municipality.

The results for North Bank Region demonstrated an equal representation of participants, with 15 females, or 50%, and 15 males, or 50%, resulting in a total percentage of 100%. All invited participants attended the focus group discussion in North Bank Region. In Banjul City Council, the findings indicated the presence of 30 female participants, representing 100%, and 15 male participants, representing 50%. As observed in other regions, the percentage exceeding 100% suggests the presence of other uninvited participants during the focus group discussion in Banjul City Council.



Figure 1: Frequency Distribution of Desegregated Participants Per Region



Source: Fieldwork (2023)

**The focus group discussions conducted among desegregated participants in all eight administrative regions of The Gambia unveiled a multitude of challenges experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic.** These findings provide crucial insights into the nature of shocks experienced across the country during this period. Participants identified a broad spectrum of concerns and difficulties that left an indelible impact on individuals, households, and communities.

Firstly, the fear of contracting the virus and the potential discrimination associated with it weighed heavily on the minds of many. The lack of adequate information regarding the virus's transmission, prevention, and care for affected family members exacerbated this fear, resulting in a reluctance to seek healthcare services and a pervasive sense of uncertainty. This psychological stress, coupled with restrictions on movement and instances of physical harassment by security forces, created a collective sense of unease and insecurity.

Economically, the pandemic-induced lockdowns led to the loss of livelihoods and increased poverty levels among many households, exacerbating inequality gaps, particularly in the education sector, where the poor struggled to cope with online educational programs. Tragically, the high death rates during this period contributed to an increased number of widows and orphans in many households, compounding the difficulties faced by these vulnerable individuals.

Food insecurity became widespread, exacerbated by rising costs of goods and services, high transport fares due to petroleum shortages, and an increase in domestic violence driven by frustration. Furthermore, the stress and isolation associated with the pandemic led to deteriorating health conditions among household members, coupled with inadequate access to water, health, and sanitation facilities in many communities.

Unemployment rates soared as many organizations ceased operations, compounding the economic challenges. Marketing difficulties for agricultural produce, rural-urban migration, an increase in street begging, petty theft, and child labor were also observed. Widespread insecurity within communities added to the general sense of fear, while low agricultural productivity was a result of farmers being unable to work due to the lockdown. High inflation compounded the challenges, leading to increased food prices, shortages, and general economic discontent.

Living conditions deteriorated dramatically, causing widespread frustration and helplessness. The education sector faced significant disruptions, with school closures resulting in high dropout rates and an increase in teenage pregnancies, particularly among girls. The cumulative impact of these hardships created a humanitarian crisis that the government struggled to address, resulting in a total halt to economic activities during the pandemic. In sum, the findings from the focus group discussions shed light on the multifaceted challenges experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic, encompassing physical, economic, psychological, and social dimensions, which have left a lasting imprint on The Gambia's individuals and communities.

**The question posed in the study was aimed at understanding the impact of COVID-19 shocks-responsive-gender-focused social protection safety nets on post-pandemic recovery programs in The Gambia.** The responses from various institutions shed light on the extensive initiatives taken to implement these safety nets to protect the most vulnerable segments of the society during the tumultuous period of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The institutional responses underscore the diverse range of COVID-19 shocks-responsive gender-focused social protection safety nets initiated by different entities to support post-pandemic recovery programs. These efforts are primarily centered around bolstering key sectors such as education, agriculture, health, and providing crucial food assistance. Such measures have proven instrumental in aiding the most vulnerable populations during the uncertainty and challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Several organizations, including ChildFund, United Purpose, TANGO, the Ministry of Agriculture, Catholic Relief Services, Red Cross, Action Aid, SOS, Ministry of Gender, Department of Social Welfare, Social Security and Housing Finance Corporation, and the Gambia Chamber of Commerce and Industry, among others, have actively contributed to these efforts. Their involvement has been pivotal in providing essential support to the most vulnerable segments of society in The Gambia, particularly during the pandemic. These social protection safety nets have played a significant role in mitigating the adverse effects of COVID-19 shocks and have been instrumental in the nation's post-pandemic recovery programs. Nevertheless, these institutions share a consensus that the post-pandemic recovery programs in The Gambia encountered significant challenges, leading to a perception of ineffectiveness. These challenges include:

- i. **Inefficient Targeting Approaches:** Many social protection recovery programs in The Gambia employed inefficient targeting methods characterized by unclear criteria, resulting

in issues like duplications and leakages in reaching and assisting the most vulnerable populations.

