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Policy Brief

Climate Disinformation and Information Integrity in The Gambia

Strengthening Public Trust for Climate Action

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Gambia is among the countries most exposed to climate change on earth, yet it contributes almost nothing to the emissions that cause it. Its capital, Banjul, sits barely above sea level; its economy rests on rain-fed agriculture, fisheries and coastal tourism; and its development plans hinge on climate adaptation financed largely by international partners.

Delivering on that agenda depends on something fragile: **public trust in climate information**. Adaptation only works if farmers, fishers and coastal communities believe the guidance they are given; the renewable-energy transition only advances if citizens support it; and international finance only flows if donors trust the integrity of the national information environment. That trust is now under pressure from **climate mis- and disinformation** false or misleading content that distorts the science, discredits solutions, and is increasingly recognised as a driver of the crisis in its own right.

The Gambia confronts this challenge from a position of unusual opportunity. Since the end of more than two decades of authoritarian rule in 2017, its media has flourished, a home-grown info-checking community has matured, and in April 2026 the country launched the first National Misinformation and Disinformation Response Centre in the ECOWAS region. Globally, COP30 in Belém made information integrity a formal part of climate governance for the first time. The pieces for an effective national response exist; what is missing is a deliberate strategy that connects the climate and the information agendas, without sacrificing the hard-won freedom of expression that defines the new Gambia.

KEY MESSAGES

- **Climate action runs on trust.** In The Gambia, the bottleneck for adaptation, the energy transition and climate finance is increasingly behavioural and informational not only technical or financial.
- **The threat has shifted from denial to delay.** Outright “climate is a hoax” claims matter less than narratives that discredit clean energy, dismiss adaptation as a foreign agenda, or drown reliable guidance in noise.
- **The Gambia’s information environment is open but fragile.** Media pluralism and high mobile use are strengths; low info-checking capacity on technical topics, an urban–rural divide and reliance on closed platforms such as WhatsApp are vulnerabilities.
- **The institutions to respond already exist.** A national response centre, independent Factcheckers, a free press and an Access to Information law can be aligned around climate cheaply and quickly.
- **Do no harm to free expression.** Heavy-handed “fake-news” laws would repeat past abuses, chill legitimate debate and ultimately erode the very trust they claim to protect. Resilience, not censorship, is the goal.

Why this matters for The Gambia

A country on the front line of climate change

The Gambia ranks among the world's most climate-vulnerable states and among the top ten countries most exposed to coastal erosion and sea-level rise.¹ Sea level is projected to rise by roughly 19-43 cm by 2050, threatening Banjul, low-lying settlements and the coastal tourism infrastructure that is the country's main foreign-exchange earner.²

Because livelihoods depend overwhelmingly on rain-fed agriculture and fisheries, the country is acutely sensitive to rising temperatures, more erratic rainfall, salinisation and soil degradation pressures the IMF has assessed as imposing large and recurring economic and welfare losses through droughts and floods.³ These are not distant risks; they shape food security, water access and public health today.

Ambitious commitments that depend on public buy-in

Despite contributing a negligible share of global emissions, The Gambia has set out a comparatively ambitious climate path: a 2050 Climate Vision and Long-Term Climate-Neutral Development Strategy aiming for net-zero emissions by 2050, an enhanced NDC covering all greenhouse-gas sectors, and a pipeline of solar projects to cut dependence on imported fossil fuels.⁴ As a least-developed country, much of this ambition is *conditional* on international support which makes the credibility of the national information environment a financial as well as a democratic concern.

The trust dependency. Every pillar of The Gambia's climate strategy has an information precondition: **adaptation** requires communities to trust and act on early warnings and climate-smart practices; the **energy transition** requires public support for solar and grid investment; and **climate finance** requires partners to trust that funds rest on sound, transparent data. Disinformation attacks all three.

The problem: climate disinformation and the information environment

What climate disinformation looks like today

"Misinformation" is false content shared without intent to deceive; "disinformation" is deliberately deceptive. In the

¹Republic of The Gambia, Long-Term Climate Change Strategy (LTS), submitted to the UNFCCC, 2022, unfccc.int.

²Republic of The Gambia, Second Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC2), UNFCCC NDC Registry, 2021.

³International Monetary Fund, The Gambia: Technical Assistance Report – Climate Policy Diagnostic, IMF Country Report 2025/019, February 2025.

