



NRIF NATIONAL STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

LISTENING . LEARNING. ENGAGING



REPORT 2026



NATIONAL RESEARCH & INNOVATION FUND

LISTENING . LEARNING . ENGAGING

REPORT 2026

*Nrif National
stakeholder Engagement*

FOREWORD BY THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The National Research and Innovation Fund (NRIF), established by an Act of the National Assembly in 2025, represents a significant institutional step in The Gambia's pursuit of a coherent, responsive, and impactful research and innovation system. Its mandate is both strategic and catalytic: to mobilise and steward resources, to strengthen national research capacity, and to ensure that knowledge and innovation meaningfully contribute to economic transformation, public service delivery, and societal wellbeing. Delivering on this mandate requires more than technical design; it requires grounded understanding, broad ownership, and sustained engagement with the ecosystem it seeks to serve.

This report emerges from such engagement; between 25 March and 24 April 2026, NRIF undertook an extensive programme of structured consultations, engaging one hundred and seventy-seven stakeholders from one hundred and eight institutions across the country and beyond. Participants represented the full breadth of the national ecosystem, including higher education institutions, TVET providers, student bodies, research centres, innovation hubs, government ministries and agencies, local government authorities, civil society organisations, private sector actors, development partners, the diplomatic community, and members of the Gambian diaspora. This process reflects NRIF's commitment to inclusivity, evidence-informed planning, and participatory governance as foundational principles of its operations.

The findings presented in this report provide a clear and sobering picture of the current state of research and innovation in The Gambia. Systemic constraints persist across financing, infrastructure, human capital, coordination, and the utilisation of evidence in decision-making processes. At the same time, the consultations revealed significant untapped potential: a growing base of institutions and individuals ready to engage, a strong appetite for collaboration, and a shared expectation that research must translate into practical outcomes that address national priorities.

For NRIF, these insights are not abstract observations; they are operational imperatives. They directly inform the design of the Fund's initial financing windows, its capacity-building offer, and its governance and accountability mechanisms.

The exceptionally high levels of participation, particularly among student unions and TVET institutions, point to constituencies that have historically been under-resourced yet demonstrate readiness for engagement and innovation. Equally, the consistent call for transparency and fairness across all stakeholder groups reinforces NRIF's obligation to operate with clarity, openness, and integrity in all aspects of its work. Most critically, the strong emphasis on translation and impact establishes a clear expectation that NRIF-supported activities must generate tangible benefits for communities, institutions, and the national development agenda.

This report therefore serves multiple purposes. It documents the consultation process and its methodological rigour; it synthesises stakeholder perspectives into a coherent evidence base; and it sets out actionable recommendations that underpin NRIF's programme design. In doing so, it also establishes a benchmark against which the Fund's performance can be assessed over time.

NRIF has, from its inception, committed to a model of operation that is transparent, accountable, and responsive. In each consultation, we undertook to ensure that stakeholder contributions would not only be heard but demonstrably shape the Fund's direction. This report represents the first step in honouring that commitment. The true measure of success, however, will lie in how effectively these insights are translated into funded programmes, strengthened systems, and measurable development outcomes.

I wish to acknowledge the dedication of the NRIF Secretariat and programme team in designing and delivering this consultation process, and to thank the NRIF Board for its strategic guidance and oversight. Above all, I extend my sincere appreciation to all participants whose expertise, perspectives, and engagement form the foundation of this work.

Professor Momodou Sallah

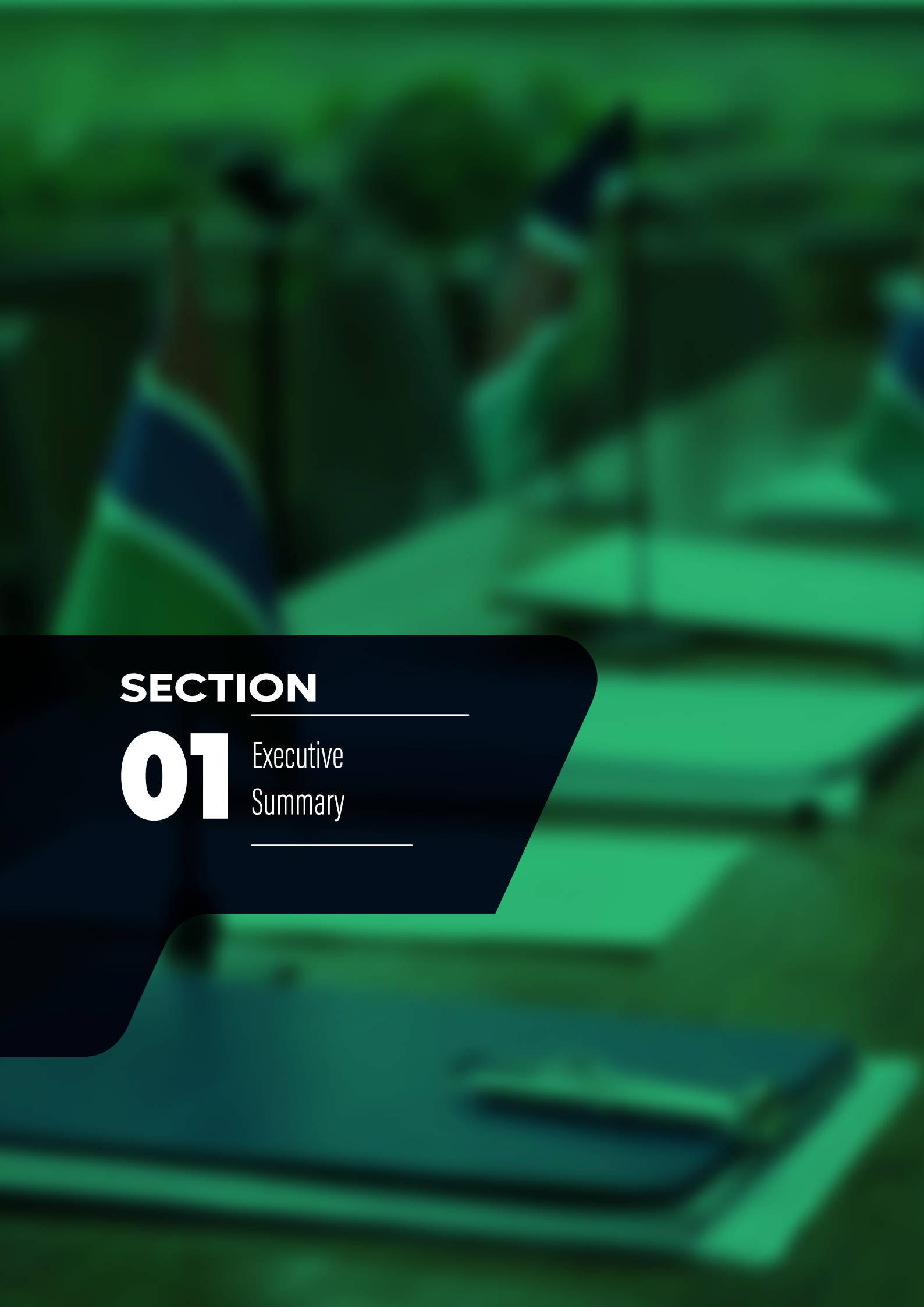
Executive Director

National Research and Innovation Fund

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SECTION

01

Executive Summary

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Between 25 March and 24 April 2026, the National Research and Innovation Fund conducted fourteen structured consultations engaging one hundred and seventy-seven (177) representatives from one hundred and eight (108) institutions across The Gambia. The consultation process was designed as the primary evidence base for NRIF's programme design, ensuring that the Fund's funding windows, governance arrangements, and operational modalities are grounded in what the research and innovation ecosystem actually needs.

This report synthesises findings from all fourteen sessions. It constitutes the unified national evidence base from which NRIF will develop its funding architecture and governance framework. The findings are the direct voice of the ecosystem, presented analytically, structured for programme design, and held accountable to the methodology set out in Section 03.

