



OFFICE OF NATIONAL SECURITY

COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

REPUBLIC OF THE GAMBIA

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ACRONYMS

CSO	Civil Society Organization
DCAF	Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
GIZ	German Agency for International Cooperation
NCCE	National Council for Civic Education
NGO	Non - Governmental Organization
NHRC	National Human Rights Commission
NIA	National Intelligence Agency
NSP	National Security Policy
ONS	Office of National Security
SSR	Security Sector Reform
SSRS	Security Sector Reform Strategy
SIS	State Intelligence Service
TANGO	The Association of Non - Governmental Organizations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
VDC	Village Development Committee

FOREWORD

Comprehensive Security Sector Reform (SSR) is a critical process that requires strong leadership and political will from the highest state authorities. The ultimate aim is to have a security sector that upholds the rule of law, respectful of fundamental human rights of citizens, and is under civilian oversight and control.

The scope of the reforms undertaken by the Government of The Gambia within the security sector since 2017 has been remarkable with tangible achievements in line with the recommendations of the SSR Technical Working Group which concluded with the SSR Assessment Report 2017. This report identified priority areas that required attention to modernize the security institutions. This modernization includes providing adequate logistics, as well as the necessary knowledge and training to enable them to effectively fulfill their constitutional mandates.

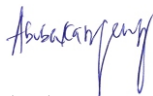
Since the inception of the SSR, the Government of The Gambia has demonstrated the needed political will, corresponding leadership and most importantly the ownership of the process to ensure that the security institutions are in a position to deliver effective and efficient security and safety service delivery.

As acknowledged in the subsequent Security Sector Reform Strategy 2020-2024, restoration of public trust in the security institutions remains paramount within the SSR framework. In this regard, ensuring effective communication between the security institutions and the populace is paramount and emerges as a cornerstone. This rationale informs the development of a Communication Strategy that seeks to build synergy and the passage to consolidate coordination,

collaboration and partnership with all relevant stakeholders in the SSR process.

Considering the important role stakeholders play in the SSR process, this Communication Strategy will facilitate public outreach and sensitization to ensure ownership and buy-in into the ongoing reforms. Accordingly, the Strategy has therefore been developed to ensure effective information sharing with all relevant stakeholders, with a view for the successful attainment of the SSR goals and updating the public on the wider activities of the Office of National Security (ONS). Suffice to indicate, the Strategy will contribute to meaningful engagement with citizens, residents and relevant stakeholders who are valuable partners in development.

The Government of The Gambia and stakeholders share a unified vision: to establish an effective, efficient, well-equipped and compact security sector. The main objective is a security sector that is professional, rooted in a human-centered security approach, and which integrate principles of gender equality across all levels. Equally, it is envisaged to attain a security sector that is apolitical, subject to civilian oversight, and which uphold democratic values, including the rule of law and human rights and responsive to the well-being and safety and security needs of all citizens and residents, most especially the vulnerable. Effective communication plays a pivotal role in achieving this common objective, and this Communication Strategy, as one of the accomplished tasks outlined in the Security Sector Reform Strategy 2020-2024, is a significant step forward.



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National Security Adviser

Office of National Security

Date: 09 September 2024

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The ONS under the auspices of the National Security Adviser would like to extend its sincere thanks to the President and Commander-In-Chief of The Gambia Armed Forces, His Excellency Adama Barrow for the political will, commitment, and continuous support in the implementation of the SSR in The Gambia.

Special recognition and gratitude is extended to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) for their continuous support to the SSR process and for supporting the ONS with the deployment of a Communications Strategist to enhance effective engagement, communication, coordination, collaboration, and partnership with key stakeholders in the implementation of the SSR process.

Gratitude is also extended to all international SSR partners which including Egypt, Federal Republic of Germany, Federal Republic of Nigeria, France, Kingdom of Morocco, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, People's Republic of China, Qatar, Senegal, Spain, Turkiye, United Kingdom, United States of America, African Union (AU), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), European Union (including through their partners DCAF and GIZ) and the World Bank, for the immense support they continue to provide in our SSR journey.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The introduction to this Communication Strategy briefly summarizes the recent history of SSR process, beginning with the Security Sector Assessment Report in 2017 which laid the foundation for the current efforts. It sets out the policy context, in particular the Five Strategic Priorities, within which this

Communication Strategy sits as one of the completed activities of the Security Sector Reform Strategy 2020–2024.

A Situational Analysis notes the challenges confronting the reform process and the importance of a communication strategy to build trust with the public and other stakeholders. It also notes some accomplishments including, most importantly, improved treatment of the population by the security services.