- ii. **Low Awareness of the Social Registry:** Recovery programs had limited awareness of the existence and potential of the social registry, leading to low uptake and utilization of the system by these programs.
- iii. **Limited Coverage of the Gambia Social Registry:** The Gambia Social Registry does not cover the entire nation, posing a negative impact on the potential for shock-responsive targeting by social protection recovery programs.
- iv. **Insufficient Capacity in Managing the Gambia Social Registry:** The capacity for handling the Gambia Social Registry (GamSR) system in terms of adequately trained staff is highly limited. The system was managed by only two staff members throughout the entire country during the pandemic and post-pandemic recovery period.
- v. **Outdated Data in the Gambia Social Registry:** The data collected in the Gambia Social Registry (GamSR) exercise has not been updated to date. While there are plans to implement structures for dynamic data updating, such as voluntary registration centers and the establishment of GRM structures at the local level, these initiatives have not yet been fully realized.

## **5. Conclusion**

The study delved into the impact of COVID-19 shocks on post-pandemic recovery in The Gambia using a combination of focus group discussions and in-depth interviews. Its primary objective was to generate evidence-based data that could contribute to the development of a strategic national plan for shock-responsive gender-focused social protection safety nets in the context of post-pandemic recovery. Two specific research objectives were successfully addressed: first, to explore the nature of shocks experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic in The Gambia, and second, to assess the repercussions of COVID-19 shocks on post-pandemic recovery programs in the country. The research hypothesis posited that the administration of shock-responsive gender-focused social safety nets during the COVID-19 pandemic in The Gambia was not effective.

The findings from the study uncovered a consensus among respondents that COVID-19 shocks had indeed engendered adverse effects on post-pandemic recovery in The Gambia. The prevailing sentiment was that the nation had not fully recuperated from the multifaceted impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and its successive waves, particularly in terms of the escalating unemployment rates attributed to the pandemic's far-reaching consequences. Institutional respondents unanimously underscored the inefficient targeting strategies employed in most intervention programs of shock-responsive gender-focused social safety nets in The Gambia. These programs frequently relied on unclear criteria, leading to issues such as duplications and leakages in delivering support to the most vulnerable segments of the population. The study's

findings largely align with the research assumption that the administration of shock-responsive gender-focused social protection safety nets during the COVID-19 pandemic in The Gambia lacked effectiveness.

In conclusion, the study revealed a shared perspective among respondents regarding the need for the development of national strategies for shock-responsive gender-focused social safety nets in the context of post-pandemic recovery planning. This reflects the urgency of addressing the multifaceted challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic and underscores the importance of strategic planning and effective safety nets to mitigate their adverse consequences on vulnerable populations.

## **6. Implications/Contributions to Knowledge**

Based on the findings of the study, several recommended strategies for the implementation of shock-responsive, gender-focused social safety nets for post-pandemic recovery in The Gambia can be delineated:

Firstly, there is an imperative need for the government to establish a centralized coordinating body dedicated to the governance of social protection safety nets. Such a body should be meticulously structured to ensure functionality and responsiveness to shocks while maintaining a gender-focused approach. A well-structured governance framework would enhance coordination, foster partnerships, facilitate collaboration, and promote transparency in the administration of shock-responsive, gender-focused social protection intervention programs across the country.

Secondly, the study underscores the importance of adopting a gender-focused approach in the design and execution of social protection intervention programs. The research findings emphasize the disparities in the COVID-19 shocks experienced by females as compared to their male counterparts. Tailoring social safety nets to address the unique vulnerabilities and needs of each gender group is paramount for effective post-pandemic recovery.

Furthermore, it is recommended that shock-responsive, gender-focused social safety nets leverage an updated social registry. The utilization of an accurate and up-to-date social registry can significantly enhance the targeting of the most vulnerable individuals and households, ensuring that the support reaches those who need it the most.

Additionally, the government should encourage and invest in local food production capacity to enhance food security. Bolstering local agricultural production not only builds resilience against global and internal shocks but also fosters endogenous economic growth. This self-sufficiency in food production contributes to greater economic stability and reduces susceptibility to external shocks.

Moreover, the promotion of local production of medical supplies is essential. Encouraging local manufacturing of medical inputs enhances the country's resilience and ensures affordable healthcare, even in the face of global pandemics, economic disruptions, or supply chain issues.

Lastly, the government should invest in the health system by increasing the recruitment and deployment of healthcare workers, strengthening the supply chain, and attracting additional funding to fortify the healthcare system and surveillance. A robust healthcare system is crucial for effective responses to health-related shocks, such as pandemics, and ensures better overall public health. These recommendations are formulated based on the study's findings and are aimed at addressing the complex and multifaceted challenges posed by COVID-19 shocks and similar crises in The Gambia. They serve as a strategic guide to enhance the country's resilience and responsiveness to future shocks while prioritizing gender-focused approaches for more effective social protection safety nets.

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