⁴IMF, Climate Change Vulnerabilities and Strategies: The Gambia, Selected Issues Paper 2024/005, February 2024; UNDP Climate Promise, "The Gambia," climatepromise.undp.org.

climate sphere both cluster into a handful of recurring narratives.⁵ Crucially, the centre of gravity has moved away from outright denial toward subtler "discourses of delay" and a "new denial" that no longer disputes that the climate is changing but instead attacks the solutions questioning whether renewable energy works, or whether action is worth the cost.⁶

Narrative type	How it typically appears
Denial	Disputing that the climate is changing or that humans are the cause; recasting climate science as a foreign or elite "hoax."
Delay	Accepting the problem but arguing now is the wrong time, the cost is too high, or someone else should act first.
Solution attacks ("new denial")	Claiming renewables are unreliable or ruinous, or that adaptation programmes are wasteful or externally imposed.
Greenwashing	Overstating the environmental benefits of a product, project or institution to blunt pressure for real change.
Conspiracy	Framing climate policy as a hidden plot e.g. to control populations or block development to delegitimise science and activists.

Why the Global South and West Africa is exposed

Across Africa, expanding digital access, uneven media literacy and fragile institutional trust create fertile ground for false narratives, and resources to monitor and rebut them are scarce.⁷ A documented regional pattern frames climate science as a Western invention designed to deny African countries the right to use their own fossil-fuel resources a narrative that surged online around recent COPs and that directly undercuts support for a clean-energy transition.⁸ Researchers warn that such campaigns are often organised and financed rather than spontaneous, and that they reduce community preparedness and erode donor engagement.

The Gambian information ecosystem: strengths and weak points

Strengths. Since the 2017 transition, the number of media outlets has grown by more than half, according to the Gambia Press Union, widening space for public debate.⁹ Very high mobile penetration and a young, engaged social-media public give climate messaging real reach. A maturing Fact-checking community including Info Checked (formerly Fact Check Center-The Gambia, FactCheck Gambia (hosted by the GPU

⁵UNDP Climate Promise, "What are climate misinformation and disinformation and how can we tackle them?" climatepromise.undp.org.

⁶Center for Countering Digital Hate, The New Denial (2024); Hayes, Gabbattis & Butler, "From climate scepticism to discourses of delay," Public Understanding of Science, 2025.

⁷Africa-Press / Ministry of Information, remarks at the launch of the National Misinformation and Disinformation Response Centre, 25 April 2026; UNESCO, Global Initiative for Information Integrity on Climate Change.

⁸DevelopmentAid, "How climate disinformation undermines sustainable development in Africa," 2025, citing the African Digital Democracy Observatory.

⁹United Nations Peacebuilding, "Fighting Falsehoods in The Gambia: A New Era of Verified Journalism," un.org/peacebuilding.

and MAJaC) and FactSpace Gambia already debunks viral falsehoods and has handled politically sensitive topics.¹⁰

Weak points. Fact-checking has focused on elections and politics; few journalists are equipped to verify climate or scientific claims. Internet penetration is estimated at roughly a third of the population, with a sharp urban-rural gap; radio remains the principal mass medium, especially in rural areas.¹¹ Much information flows through WhatsApp and Facebook groups, where false content spreads quickly and is hard to monitor or correct.¹² And in a society where rumours have previously been used to inflame ethnic and political division, unmanaged falsehoods carry real risks to social cohesion.

How this plays out for climate action

Left unaddressed, climate disinformation in The Gambia threatens to:

- **undermine adaptation** by discrediting early-warning messages, climate-smart agriculture and coastal-protection measures among the communities that need them most;
- **stall the energy transition** by amplifying doubts about the reliability or fairness of solar and grid investments;
- **erode climate finance** by weakening partner and public confidence in the integrity of national data and reporting; and
- **deepen division** by attaching climate debates to existing political or ethnic fault lines.

Policy landscape and windows of opportunity

A global turning point: COP30 and information integrity

At COP30 in Belém (November 2025), information integrity entered formal UN climate governance for the first time. The **Declaration on Information Integrity on Climate Change**, launched on 12 November 2025, commits signatories to promote accurate climate information and protect scientists, journalists and environmental defenders in line with international human-rights and free-expression standards.¹³ The summit's Mutirão decision also recognised information integrity as essential to climate action. By mid-2026 the Declaration had been signed by 26 countries and the European Union **The Gambia is not yet among them.**¹⁴

A **Global Fund for Information Integrity on Climate Change**, launched in 2025 with initial funding from Brazil, is already financing projects with the majority of eligible proposals

¹⁰InfoCheck Gambia, factcheckgambia.org; FactSpace Gambia / FactSpace West Africa, factspace.org.