The Specific Objectives section set out some clear priorities for the Strategy including improved visibility, effective communication, stronger partnership and inclusivity to ensure ownership and buy-in by the public so as to effect social and behavioral change in knowledge, attitudes, and social norms.

In order to achieve these objectives, communication with stakeholders should be reciprocal: listening and responding as well as informing. A set of Communication Principles: transparency, consistency, timeliness and excellence seek to ensure that communication is done in a timely and respectful manner and to the requisite standard. The Target Audience section spells out the audience for this Strategy.

The Key Activities identify some specific activities that the ONS is committed to. Working more closely with the traditional media through a designated media focal point and regular press conferences, through social media, building and updating an ONS website, and reaching out to the rural populations.

Finally, the Strategy identifies an effective approach in handling and managing crisis, including management of the media and post crises evaluation. It concludes with a commitment to a costed work plan with timelines.

INTRODUCTION

Following the political impasse and the transition of power in 2016-2017, the Government of The Gambia embarked on SSR process to rebuild its security institutions' ability to strengthen the national security of the country and to contribute toward global peace and security. As a starting point, the government commissioned and tasked a Technical Working Group to conduct a comprehensive assessment of the security sector, looking into its capabilities, weaknesses and challenges.

The outcome of that exercise was the publication of the SSR Assessment Report 2017. The report was premised on the protection of the citizen - human-centered security - and their necessary participation in security matters as a guarantee of their freedom, and the enthronement of values that should underpin the rule of law in The Gambia. This culminated in the creation of a new national security architecture, with the establishment of ONS as the coordinating center for all of the security institutions in the country as well as the wider SSR efforts.

Since the commencement of the SSR in The Gambia, some significant reforms have been undertaken, including capacity building and institutional development of the security services and the development and implementation of policy documents such as the National Security Policy, the National Security Strategy, the National Defence Policy and Internal Security Policy. The Report also recommended amongst other things, the development of a Security Sector Reform Strategy (SSRS) which was completed in 2020. The SSRS describes The Gambia's path to implementing the recommendations of the SSR Assessment Report by setting out five strategic SSR priority areas of reform, namely:

Strategic Priority Area 1: Addressing Post Authoritarian Legacies.

Strategic Priority Area 2: Developing Overarching Security Governance, Legal and Policy Frameworks.

Strategic Priority Area 3: Reform activities to enable Civil Management and Oversight.

Strategic Priority Area 4: Reform Imperatives to Address Cross Cutting Perennial Challenges.

Strategic Priority Area 5: Specific reform activities relating to Respective Security Institutions.

The overall objective of the SSR process is to refocus the security sector changing it from a state-centered to a human-centered security sector under civilian oversight and control. Such a change, if meaningfully implemented with lasting effect, would ensure that the security sector observes respect for human rights and the rule of law in line with internationally accepted standards. By doing this, public trust and confidence in the security sector will be restored.

The SSR Strategy sets out the steps necessary to enable the fulfillment of legitimate security functions, enhanced by increased democratic oversight of the security sector. It also sets out some of the expected outcomes to be delivered at the end of the exercise and effective communication is an important enabler of these outcomes. The SSR Strategy recognizes the importance of effective communication to achieve this aim hence under Outcome 1.1.4; “Restored public trust and confidence in the security sector,” it sets out requisite activities including to “Develop and implement a comprehensive communication strategy for the Security Sector” and to “Keep the public aware on the progress of SSR.”

In short, effective communication is both an enabler of other outcomes and a desired Outcome in itself. The communication capacity and delivery needs to address both the SSR agenda and wider ONS activities, and the Communication Strategy should be seen in this wider light.

The Strategy identifies its target audiences which includes amongst others, the public, government, donors, development partners and oversight bodies such as the National Assembly, CSOs and the media. It also states the activities that need to be implemented to achieve the desired outcomes.

SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS

Significant SSR outcomes have been achieved in recent years beyond the creation and implementation of the policy and strategic documents already identified. These include:

- A re-orientated security service that is now accountable to existing oversight mechanisms for safeguarding and upholding citizens' rights.
- The abolition of arbitrary arrest and detention, torture, and other human rights abuses by the National Intelligence Agency (NIA), now re-branded as the State Intelligence Service (SIS).
- The adherence to a maximum of 72- hour detention of suspects by Law Enforcement as stated in the constitution, and
- An Armed Force more focused on its core mandate of safeguarding the territorial integrity of the state.

