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**The Gambia invests in jobs for youth through national trade roadmap**

**Government, business and young people endorse five-year roadmap to create quality jobs and export opportunities for youth**

(Banjul) – The Gambia’s Vice President Ms. Fatoumata Tambajang today unveiled the Youth and Trade Roadmap, which sets out to help tackle the root causes of youth unemployment and competitive market constraints, which are at the heart of irregular migration. Today’s launch follows a wide consultative process among public agencies, the business community, training institutions and youth across the country.

‘My Government is fully committed to leading and implementing the Youth and Trade Roadmap to turn the tide of youth migration,’ said Vice President Tambajang. ‘The roadmap directly supports our country’s new National Development Plan to empower youth.’

The National Development Plan (2018-2021) targets economic reforms to restore growth and stability in the country. The Gambia is re-emerging on the global scene after decades of struggling with socioeconomic and political challenges, which have fuelled unemployment and migration, particularly among youth.

Vice President Tambajang thanked the International Trade Centre (ITC) for its guidance and the consultative process in designing the Roadmap, as well as the [European Union (EU) Emergency Trust Fund for Africa](https://ec.europa.eu/trustfundforafrica/)) for its financial support to the [ITC Youth Empowerment Project](http://www.yep.gm/) (YEP)), which supports youth employment and entrepreneurship in the country.

‘Youth empowerment and employment is a strategic priority,’ said Mr. Attila Lajos, European Union Ambassador to The Gambia. ‘The hopes and expectations of the youth, including the returnees, should not be deceived, and this increases the need to adopt measures for entry-level job creation.’

**Serving as a ‘guiding compass’**

Mr. Henry Gomez, Minister of Youth and Sports, said: ‘I am pleased that the development of the roadmap followed an inclusive process with the participation of youth, the public and the private sectors, as well as civil society.’

[ITC Executive Director Arancha González](http://www.intracen.org/itc/about/how-itc-works/management/executives-directors-corner/%29) said: ‘ITC is committed to working with The Gambia to help young people move from being job seekers to creators through trade. The roadmap will serve as a guiding compass to bolster competitiveness and develop economic opportunities for youth, in line with the Government’s priorities.’

Through YEP, ITC is supporting implementation of the roadmap, focusing on building market-oriented skills of youth while fostering value addition in the priority sectors of nuts and agro-processing, information and communications technologies, and tourism.

Youth representatives from the sector core teams also participated in the launch event.

‘We need to be equipped with a business mind-set and entrepreneurial skills to become our own engines of growth,’ said Mr. Omar Jammeh, youth activist, Director of Just Act Gambia, a non-governmental organization, and a member of the National Youth Council.

Ms. Beran Dondeh, Vice President of the Information Technology Association of The Gambia, said: ‘We can bring new ideas to solve old economic problems as long as we receive quality education and have the opportunity and skills to develop our businesses*.*’

**Tackling gaps in skills, education**

‘In The Gambia, micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) employ 60% of the active labour force,’ said Minister of Trade, Industry, Regional Integration and Employment, Dr. Isatou Touray. ‘If Gambian companies become more competitive, they will grow and create more jobs.’

The SME Competitiveness in The Gambia survey – conducted by the Gambia Investment and Export Promotion Agency in 2017 with support from ITC – found that 35% of companies report poor levels of skills among young graduates. The skills gap is particularly marked with youth trained in technical and vocational education and training institutes (TVETs). Youth in rural areas are particularly disadvantaged, as approximately 70% of the accredited training institutes are located in the greater Banjul area.

The survey also reveals that more than half of MSMEs have difficulties meeting international quality standards, which is a prerequisite to export.

**Strengthening training institutes, entrepreneurship**

Based on these findings, the Youth and Trade Roadmap targets the strengthening of TVETs as one of the first steps to addressing the skills gap.

Another priority area is equipping youth with the skills needed to venture into self-employment through quality entrepreneurial and mentoring programmes.

The roadmap also outlines how youth can add value and tap into new opportunities in the sectors of nuts and agro-processing, information and communication technologies, and tourism.

**Notes for the Editor**

**ITC'S YOUTH EMPOWERMENT PROJECT (YEP)**

The Youth Empowerment Project aims to reduce migration pressures through increased job opportunities and income prospects for youth. The four-year project takes a market-led approach and sets out to strengthen existing youth development systems, structures and services to create employment opportunities. The national sector export strategies have been funded by YEP through the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa. For further information about the **Youth Empowerment Project**, please visit: <https://www.yep.gm>

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**About ITC**
The International Trade Centre is the joint agency of the World Trade Organization and the United Nations. ITC assists micro, small and medium-sized enterprises in developing and transition economies to become more competitive in global markets, thereby contributing to sustainable economic development within the frameworks of the Aid-for-Trade agenda and the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals.
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