¹¹Freedom House, *Freedom on the Net — The Gambia (2022–2024 editions)*, freedomhouse.org.

¹²Centre for Democracy and Development, "The Gambia's Fake News Ecosystem: An Overview," cddfactcheck.org.

¹³UNFCCC, COP30 live updates archive, unfccc.int; UN News, "Belém COP30 delivers climate finance boost...", 24 November 2025.

¹⁴UNESCO, "Strengthening information integrity on climate change: from COP30 to COP31 and beyond," unesco.org (listing 26 signatory states and the EU).

coming from the Global South, signalling an open door for Gambian initiatives.¹⁵

A national first: the response centre

In April 2026, The Gambia launched the **National Misinformation and Disinformation Response Centre (NMDRC)** under the Ministry of Information, Media and Broadcasting Services, with development financing from ECOWAS and built by a Gambian team. Presided over at launch by the Vice President and attended by the ECOWAS Commission President, it is described as the country's first structured institutional response to information disorder and the first centre of its kind in the ECOWAS space.¹⁶ Its mandate is general; climate is not yet an explicit focus a gap this brief proposes to close.

Existing assets to build on

- **Independent Factcheckers** (Info-Checked Gambia, FactSpace Gambia) and the Gambia Press Union' FactCheck Gambia, supported by UNESCO and the UN Peacebuilding Fund, which have trained scores of journalists in verification.
- **The Access to Information Act (2021)**, which underpins proactive disclosure of reliable public data a powerful, rights-respecting antidote to rumour.
- **National climate institutions** (the National Environment Agency, Department of Water Resources and meteorological services) that can serve as trusted, authoritative voices.

A lesson from The Gambia's own history. Under the previous government, "false-news" and internet-criticism offences carried penalties of up to 15 years and were used to jail journalists; the Supreme Court struck down key provisions in 2018, and the ECOWAS Court found that such offences had a chilling effect on free expression. The Cybercrime Bill (2023) drew warnings from the Gambia Press Union and ARTICLE 19 that vague "false-news" and "incitement" clauses could again criminalise legitimate speech. Any response to climate disinformation must therefore be built on resilience and counter-speech not new criminal offences for "false" climate claims, which would be both rights-violating and counter-productive.

Guiding principles

- **Trust first.** Prioritise building trusted, accessible climate information over policing falsehoods; supply usually beats suppression.
- **Rights-based.** Every measure must comply with constitutional and international free-expression guarantees. No criminalisation of "false" climate speech.

¹⁵ESG Times / Engineer Live, COP30 coverage of the Global Initiative and Global Fund for Information Integrity on Climate Change, November–December 2025.

¹⁶Africa-Press, "Safeguarding Truth in an Age of Uncertainty," 28 April 2026, reporting the NMDRC launch of 25 April 2026.

- **Prebunk, don't just debunk.** Anticipate predictable false narratives (e.g. anti-solar or “foreign-agenda” framing) and inoculate audiences in advance.
- **Meet people where they are.** Use radio, local languages, religious and community leaders, and trusted influencers not only English-language social media.
- **Local and proportionate.** Lead with Gambian institutions and voices; calibrate effort to the scale of the local problem rather than importing alarm.

Recommendations

The following actions are grouped by actor. They are designed to be low-cost, to reuse existing institutions, and to reinforce not constrain The Gambia’s open information space.

For Government

- **Sign the COP30 Declaration on Information Integrity on Climate Change** and join the Global Initiative a low-cost step that signals leadership, unlocks partnership and finance, and aligns the climate and information agendas.
- **Give the NMDRC an explicit climate remit** add climate and environmental claims to the centre’s monitoring scope, with a standing link to the National Environment Agency and meteorological services for rapid, authoritative responses.
- **Adopt a “resilience-not-criminalisation” position** publicly rule out criminal “false-news” offences for climate content, and ensure any cybercrime legislation meets international free-expression tests (legality, necessity, proportionality).
- **Use the Access to Information Act proactively** publish climate data, project information and adaptation plans in open, plain-language formats so accurate information is the default and easiest to find.
- **Embed an information-integrity objective in the next NDC and National Adaptation Plan**, treating public communication and trust as measurable components of delivery.