177

STAKEHOLDER
REPRESENTATIVES

108

INSTITUTIONS
REACHED

14

CONSULTATION
SESSIONS

77%

OVERALL
PARTICIPATION
RATE

Gender	Participants
Male	120
Female	57
Total	177

The following stakeholder categories were consulted:

- Innovation ecosystem actors: nine innovation hubs and laboratories
- Civil society organisations: thirteen representatives from eleven organisations
- Government ministries and the Office of the Vice President: nine representatives
- Government sub-vented agencies: eighteen agencies across regulation, oversight, audit, and social protection
- Universities and research institutions: twenty-three representatives from twelve institutions
- Student unions of universities and TVETs: twenty-eight student leaders (100% participation)
- TVET institutions: seven institutions (100% participation)
- Vice Chancellors and university leadership: ten institutional leaders
- Urban local government authorities: fourteen representatives from Banjul, Kanifing, and West Coast Region
- Provincial local government authorities: eleven representatives from LRR, NBR, and URR
- Private sector: sixteen representatives spanning manufacturing, ICT, financial services, and business associations
- Development partners: seven representatives including UNDP, UNICEF, FAO, WHO, ITC, AfDB, and the commercial banking sector
- Gambian diaspora: thirty-four participants across two dedicated virtual sessions
- Diplomatic corps: six missions including China, UK, Senegal, Cuba, Turkey, and ACHPR

PARTICIPATION BY STAKEHOLDER CATEGORY

Stakeholder Group	Participants	Share
Innovation and Incubator Hubs	11	6%
Civil Society Organisations	13	7%
Government Ministries (National Executive)	9	5%
Government Sub-Vented Agencies	18	10%
Universities and Research Institutions	23	13%
Student Unions of Universities and TVETs	28	16%
TVET Institutions	7	4%
Vice Chancellors and University Leadership	10	6%
Urban Local Government Authorities	14	8%
Provincial Local Government Authorities	11	6%
Private Sector	16	9%
Development Partners	7	4%
Gambian Diaspora (two virtual sessions)	22	12%
Diplomatic Corps	6	3%
TOTAL	177	100%



KEY FINDINGS AT A GLANCE

The following headline findings are drawn directly from the fourteen consultation sessions. Full session-by-session analysis is presented in Section 04; cross-cutting thematic synthesis in Section 05.

INNOVATION ECOSYSTEM · 25 MARCH 2026

- Access to finance was the unanimously identified dominant constraint.
- 67% of participants ranked prototype funding as the top financial priority. This is the critical mid-lifecycle gap where most Gambian innovations stall.
- 89% endorsed market access support as the most urgent non-financial intervention.
- Testing infrastructure identified as a systemic failure point: the absence of certified facilities prevents prototypes from reaching market regardless of their technical merit.
- Hub-based delivery strongly preferred, but explicitly conditional on strong governance safeguards.

CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS · 27 MARCH 2026

- Inadequate funding and duplication of effort arising from weak coordination are the two dominant barriers.
- 29% of votes went to CSO-led

projects as the top funding priority, CSOs want to be direct recipients of funding, partners in design, and implementers.

- Community co-design, contextual engagement, and local ownership were unanimously identified as non-negotiable programme principles.
- Training in research, project design, and M&E ranked as the highest non-financial priority (12 of 13 votes).

GOVERNMENT MINISTRIES · 30 MARCH 2026

- Capacity building for staff and systems received 33% of votes. This was identified as the foundation for evidence-based governance.
- Persistent evidence gaps identified across disaster response, social protection, youth migration, agricultural mechanisation, and environmental enforcement.
- Weak researcher–policymaker linkages and poor inter-ministerial coordination mean available evidence rarely reaches or influences decisions.

GOVERNMENT SUB-VENTED AGENCIES • 31 MARCH 2026

- Data systems and digital tools ranked first with 14 votes, identified as the most urgent constraint across all 18 agencies.
- Three cross-cutting bottlenecks identified with unanimous consistency across agencies spanning entirely different mandates: evidence readiness, analytical capacity, and translation into action.
- Participants articulated a clear sequencing logic: data systems first, then capacity building, then M&E. This should structure NRIF's investment approach for this sector.

UNIVERSITIES AND RESEARCH INSTITUTIONS • 1 APRIL 2026

- Funding access was rated 'weak' by all five discussion groups, the single most consistent finding of the session.
- Institutional capacity grants (14 selections) and research infrastructure (13 selections) emerged as the two highest funding priorities.
- Research translation gap confirmed: research priorities are frequently externally driven; outputs rarely inform national policy or industry.

STUDENT UNIONS • 2 APRIL 2026

- The 100% participation rate, the highest of any session, signals acute unmet need and strong student motivation.
- Research opportunities for students ranked first (71%); small grants for student ideas second (61%).
- Implementation stage identified as the critical failure point: ideas stall at the transition to prototype due to absent mentorship, facilities, and logistical support.
- Proposed milestone-based grant framework: GMD 50,000 (ideation) to GMD 300,000 (scale-up).

TVET INSTITUTIONS • 7 APRIL 2026

- 100% participation rate.
- Capacity building for trainers ranked as the top priority at 40% of indicative allocation. Without skilled instructors, investments in equipment and curriculum will have limited impact.
- Curriculum misalignment is systemic: outdated, reform-resistant, and lacking institutional capacity for evidence-based revision.
- TVET is widely perceived as education for school dropouts, a perception that suppresses enrolment quality and reduces policy attention.

- Funding to be channelled through the NAFTI association, with NAFTI represented on evaluation panels. This was stated as a governance condition, not a preference.

VICE CHANCELLORS · 10 APRIL 2026

- Research infrastructure ranked as top funding priority by Mentimeter consensus across all 10 leaders.
- Thematic funding was preferred, provided it is designed to avoid widening capacity disparities between institutions.
- Transparency identified as the single most important trust factor for NRIF.

URBAN LOCAL GOVERNMENT AUTHORITIES · 26 MARCH 2026

- Decentralised funding ranked first (25%), enabling Area Councils to manage resources directly.
- All stakeholders agreed without exception that NRIF funding must be channelled through Area Councils as provided by the Local Government Act.
- Partnership creation ranked as the highest non-financial priority (50% of votes).

PROVINCIAL LOCAL GOVERNMENT AUTHORITIES · 17 APRIL 2026

- Limited coordination, inadequate resources, and institutional

capacity gaps dominate at provincial level.

- Education and skills, agriculture, waste management, and youth employment identified as requiring immediate intervention.
- Community-led, partnership-based delivery strongly preferred; Governor's Office unanimously identified as the regional coordinating body.

PRIVATE SECTOR · 24 APRIL 2026

- Human capital deficits, including skills gaps, inadequate work readiness, and poor professional attitudes, are the leading constraint, ranked ahead of access to finance.
- Data fragmentation is critical: financial institutions cannot assess creditworthiness; business associations cannot profile members.
- Matching grants and co-financing identified as the preferred instruments; private sector engagement is conditional, not absent.

DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS · 15 APRIL 2026

- NRIF credibility will be built through demonstrated impact, relevance, sustainability, and accountability. Institutional announcements alone will not suffice.