Notwithstanding the concrete achievements registered so far, there remain challenges in the SSR process, specifically in the enactment and implementation of the relevant legislation relating to individual security institutions. Further, the perception among citizens regarding the slow pace in the implementation of the SSR process is a concern, despite the successes so far registered and this perceived notion needs to be taken into consideration and addressed.

In order to address these concerns, the development of a Communication Strategy is important to ensure that the citizens and residents of the country have accurate information regarding the SSR process and wider ONS activities. This will ultimately bring about greater understanding from the citizens and ensure their buy-in and ownership of the SSR process.

The objective of this Communication Strategy, therefore, is to identify series of structured and coordinated activities to effectively inform and engage diverse stakeholders in the ongoing SSR process, through raising public awareness of the SSR process, building confidence and support for the reform among key stakeholders, and ensuring clear and open lines of communication throughout the reform process. This Strategy seeks to promote transparency, trust, and buy-in of all stakeholders, with its effectiveness evidenced through periodic evaluations and adjustments.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

The following are the specific objectives of the Communication Strategy:

- **Effective Communication:** To improve the visibility of the ONS and establish it as the recognized lead in the SSR process and to communicate effectively with identified audiences through various mediums to raise awareness on key SSR issues.
- **Collaboration and inclusivity:** To ensure ownership and buy-in by the public so as to effect social and behavioral change in knowledge, attitudes, and social norms.
- **Coordination:** To improve synergy and coherence, leading to effective interoperability between security institutions, and improved co-operation with wider stakeholders
- **Stronger partnerships:** To strengthen cooperation and funding support for the SSR process locally and internationally.

KEY COMMUNICATION PRINCIPLES

Given the importance and relevance of SSR to the reform agenda of the government, it is essential that the following communication principles are deployed and adhered to:

- **Transparency:** It is critical to be up front and sincere in discussions and proactive and responsive in sharing information.
- **Consistency:** Ensuring that there is uniformity of information across all mediums of communication.
- **Timeliness:** Timely dissemination of information as and when it happens.
- **Reputation:** Fact-check sources to ensure credibility of information.
- **Respect:** Understand and empathize with stakeholders' opinions and concerns.

TARGET AUDIENCE

Communication has a better chance of success: ensuring its message is heard, understood and potentially effects change in attitudes or behavior, if it begins from the perspective of the audience rather than the communicator. Audiences can influence strategy to meet the expected outcomes and their support is critical in the attainment of development objectives.

Having a clear understanding of the target audience is therefore critical in creating messages that are relevant to different groups and specific to their needs as different audiences respond in different ways to different mediums. The Strategy seeks to target the following audience/ stakeholders:

Security Institutions need to be engaged and sensitized on the goals and advantages of SSR recognizing that different institutions and ranks may have different information needs and may be affected or perceived to be affected differently by the SSR process.

Central Government structures such as Ministries, Departments and Agencies need to be kept informed on reform initiatives that may affect their structures or processes and be knowledgeable and supportive of the reform process.

Formal accountability structures such as the National Assembly Standing Committee on Defence and Security, the Ombudsman and National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) need to be able to give their institutional perspectives on SSR proposals and be well-informed so as to be able to conduct their oversight responsibilities.

Informal accountability bodies such as CSOs and religious bodies are often trusted intermediaries and can have better access to local populations than formal government institutions. They may also provide a useful service in identifying and informing of issues or problems. CSOs, including by working through TANGO as the umbrella organization of NGOs, will be involved in establishing collaboration, to promote oversight and public participation.

Local Government functionaries such as Mayors, Councilors, Chiefs, Alkalos, and Village Development Committees (VDC) are often the first and most important medium through which local populations receive and interpret information, and where they first bring problems. Local government officials need to be informed of the duties of security institutions present locally, be confident in raising issues, and be informed of the reform process.

The **general public** needs to receive clear and appropriate information to ensure that no sections of the population are omitted. Special attention must be made for marginalized groups or disabled individuals.

The **National Council for Civic Education** and schools education programs remain important partners in sensitizing the adult and youth population about the duties of security institutions and rights of citizens and residents.

The **media** retains a unique role as a communication and interpretation channel, and an important partner in countering disinformation. The ONS will work closely with the media community in providing up-to-date information for onward publication. and the public will be sensitized and involved in the change process.

The **international community** has distinct information requirements consequent on their role as partners and donors. ONS will keep close contact and cooperation with relevant international organizations.

A variety of mediums, including media campaigns, peer educators and mentors, digital tools, community dialogues, and others will be used as part of this social and behavioral change on the communication pattern. It is critical in assessing the level of understanding and the knowledge gaps to address, for a successful reform.