For climate institutions (NEA, Water Resources, Meteorology)

- **Become the trusted source** issue regular, jargon-free climate updates and early warnings through radio and community networks in local languages.
- **Run prebunking campaigns** ahead of predictable flashpoints (flood season, new solar projects, COP cycles), explaining the manipulation tactics behind likely false claims.
- **Pair every adaptation or energy project with a communication plan** co-designed with affected communities to pre-empt “foreign-agenda” or anti-renewables narratives.

For media and fact-checkers

- **Build a climate-verification capability** train journalists and Fact-checkers (via Info Checked, GPU) in climate science basics and create a dedicated climate vertical within existing fact-checking platforms.
- **Establish a rapid-response network** linking newsrooms, fact-checkers, the NMDRC and scientists, so viral climate falsehoods can be corrected within hours, not weeks.
- **Apply solutions and explanatory journalism** covering what works in adaptation and clean energy to crowd out fear- and delay-based narratives.

For civil society, communities and influencers

- **Mainstream media and climate literacy** through schools, community radio, women’s and youth groups, and faith institutions, focusing on simple verification habits.
- **Equip trusted messengers** support religious leaders, teachers, agricultural extension workers and social-media influencers with accurate, shareable climate content.
- **Engage WhatsApp and Facebook communities directly** since that is where much false content circulates and where peer correction is most effective.

For development and regional partners (ECOWAS, UNESCO, UN, donors)

- **Fund a Gambian climate-information-integrity initiative** through the Global Fund for Information Integrity on Climate Change and existing peacebuilding/UNESCO channels.
- **Support the NMDRC’s climate function** with technical assistance, monitoring tools and training, and position The Gambia as an ECOWAS model worth replicating.
- **Invest in connectivity and rural radio** so accurate information reaches the communities most exposed to both climate risk and the digital divide.

A phased roadmap

Horizon	Priority actions	Lead actors
Short term (0-12 months)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sign the COP30 Declaration ▪ Add a climate remit to the NMDRC ▪ Train a first cohort of climate Factcheckers ▪ Launch flood-season prebunking on radio 	Min. of Information; Min. of Environment; Info Checked and others
Medium term (1-2 years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Stand up a rapid-response network ▪ Proactive climate disclosure under the ATI Act ▪ Community media-literacy programmes ▪ Secure Global Fund financing 	NEA; Fact checkers; CSOs; partners
Long term (2-5 years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Information integrity embedded in NDC/NAP 	Government; ECOWAS;

Horizon	Priority actions	Lead actors
	delivery <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sustained rural connectivity and radio reach ▪ The Gambia as an ECOWAS reference model 	donors

Measuring success

Progress should be tracked with a small set of practical indicators, reported annually:

- **Reach:** share of the population (urban and rural) receiving regular climate information through trusted channels.
- **Responsiveness:** median time from a viral climate falsehood to a published, accessible correction.
- **Capacity:** number of trained climate Factcheckers and active rapid-response partners.
- **Trust:** periodic survey measures of public trust in climate information and institutions.
- **Rights safeguard:** zero prosecutions for “false” climate speech, confirming the resilience-not-criminalisation commitment is honoured.

Conclusion

The Gambia cannot stop the seas from rising on its own, but it can decide whether its people face that threat armed with reliable information or disoriented by falsehood. The country has already done the hard institutional work – an open media, an info-checking community, an access-to-information law and a pioneering response centre. The task now is to point those assets at climate, fund them, and protect the freedoms that make them credible. Information integrity is not a side-issue to climate action in The Gambia; it is part of the foundation on which adaptation, the energy transition and climate finance all stand.

ABOUT THIS BRIEF

This document synthesises publicly available sources on The Gambia’s climate vulnerability and information environment as of June 2026. It treats **information integrity as climate infrastructure**: arguing that trusted, locally-grounded climate communication and “prebunking” deserve the same status as adaptation and clean-energy investment, and that the institutions built since 2017 — an open press, an info-checking community, an access-to-information law and the new National Misinformation and Disinformation Response Centre — can be aligned around climate quickly and at low cost.

The brief is prepared for the Ministry of Environment, Climate Change and Natural Resources; the Ministry of Information, Media and Broadcasting Services; and partners across The Gambia’s climate and information-integrity ecosystem. It is intended to inform policy discussion and is not legal advice; specific legislative measures should be reviewed by qualified Gambian counsel and validated with affected communities.

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This brief reflects analysis of open sources and does not represent an official position of any government or institution named herein. Figures on sea-level rise, connectivity and media growth are drawn from the cited UNFCCC, IMF, Freedom House and Gambia Press Union materials and should be read alongside those originals.