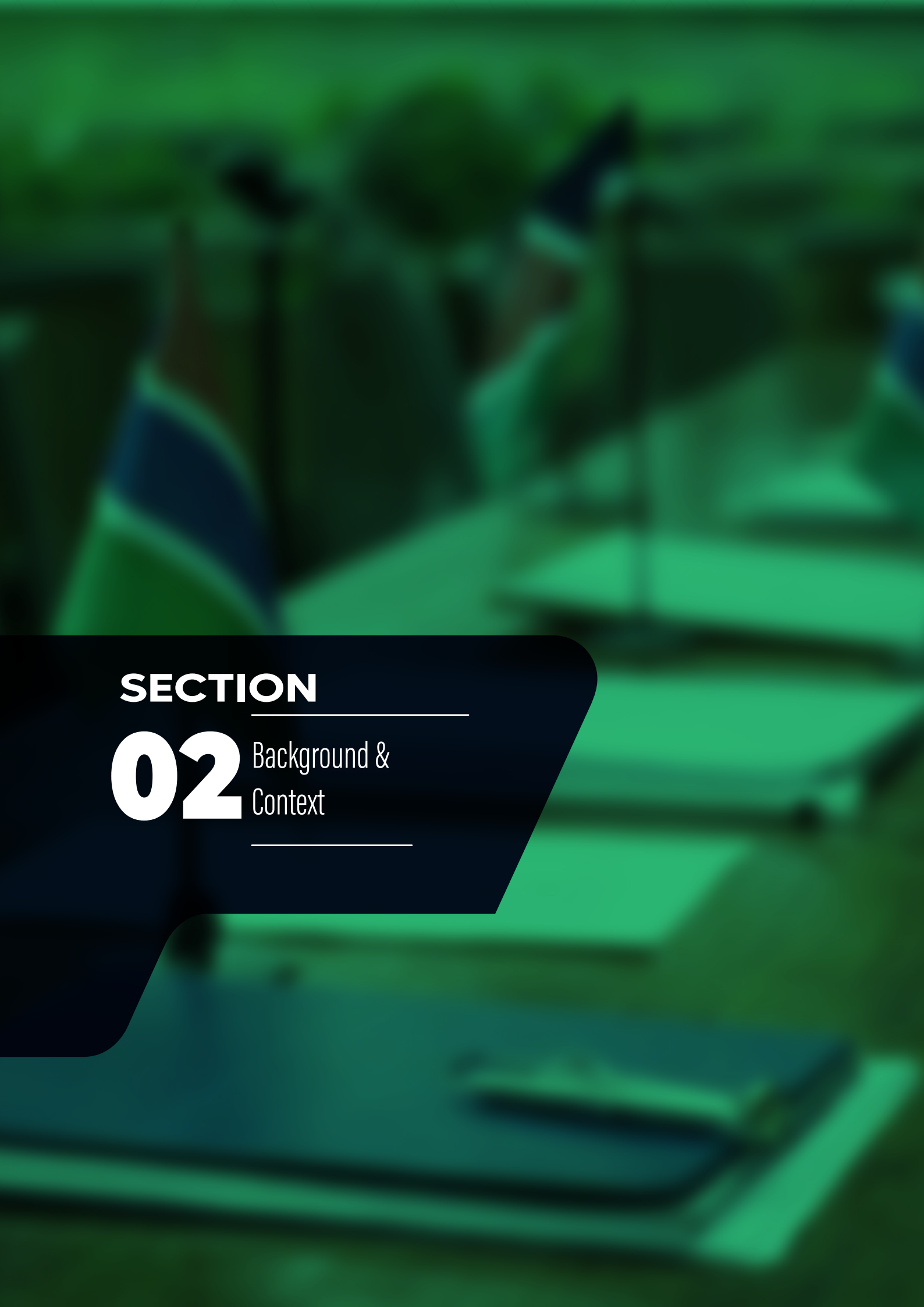
- Results-based financing is the most preferred instrument; 8 of 9 participants indicated moderate risk is acceptable with appropriate safeguards.
- Develop partners recommended the conduct of institutional micro-assessments before funding can be channelled through new national entities.

GAMBIAN DIASPORA • SESSIONS I AND II

- Mentorship programmes and innovation partnerships each received five selections, making them the highest-ranking engagement areas.
- Bureaucratic barriers, absence of clear entry points, and weak coordination are preventing willing diaspora professionals from contributing.
- A key principle was established: whatever the diaspora is doing must have a local partner. Sustainability requires domestic institutional anchoring.

DIPLOMATIC CORPS • 16 APRIL 2026

- Strong emphasis on positioning The Gambia as a collaborative global research partner, not an isolated actor.
- Limited international visibility of Gambia's research efforts identified as a structural barrier to attracting and sustaining partnerships.
- NRIF should be associated internationally with excellence, innovation, results, integrity, and prudence.

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SECTION

02

Background &
Context

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

2.1 MANDATE AND PURPOSE

The National Research and Innovation Fund (NRIF) was established by an Act of the National Assembly in 2025 with a mandate to strengthen a high-quality, inclusive, and responsive research and innovation ecosystem in The Gambia. Its role centres on three interrelated functions: building national capacity by supporting institutions and individuals to develop the skills, systems, and infrastructure required for effective research and innovation; providing targeted funding through competitive mechanisms to stimulate high-quality and relevant research and innovation across sectors; and ensuring strong alignment with national development priorities by promoting linkages between research, policy, and practice. In doing so, NRIF advances evidence-informed decision-making and supports the translation of knowledge into practical economic and social outcomes, positioning the Fund as both a financing mechanism and a catalyst for national development.

Delivering on this mandate requires more than the provision of funding. It demands financing instruments, governance arrangements, and operational approaches that are firmly grounded in the realities of the Gambian context. In recognition of this, NRIF undertook a structured and participatory consultation process prior to finalising its initial programme design. This approach ensured that the Fund's priorities and mechanisms are informed directly by the experiences, constraints, and opportunities identified by stakeholders across the research and innovation ecosystem. Practitioner insight and locally grounded evidence were deliberately prioritised over reliance on imported models or untested assumptions.

The Fund's initial capitalisation, subvented by the Government of The Gambia, amounts to 30 million Dalasis. Of this, 12.5 million Dalasis has been allocated to operational establishment costs, including institutional set-up, systems development, and programme administration. The remaining 17.5 million Dalasis is dedicated to the direct financing of research and innovation activities during the 2026 funding cycle. This allocation reflects a deliberate effort to balance the immediate need to operationalise the Fund with the imperative to begin disbursing resources to the sector without delay.

Looking ahead, the draft Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) Policy currently under development articulates a national ambition to increase investment in research and innovation to 0.5 per cent of GDP by 2035. In parallel, NRIF is actively pursuing the establishment of a 100 million Dalasi endowment fund as a mechanism to secure predictable, long-term financing and to enhance the sustainability and strategic autonomy of the Fund.

Together, these measures signal a growing policy commitment to positioning research and innovation as central pillars of The Gambia's development trajectory.

2.2 OBJECTIVES OF THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

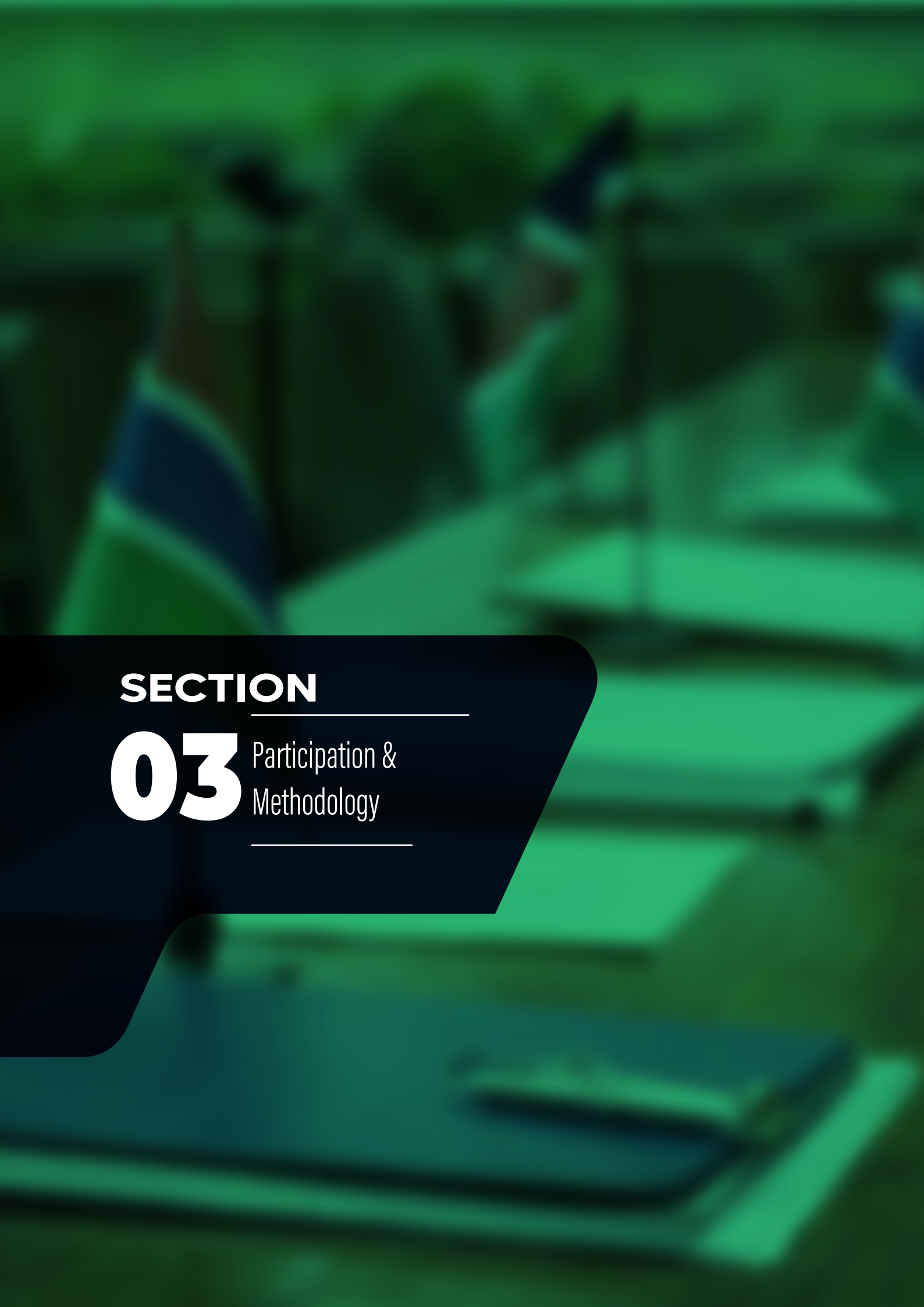
The consultation was designed around ten strategic objectives:

- Gather first-hand, practical insights to inform the design of NRIF funding windows, instruments, and operational modalities.
- Diagnose cross-cutting system gaps in data, human capacity, infrastructure, coordination, and the translation of research into policy and practice.
- Enable stakeholders to articulate and rank their most pressing funding and non-financial support needs.
- Co-design delivery models and governance arrangements that are practical, transparent, and credible.
- Build institutional trust and national ownership of NRIF in advance of programme rollout.
- Ensure NRIF-supported activities align with national development objectives including the National Development Plan.
- Identify opportunities to reduce duplication and strengthen collaboration across the ecosystem.
- Define NRIF's role as a system-level coordinator and enabler, not a replacement for existing institutional mandates.
- Explore structured mechanisms for engaging the Gambian diaspora and international partners.
- Establish a foundation for continuous, iterative stakeholder engagement throughout NRIF's implementation cycle.

2.3 CONSULTATION SCHEDULE

The fourteen sessions were conducted across a thirty-one-day period, combining in-person sessions in Banjul and Soma with virtual sessions for the diaspora:

Date	Session	Location	Reach
25 March 2026	Innovation Ecosystem	Banjul	9 institutions · 60%
26 March 2026	Urban Local Government Authorities	Banjul	14 representatives · 56%
27 March 2026	Civil Society Organisations	Banjul	13 representatives · 52%
30 March 2026	Government Ministries	Banjul	9 representatives · 47%
31 March 2026	Government Sub-Vented Agencies	Banjul	18 agencies · 81%
1 April 2026	Universities and Research Institutions	Banjul	23 representatives
2 April 2026	Student Unions of Universities	Banjul	28 representatives · 100%
7 April 2026	TVET Institutions	Banjul	7 institutions · 100%
10 April 2026	Vice Chancellors	Banjul	10 leaders
15 April 2026	Development Partners	Banjul	7 representatives
16 April 2026	Diplomatic Corps	Banjul	6 missions
17 April 2026	Provincial Local Government Authorities	Soma	11 representatives
March 2026 (virtual)	Gambian Diaspora — Session I	Virtual	12 participants
18 April 2026	Gambian Diaspora — Session II	Virtual	22 participants

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SECTION

03

Participation &
Methodology

PARTICIPATION AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The methodology underpinning this consultation process draws on an established body of social science theory concerned with participatory research, stakeholder engagement, and mixed-methods inquiry. Three theoretical traditions inform the design, execution, and analytical approach of the consultation.

3.1.1 PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

The consultation was designed within the tradition of Participatory Action Research (PAR), first systematised by Kurt Lewin in the 1940s and subsequently developed by scholars including Freire (1970), Chambers (1994), Reason and Bradbury (2008) and Sallah (2014). PAR holds that those who are most directly affected by a problem are best positioned to diagnose it, and that research processes that exclude affected communities from knowledge production are epistemologically limited as well as ethically compromised.

In the context of NRIF's consultation, PAR principles translate into a specific methodological commitment: stakeholders are not treated as subjects from whom data is extracted, but as co-producers of the evidence base from which programme design decisions are derived. The consultation process was accordingly structured to give participants genuine influence over NRIF's funding architecture, to give participants genuine influence, not a token consultation. The direct traceability from stakeholder voting results to funding window design, which is documented throughout this report, is the operationalisation of that commitment.

PAR also demands reflexivity: researchers must acknowledge their own position and potential to influence outcomes. NRIF facilitated the consultations as a prospective funder, not as a neutral academic researcher. This created a risk of social desirability bias, whereby participants might articulate needs they believed NRIF wished to hear. This risk was mitigated through the use of structured voting (which reduces social pressure compared to open verbal advocacy), through the inclusion of critical and governance-related questions in every session, and through facilitation norms that explicitly encouraged challenge and dissent.

3.1.2 DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY AND STAKEHOLDER THEORY

The consultation also draws on deliberative democratic theory, associated primarily with Habermas (1984, 1996) and applied to policy and governance processes by scholars including Dryzek (1990), Fischer (2003), and Cornwall and Gaventa (2001). Deliberative approaches hold that legitimate policy decisions require both technical analysis and structured dialogue, in which affected parties can articulate interests, contest evidence, and reach considered conclusions.

Applied to programme design, this theoretical commitment distinguishes the NRIF consultation from a conventional needs assessment or market survey. Participants were not asked simply to rank preferences from a pre-determined menu. Each session included plenary discussion, group deliberation, and structured debate before prioritisation exercises were conducted. This sequencing matters analytically: preferences expressed after deliberation are stronger indicators of considered institutional need than first-order responses to a questionnaire, because they incorporate peer challenge, contextual information, and collective reflection.

Stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984; Mitchell, Agle and Wood, 1997) further informs the sampling logic of the consultation. Stakeholders were identified and included on the basis of their salience to NRIF's mandate, their power to affect or be affected by NRIF's operations, the legitimacy of their stake in the research and innovation ecosystem, and the urgency of the issues they face. This explains why the consultation spans stakeholder groups as different as student unions and the diplomatic corps. Each group holds a qualitatively distinct but genuine stake in how NRIF operates, and excluding any of them would have produced a systematically incomplete evidence base.

3.1.3 MIXED-METHODS RESEARCH DESIGN

The methodological architecture of the consultation is grounded in mixed-methods research theory, as developed by Creswell and Plano Clark (2011), Tashakkori and Teddlie (2010), and Greene (2007). Mixed methods designs combine quantitative and qualitative data collection within a single inquiry in order to exploit the complementary strengths of each approach: quantitative data provides comparability and generalisability; qualitative data provides depth, context, and explanatory richness.

The consultation employed an explanatory sequential design: qualitative data (plenary discussion, group work, institutional presentations) was collected before and alongside quantitative data (voting and ranking exercises), with the qualitative strand providing the interpretive context necessary for the quantitative findings to be understood correctly.

This matters because a ranking exercise conducted without contextual discussion can be systematically misinterpreted: a low vote for ‘research grants’ in the innovation ecosystem session, for example, reflects not a lack of interest in research but a considered preference for prototype funding as the higher-use investment at that stage of ecosystem development, a distinction only visible when the voting data is read against the discussion record.

Within-session integration of quantitative and qualitative strands was therefore designed as an analytical requirement, an analytical requirement built into the design. This is documented in the session methodology descriptions in Section 3.2.3 and in the interpretation notes accompanying all voting tables throughout Section 04.