KEY ACTIVITIES

Pursuant to the Specific Objectives of the Communication Strategy, choosing the appropriate channels of communication will be crucial for reaching out, establishing credibility and regularly communicating with the target audience. Therefore, the following channels and activities will be adopted:

Website: The existing ONS website will be enhanced and managed to provide regular updates on SSR and other emerging security concerns.

Publications: A quarterly newsletter will be published, equally written materials will be developed to support information dissemination, and education outreach.

Press briefings: Regular press briefings will be conducted to issue announcements, to brief the media, and explain actions taken or responses that will be made, and providing time for questions and answers.

Media Relation Officer: The designated ONS Communication Officer to serve as a point of contact for the media, to oversee engagement, and provide routine briefings and raise and correct any factual errors.

Social media: Appropriate social media platforms will be used to interact with the audience and to post real-time information, acting promptly to correct false information and rumors in a professional and open manner.

Radio, television, newspapers: The Office will develop material and opportunities to disseminate SSR policy and other ONS activities, with programs on radio, television, and print media.

Media outreach: ONS will develop a relationship with the media through the creation of a platform for effective communication, coordination, collaboration and partnership to enhance greater understanding of the SSR process and the wider ONS activities for public outreach.

Updates to partners: Regular updates to key national and international stakeholders and ensure consistency in the briefings.

Security institutions: Support the development of outreach programs and enhanced information dissemination capability within security institutions through the establishment of an inter-service communication committee.

Civic education: Partner with the National Council for Civic Education (NCCE) to incorporate SSR and security issues in civic education programs and activities in both school and community levels.

Regional tours: The Office will hold regular town hall meetings and regional tours to interact with the public on security issues directly affecting them, using regional community radio stations to reach remote areas.

Public Monitoring: The ONS media monitoring capability will be expanded to include a focus on public perceptions of the SSR and wider ONS activities through regular monitoring of media coverage and social media activity.

COMMUNICATION DURING CRISIS

During security incidents such as social unrest, demonstrations, public disorder and natural disasters, crisis response and communications will be led out of the ONS Crisis Response Unit which will develop crisis management plans as required.

Clear and effective communication is a critical element of crisis management. Any effective crisis management plan will require a robust communication strategy component to provide tactics and guidelines for efficient communication in such circumstances, while also ensuring accountability, transparency and influencing perception, thus earning the trust and confidence of the public. Early preparation for a crisis management communication response would include:

Establishment of a Crisis Management Communication Team

Consistency of information and approach is critical to effective communication in crises. It is essential to establish a crisis management team that comprises communication leads and media focal points from relevant government ministries, security services, communication specialists and other stakeholders.

Development of Crisis Communication Strategies

Rapid response is important in crisis management, immediate responses should include:

- Alerting stakeholders within the first 2 hours with clear messages.
- Provide a crisis hotline and media liaison for information updates, as well as identifying media contact points.

- Organize press conferences as required to clarify any confusion or misrepresentation.

It is strongly recommended that multiple channels of communication are used to inform the audience and also to manage the situation.

Training and Simulation

ONS will ensure that members of the crisis communication team have received training on how to handle different crisis scenarios. The team will regularly test the effectiveness of the strategy by conducting crisis communication exercises and simulations.

Post-crisis Evaluation

A detailed evaluation of the crisis communication response should be done to see how well the communication techniques worked and to identify areas where communication and crisis management should be improved.

The crisis communication strategy for The Gambia's SSR and the wider ONS activities seeks to offer a methodical approach in handling communication during emergencies. It will be evaluated and updated on a regular basis to stay current and useful.

IMPLEMENTATION

Work Plan

A separate Communication Strategy Work Plan will be developed to structure implementation and track progress of the Communication Strategy. It will include a costed budget with specific details regarding resource requirements and allocation.

Evaluation Plan

To measure progress, a cost-effective monitoring and evaluation approach with specific metrics, methods for data collection, and indicators of success will be established. This will accurately assess the effectiveness of communication efforts and track public perceptions of the SSR process and of the security institutions. The process will include regular monitoring of traditional media coverage and social media activities. Opinions of stakeholders will be gathered through surveys, public meetings, and other innovative methods. The Evaluation Plan will be linked to donor-led monitoring and evaluation activities in donor-funded programs to ensure overall synergy and coherence.

Timeline

The Communication Strategy shall be reviewed every three years. The accompanying Work Plan will be reviewed on an ongoing basis and an annual report provided to the National Security Adviser.