3.1.4 ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK: FOUR DIMENSIONS OF INQUIRY

Drawing on the three theoretical traditions above, a common analytical framework was developed and applied consistently across all fourteen sessions. The framework organises the evidence base around four dimensions:

Analytical Dimension	Guiding Question	Programme Relevance
System Diagnosis	What are the primary constraints, gaps, and structural failures affecting this stakeholder group?	Identifies sector-specific and cross-cutting barriers; informs problem definition across the portfolio
Priority Setting	Which funding and non-financial interventions are most urgently needed, and in what order?	Generates comparable ordinal preference data; informs resource sequencing and instrument weighting
Delivery and Governance	How should NRIF structure its delivery channels, and what governance safeguards are required?	Co-designs accountability architecture; builds legitimacy through participatory governance design
Strategic Role of NRIF	What role should NRIF play within the national ecosystem, and what is expected of it?	Positions NRIF accurately within the institutional landscape; surfaces expectations and boundaries

This four-dimensional framework serves two functions simultaneously. It provides the analytical comparability necessary for cross-session synthesis, because each session addressed the same dimensions, findings can be compared and contrasted in a methodologically defensible way. It also provides the programme design relevance necessary for NRIF's purposes, because each dimension maps directly onto a decision that NRIF must make in designing its funding architecture.

3.2 PARTICIPANTS AND REACH

NRIF engaged a broad and deliberately cross-sectoral range of stakeholders whose collective roles span the full research-to-implementation continuum. The consultation was designed to ensure representation across policy formulation, regulatory oversight, knowledge generation, service delivery, community engagement, financing, and international cooperation, recognising that no single institutional perspective can capture the full complexity of what a national research and innovation fund must address.

Stakeholder Group	Participants	Share
Innovation and Incubator Hubs	11	6%
Civil Society Organisations	13	7%
Government Ministries (National Executive)	9	5%
Government Sub-Vented Agencies	18	10%
Universities and Research Institutions	23	13%
Student Unions of Universities and TVETs	28	16%
TVET Institutions	7	4%
Vice Chancellors and University Leadership	10	6%
Urban Local Government Authorities	14	8%
Provincial Local Government Authorities	11	6%
Private Sector	16	9%
Development Partners	7	4%
Gambian Diaspora (two virtual sessions)	22	12%
Diplomatic Corps	6	3%
TOTAL	177	100%

Participation rates varied across sessions, reflecting differences in institutional mandates, scheduling constraints, and the logistical challenges of reaching provincial and diaspora audiences. The overall participation rate of 77%, 177 of 229 invited stakeholders, is a meaningful indicator of sector engagement. The highest participation rates were recorded at the student union (100%) and TVET (100%) sessions, and at the government sub-vented agencies session (81%). The lowest rate was recorded at the government ministries session (47%), underscoring the importance of follow-up outreach to the 23% of invited participants who were unable to attend.

3.3 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

NRIF adopted a structured, mixed-methods stakeholder engagement methodology designed to move beyond information gathering towards active co-creation, prioritisation, and validation of national research and innovation priorities. The approach was deliberately designed to generate findings capable of withstanding critical scrutiny, both as evidence for programme design decisions and as a public accountability instrument demonstrating that NRIF's programmes are grounded in what stakeholders actually said.

3.3.1 METHODOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES

Five principles governed the design and execution of every session:

Inclusivity. Representation was sought across all levels of the research and innovation system: policy, research, innovation, regulation, service delivery, community, diaspora, and international. No sector or institution type was treated as the primary voice; all were engaged on the basis of the quality of their stake in the ecosystem.

Practicality. Sessions were oriented towards operational constraints, feasible solutions, and implementation realities. Abstract policy preferences were deprioritised in favour of evidence grounded in institutional experience.

Transparency. The purpose, scope, intended use, and limitations of all stakeholder inputs were communicated clearly at the outset of each session. Participants were informed that this was an advisory, non-evaluative process.

Evidence Orientation. Lived institutional experience and verifiable challenges were prioritised. Voting and ranking exercises were used to generate quantifiable signals to complement and discipline qualitative discussion.

Comparability. The four-dimensional analytical framework was applied consistently across all sessions. This comparability makes cross-session synthesis methodologically defensible.

3.3.2 SESSION DESIGN

Each consultation session was designed around the four-dimensional analytical framework described in Section 3.1.4, adapted to the specific context of the stakeholder group. A common methodological spine was maintained across sessions:

- Opening: NRIF mandate introduced; session objectives stated; methodology explained; confidentiality and non-attribution confirmed.
- System diagnosis: Participants invited to identify primary constraints, evidence gaps, and operational barriers.
- Priority setting: Structured voting or ranking exercise on funding and non-financial support options, conducted after deliberation.
- Delivery and governance: Discussion of preferred delivery channels, accountability mechanisms, and governance safeguards.
- Strategic role: Participants invited to articulate expectations of NRIF's role and what success would look like.
- Close: Participants informed of how findings will be used and how they will be consulted further.

The sequencing of discussion before voting ensures that voting results reflect considered institutional preferences. It also provides the interpretive context necessary to understand what voting choices mean in practice.

3.4 DATA COLLECTION METHODS

Seven data collection methods were deployed across the fourteen sessions. The selection of methods for each session was determined by group size, institutional context, available technology, and the nature of the findings sought.

Method	Sessions Used	Data Type	Function
Facilitated Plenary Discussion	All 14 sessions	Qualitative	Introduced mandate; surfaced system challenges; established shared context
Guided Thematic Discussion	All 14 sessions	Qualitative	Structured questions aligned to four analytical dimensions maintained comparability across sessions
Small Group / Breakout Work	8 sessions	Qualitative	Enabled deeper analysis and broad participation where group size and diversity warranted subdivision
Structured Digital Voting (Mentimeter)	8 sessions	Quantitative	Real-time ranked prioritisation of funding and non-financial support options; generated comparable ordinal data
Manual Scoring (Excel/paper)	4 sessions	Quantitative	Used where digital polling was impracticable; equivalent prioritisation outputs
Qualitative Consensus Assessment	2 sessions (Diplomatic Corps; Provincial LGAs)	Qualitative	Convergence assessed through repeated themes and explicit agreement where polling was not feasible
Institutional Presentation and Q&A	3 sessions (Universities; VCs; TVET)	Qualitative	Structured institutional input before collective prioritisation; enabled contextualisation of system-level findings

The combination of structured voting with open discussion is the methodological core of the consultation design. Structured voting generates ordinal preference data that can be compared across sessions and presented in a form suitable for programme design decisions. Open discussion generates the contextual and explanatory data needed to interpret what those preferences mean, what constraints lie behind them, and what caveats should qualify how they are applied.

In sessions where Mentimeter was used, participants received a unique participation code and could respond anonymously on personal devices. Results were displayed in real time, enabling immediate discussion of findings within the session and reducing the risk that vocal participants would disproportionately influence the group's stated preferences. Where Mentimeter was unavailable or ineffective, including the Provincial LGA session (connectivity limitations) and the Diplomatic Corps session (participant preference), equivalent processes were conducted through manual scoring or guided consensus assessment, with findings documented in the session record.

3.5 DATA ANALYSIS AND SYNTHESIS

3.5.1 WITHIN-SESSION ANALYSIS

Each session produced two categories of data: structured quantitative outputs (voting results, ranking scores) and qualitative records (facilitation notes, group exercise outputs, and contemporaneous documentation of plenary discussion). Within-session analysis integrated these two data streams by treating voting results as a starting point for interpretation: every significant voting result was discussed in session to surface the reasoning behind it and to identify important minority positions or caveats.

Session documentation was completed within 48 hours of each session, while facilitation notes and participant contributions remained fresh. Each session record captured: the voting results in full; the key qualitative insights from plenary and group discussion; minority views and dissenting positions; explicit agreements and commitments made; and any contextual factors that qualify interpretation of the findings.

3.5.2 CROSS-SESSION THEMATIC SYNTHESIS

Cross-session synthesis followed a thematic analysis approach informed by Braun and Clarke (2006) and adapted for policy-relevant mixed-methods research. The process involved four stages:

Stage 1, Independent session summaries. Each of the fourteen sessions was summarised independently, without reference to other sessions' findings, to preserve the specificity of each stakeholder group's contribution and avoid premature convergence.

Stage 2, Initial theme identification. Session summaries were reviewed systematically to identify themes, recurring patterns in the data that appeared across sessions and that carried analytical weight for programme design. Themes were identified inductively from the data, without being imposed from theory or prior consultation reports.

Stage 3, Theme development and validation. Initial themes were developed by examining the evidence supporting each one: the sessions in which it appeared, the strength of the signal (expressed as the proportion of sessions raising the theme and the consistency of the framing across sessions), and the extent to which quantitative voting data corroborated qualitative discussion findings. This stage also identified divergent perspectives, minority positions, and cases where stakeholder groups disagreed, all of which are retained in the analysis.

Stage 4, Programme design translation. Validated themes were mapped to their programme design implications for NRIF, drawing the analytical connections between what stakeholders said, what the evidence indicates about the nature of the underlying problem, and what types of intervention the evidence supports. This mapping is the analytical core of Sections 05 and 07.

3.5.3 TREATMENT OF QUANTITATIVE DATA

Voting results are presented throughout this report as proportions of participants endorsing each option within a session (e.g., '67% of participants ranked prototype funding as a top priority'). These proportions should be interpreted with reference to the session sample size, which ranged from 6 (Diplomatic Corps) to 28 (Student Unions). They are measures of relative preference within a stakeholder group, not population-representative survey statistics, and should not be treated as such.

The analytical value of the voting data lies not in the absolute percentages but in three dimensions: the consistency of rankings across sessions (a finding endorsed by multiple independent stakeholder groups carries more weight than one endorsed by a single group); the relationship between voting results and qualitative discussion (whether the discussion corroborates or complicates what the voting suggests); and the convergence or divergence between stakeholder groups (where groups agree, the signal is stronger; where they disagree, both positions are documented and the basis for disagreement is analysed).

3.6 RIGOUR, VALIDITY, AND LIMITATIONS

3.6.1 MEASURES TO STRENGTHEN RIGOUR

Several measures were built into the consultation design to strengthen the rigour and credibility of the findings:

Methodological triangulation. Every session combined at least two data collection methods (qualitative discussion and structured voting), and most combined three or more. This triangulation reduces the risk that findings reflect the artefact of a single method.

Cross-session corroboration. The analytical weight attributed to any finding is proportional to the number of independent stakeholder groups that raised it. Themes appearing across sessions conducted weeks apart with entirely different participants and facilitators cannot be attributed to facilitation artefact, social desirability, or group dynamics.

Minority view retention. Dissenting positions, minority views, and inter-group disagreements are documented throughout this report. They are not excluded in favour of consensus narratives. Where stakeholders disagreed, for example, on thematic funding approaches (Vice Chancellors) or capacity building versus infrastructure priorities (TVET), both positions are presented.

Facilitation neutrality. NRIF facilitation teams were briefed to avoid leading questions and to create conditions in which participants could disagree with NRIF's stated positions. The critical and governance-related findings documented throughout Section 04, including participants' explicit conditionality around transparency, their concerns about political interference, and their insistence on NAFTI representation, are evidence that these conditions were broadly achieved.

Independent documentation. Session records were prepared by documentation officers distinct from facilitation leads, reducing the risk that facilitation decisions influenced what was recorded.

3.6.2 ACKNOWLEDGED LIMITATIONS

The following limitations are acknowledged and should be borne in mind when interpreting the findings:

Non-random sampling. Participants were purposively selected on the basis of institutional affiliation and role. The consultation does not claim to be a representative sample of the Gambian population or the full research and innovation ecosystem. Findings are representative of the perspectives of the institutions and individuals who participated.

Variable participation rates. Session participation rates ranged from 47% (government ministries) to 100% (student unions; TVET institutions). The 23% of invited participants who did not attend may hold systematically different views from those who did.

Institutional representation. Participants represented their institutions. They did not represent the full range of views within those institutions. Individual staff at lower levels of institutional hierarchies, who may have different experiences of the constraints identified, were not directly consulted.

Social desirability effects. Notwithstanding the use of anonymous voting and facilitation norms designed to encourage honest expression, the fact that NRIF is the prospective funder may have influenced participants' stated preferences in some sessions.

Small sample sizes in some sessions. Sessions with six to nine participants (Diplomatic Corps, innovation ecosystem) produce ordinal preference data. These should be treated as directional indicators, not statistically representative findings.

Qualitative reliance in two sessions. The Provincial LGA and Diplomatic Corps sessions relied primarily on qualitative data due to connectivity limitations and participant preference respectively. Findings from these sessions are treated as strong qualitative signals, not as quantitatively comparable with sessions that employed structured voting.

These limitations have been mitigated through conservative interpretation, emphasis on convergence across sessions over isolated findings, and explicit documentation of the methodological basis for each conclusion. They do not undermine the utility of the consultation findings for programme design purposes; they define the appropriate level of confidence with which those findings should be held.

3.7 ETHICAL FRAMEWORK

The consultation process adhered to established principles of research ethics, adapted for the specific context of a government-mandated participatory programme design process:

Informed voluntary participation. All participants were invited, not required to attend. Session objectives, intended uses of data, and NRIF's reporting and publication plans were communicated clearly before each session. No participant was pressured to contribute in any particular direction.

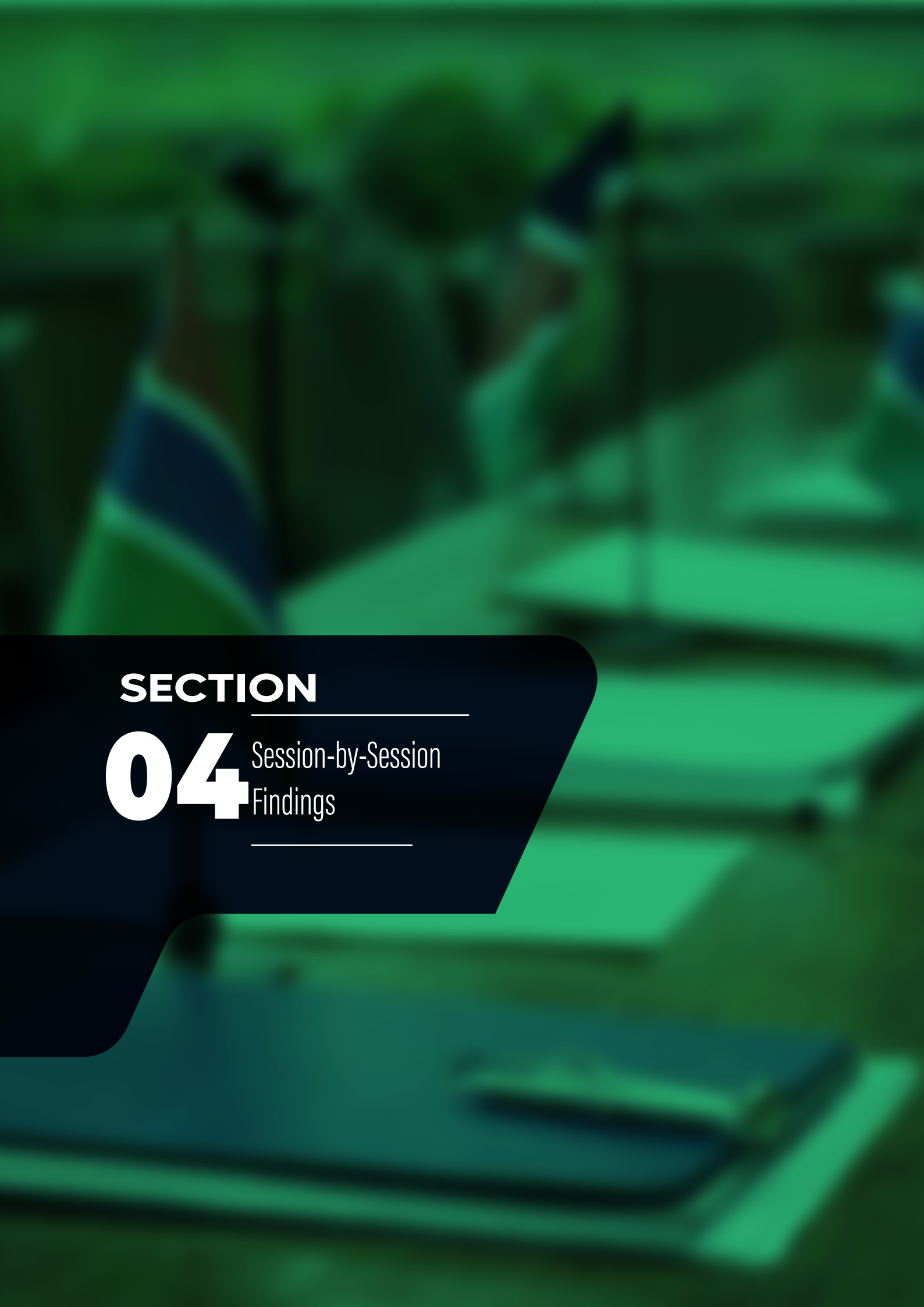
Non-attribution. Individual contributions are not attributed to named participants in this report or in any NRIF programme design documentation. Institutional affiliations are noted where directly relevant to the analytical findings.

Respect for institutional mandates. Participants were engaged in their institutional capacities. The consultation process was not designed to elicit information that would compromise institutional confidentiality, proprietary interests, or professional obligations.

Exclusive use for programme design. Stakeholder inputs are used solely for NRIF programme design and strategic planning. They are not used for evaluation, audit, or any purpose that could affect participants' institutional standing.

Non-evaluative framing. Participants were informed explicitly that the consultation was consultative and advisory in nature. No session was framed as an assessment of institutional performance.

Feedback and accountability. NRIF committed to sharing consultation findings with all participants, to conducting a national validation workshop before finalising programme design, and to publishing the funded framework with explicit acknowledgement of how stakeholder inputs shaped the final decisions. This report is the first fulfilment of those commitments.



SECTION

04

Session-by-Session Findings

SESSION-BY-SESSION FINDINGS

This section presents the substantive findings from each of the fourteen consultation sessions. Each entry follows a consistent structure: operating context and key constraints; financial funding priorities with voting data; non-financial support priorities; and governance and delivery preferences, including stakeholder recommendations and NRIF's commitments. Together these entries constitute the primary evidential foundation of this report.

4.1 INNOVATION ECOSYSTEM · 25 MARCH 2026

9 hubs and labs

60% participation

Early-stage technology, agri-innovation, incubation, innovation, entrepreneurial support



OPERATING CONTEXT AND SYSTEMIC CONSTRAINTS

Innovation ecosystem actors face a cluster of interdependent constraints that collectively prevent promising ideas from becoming viable products. Access to finance operates as the binding constraint, no single institution is immune, regardless of sector or stage. Participants described a fragmented ecosystem in which institutions operate in silos, duplicating efforts and failing to share knowledge or resources. Early-stage ventures lack the financial track record and institutional maturity required to meet standard donor thresholds, systematically excluding the most creative but nascent actors.

Operational barriers compound systemic issues: limited physical space; cumbersome procurement and importation processes for specialised equipment; restricted international exposure; and inadequate government recognition.

INNOVATION LIFECYCLE ANALYSIS

Participants mapped challenges across all four stages of the innovation lifecycle, enabling identification of the highest-use intervention points:

Stage	Primary Barriers	Programme Implication
Ideation	No structured mentorship; funding prevents advisory services.	Small concept development grants and mentorship access.
Prototype Development	No shared facilities; weak market linkage; high material costs; no government procurement access.	Prototype grants combined with shared infrastructure and market linkage support. This is the most acute bottleneck.
Testing	No certified testing facilities. 'The testing stage is where innovations go to die.'	NRIF to catalyse co-investment in certified shared testing infrastructure as a national public good.
Market Entry	Limited market research; high entry costs; no cold storage/distribution infrastructure.	Market access support is the most urgently needed non-financial intervention.

FINANCIAL FUNDING PRIORITIES

Priority Area	Votes	Share	Significance
Prototype Funding	6/9	67%	Highest priority, addresses critical mid-lifecycle gap
Scale-Up Funding	5/9	56%	Bridges viability to growth
Funding Through Labs	4/9	44%	Preferred delivery channel, not a standalone instrument
Innovation Competitions	4/9	44%	Visibility and early-stage galvanisation
Research Grants	2/9	22%	Lower relative priority in this cohort
Industry Partnership Funding	2/9	22%	Long-term priority, ecosystem not yet ready to absorb at scale

NON-FINANCIAL SUPPORT PRIORITIES

Priority Area	Votes	Share	Significance
Market Access Support	8/9	89%	Innovators need help reaching consumers who do not yet know their products exist
Mentorship	6/9	67%	Access to experienced practitioners makes a material difference for first-time entrepreneurs
Partnerships	6/9	67%	For scale, credibility, and access to procurement markets

STAKEHOLDER RECOMMENDATIONS

#	Theme	Recommendation	NRIF Commitment
1	Role Clarity	NRIF should resource and amplify innovation actors, not duplicate or compete with existing functions.	NRIF to publish an explicit role delineation statement prior to programme launch.
2	Local Priority	Engagement and procurement should prioritise local stakeholders and domestic expertise.	NRIF to include local priority provisions in procurement guidelines.
3	Transparency	All funding decisions must be transparent, consistent, and free from favouritism.	Full selection criteria, reviewer compositions, and decisions published on digital portal.
4	Ecosystem Collaboration	NRIF should broker collaboration, not fund institutions in isolation.	Collaboration requirements embedded in programme design; annual ecosystem convenings hosted.
5	Continuous Dialogue	Stakeholders expect structured engagement beyond this consultation.	Formal engagement calendar established; progress reports shared bi-annually.

4.2 CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS • 27 MARCH 2026

13 representatives

52% participation

11 organisations:
environmental, disability,
media, gender, youth,
community welfare



SYSTEMIC CONSTRAINTS

Two dominant cross-cutting barriers affect every participating CSO regardless of sector: inadequate and unpredictable funding; and duplication of effort arising from weak coordination, with multiple organisations often addressing the same community challenge without awareness of one another. Specific institutional constraints include: weak implementation of the Disability Act (Gambia Alliance of the Disabled); restrictive cultural norms limiting gender equality work (Think Young Women); limited capacity building for journalists (Gambia Press Union); inadequate youth funding (National Youth Parliament); and persistent climate policy implementation failures (Green Up Gambia).

Priority intervention areas identified: environmental protection and climate action, including renewable energy and agroecology; media freedom and civic engagement; gender equality and social protection; disability inclusion; and youth empowerment.

FINANCIAL FUNDING PRIORITIES

Priority Area	Votes	Share	Significance
CSO-Led Projects	12	29%	CSOs as direct recipients, design partners, and community implementers
Youth / Community Innovation Programmes	9	21%	Convergence of CSO and youth development agendas
Research for Policy and Advocacy	7	17%	Evidence to strengthen CSO advocacy and policy engagement
Community-Based Research	6	15%	Research grounded in community realities
Partnerships (CSOs, universities, gov.)	4	9%	Cross-sector collaboration
Capacity Building for CSOs	4	9%	Institutional strengthening

NON-FINANCIAL SUPPORT PRIORITIES

Priority Area	Votes	Share	Significance
Training in Research, Project Design, M&E	12	—	Essential for improving CSO capacity to design and evaluate programmes
Community Engagement Tools	11	—	Improving outreach and ensuring community ownership
Partnerships	8	—	Strategic collaboration among CSOs, academia, and government
Access to Data	4	—	Evidence-based advocacy and policy engagement

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PRINCIPLES

CSOs were unanimous that community consultation, co-design, and full participation are non-negotiable preconditions for effective NRIF-supported programmes, not optional add-ons. Communities possess irreplaceable contextual knowledge. Strong community ownership is essential for relevance, sustainability, and long-term impact. Each community is unique: flexible, needs-based approaches are required; one-size-fits-all programme design will fail.

#	Theme	Recommendation	NRIF Commitment
1	Transparency	All funding decisions must be transparent and free from favouritism.	Full criteria, reviewer compositions, and decisions published on digital portal.
2	Ecosystem Collaboration	NRIF should broker collaboration, not fund in isolation.	Collaboration requirements embedded in programme design.
3	Continuous Dialogue	Stakeholders expect ongoing engagement.	Formal engagement calendar; progress reports shared bi-annually.

4.3 GOVERNMENT MINISTRIES •

30 MARCH 2026

9 representatives

47% participation

OVP, MoHERST, Gender,
Environment, Agriculture,
Youth and Sports, Defence



OPERATING CONTEXT: PERSISTENT EVIDENCE GAPS

Government ministries cannot effectively govern, plan, or deliver services without quality research and data, yet almost none have the funding, capacity, or systems to generate it. The session surfaced institution-specific evidence gaps that, taken together, constitute a national governance challenge:

Ministry	Primary Evidence Gap	Research Priority
OVP	Disaster response and early warning; NDP monitoring.	Research coordination; NRIF brokerage between institutions and policymakers.
MoHERST	Data access; weak researcher-policymaker linkages; inadequate laboratory infrastructure.	Capacity building for STI staff; research infrastructure; evidence-to-policy platforms.
Gender and Social Welfare	Outdated Social Registry; insufficient poverty threshold data.	Social protection data systems; policy-relevant welfare research.
Youth and Sports	No quality data on youth migration flows; research agenda misaligned with national priorities.	Youth migration data systems; aligned research agenda.
Agriculture	Dependent on traditional methods; absent cross-sectoral collaboration; engineering unit under-resourced.	Agricultural mechanisation research; student research funding; cross-ministerial coordination.
Environment	Shortage of technical expertise; researchers on administrative duties; weak policy enforcement; data gaps.	Environmental research capacity; enforcement-linked evidence systems.

FINANCIAL FUNDING PRIORITIES

Priority Area	Votes	Share	Significance
Capacity Building (Staff and Systems)	8	33%	Foundation for evidence generation and use, highest priority
Policy-Relevant Research	6	25%	Research that directly informs policy and strengthens decision-making
Data Systems and Analytics	5	21%	National data availability, quality, M&E, and evaluation
Cross-Sector Research Programmes	3	13%	Inter-ministerial collaboration
Research Linked to Ministries	1	4%	Targeted sector-specific research
Innovation Pilots	1	4%	Testing solutions before scale-up

Budgetary context: as a tax-based economy, Gambian ministries receive funding based on approved budgets and collected revenue. Additional unbudgeted resources require formal justification to the Ministry of Finance. This structural constraint makes predictable, multi-year NRIF financing particularly valuable, as it operates outside the annual budget cycle and can support research activities that ministries cannot fund internally.

4.4 GOVERNMENT SUB-VENTED AGENCIES • 31 MARCH 2026

18 agencies

81% participation

Disaster management, food safety, human rights, audit, standards, social protection, youth services, regulatory agencies



THREE CROSS-CUTTING BOTTLENECKS

Despite radically different mandates, 18 sub-vented agencies converged on three identical structural constraints. This convergence is analytically significant: when agencies as different as the National Disaster Management Agency and the Gambia Bureau of Statistics identify the same problems in the same order, the problem is systemic, not sectoral.

EVIDENCE READINESS.

Data is either unavailable, outdated, fragmented, or unreliable. In several cases, data exists but is not accessible in usable formats when operational decisions require it, in regulation, disaster response, audit, and social protection. Food safety samples are still being sent outside the country for laboratory analysis. National nutrition surveys lack routine funding. The social registry is not current.

Analytical Capacity. Limited staff capacity to interpret and analyse available data means that investments in data collection alone do not improve outcomes. Data without analytical capability is an unused asset. This was raised independently by the National Environment Agency, PURA, NAQAA, and the National Audit Office.

Translation into Action. Even where evidence exists and can be analysed, translating findings into policy decisions, regulatory enforcement, service improvements, or innovation uptake is near-universally problematic. Weak coordination and limited implementation follow-through are the most frequently cited causes.

FINANCIAL FUNDING PRIORITIES

Priority Area	Votes	Share	Significance
Data Systems and Digital Tools	14	1st	Most urgent constraint across all 18 agencies
Capacity Building	12	2nd	Analytical skills to make data systems useful, inseparable from data investment
Monitoring and Evaluation	10	3rd	Accountability, learning, and results verification
Applied Research and Innovation Pilots	9	4th	Demand-driven research with clear uptake pathways
Implementation and Coordination Support	6	5th	Coordination and convening as eligible cost categories

The ranking reveals a practical sequencing logic: institutions want data systems that generate and store evidence; then people who can interpret it; then mechanisms that verify results. These are sequential and mutually reinforcing investments, not alternatives.

4.5 UNIVERSITIES AND RESEARCH INSTITUTIONS • 1 APRIL 2026

12 institutions

5 discussion groups

UTG, UEG, USET, Civil Service University, Al-Bukhari, Al-Hikma, Al-Ihsan, Euclid, IOU, NARI, MRC, Kids in Technology



SYSTEM STATUS ASSESSMENT

Five structured discussion groups independently assessed the current state of the research system across five dimensions:

Area	System Status			Key Observation
Funding Access	Weak, all groups	5		Universally identified as the primary bottleneck; affects infrastructure, staffing, and student research.
Research Capacity	Staff Weak Moderate	to		Grant-writing, research management, and supervision capacity all underdeveloped.
Postgraduate Pipeline	Weak Moderate	to		Strong only at MRC; limited elsewhere; long-term talent base at risk.
Infrastructure	Moderate (disparate)			Some infrastructure exists but is underutilised due to lack of trained operators.
Partnerships	Weak Moderate	to		Strong examples at MRC; limited elsewhere; international partnerships largely absent.

FINANCIAL FUNDING PRIORITIES

Priority Area	Votes	Share	Significance
Institutional Capacity Grants	14	1st	Foundation on which all other research investment depends
Research Infrastructure / Lab Support	13	2nd	Laboratories, equipment, and shared facilities
Competitive Research Grants	10	3rd	Open, merit-based funding
Thematic National Research Programmes	9	4th	National priority alignment
PhD and Postgraduate Funding	6	5th	Long-term talent pipeline
Collaborative Research (local/international)	6	5th	Cross-institutional partnerships

Research translation gap: MRC highlighted that research priorities are frequently set by external funders, with national development needs given insufficient weight. UTG and UEG reinforced the need for research that addresses Gambian challenges and delivers tangible outcomes. Incentives for applied research, and stronger engagement mechanisms with policymakers and industry, are required.

4.6 STUDENT UNIONS · 2 APRIL 2026

28 participants

100% participation

Highest attendance of any session, all invited student unions present



OPERATING CONTEXT

The 100% participation rate, all 28 invited representatives present, signals a sector acutely aware of the gap between student innovation potential and the structural absence of support to realise it. Students are largely dependent on parental funding. Institutional frameworks to nurture student innovation are absent or dysfunctional. Private universities reported additional marginalisation in grant access.

Problem	Key Challenges Identified
Lack of Funding	Inadequate financial support; limited grants; centralised funds; government institutions inadequately resourced for student research.
Lack of Mentorship	Limited supervised research; technical challenges unaddressed; supervisor shortages.
Limited Facilities	Insufficient research facilities; inaccessible prototyping spaces; inadequate laboratories and innovation centres.
Lack of Information	Limited awareness of funding opportunities; institutional responses to student inquiries often absent.
Weak Institutional Support	Absent frameworks for student research; insufficient budget allocations; private universities marginalised from grant access.

The implementation stage is the critical failure point: ideas stall at the transition from concept to prototype, where funding absence, mentorship gaps, and facility shortages combine to create an impenetrable barrier.

FINANCIAL FUNDING PRIORITIES

Priority Area	Votes	Share	Significance
Research Opportunities for Students	20/28	71%	Structured access to research activity, not just financial grants
Small Grants for Student Ideas	17/28	61%	Direct, accessible funding without institutional gatekeeping
Support Through Universities/TVETs	15/28	54%	Institutional delivery accepted where transparency is guaranteed
Youth Entrepreneurship Programmes	14/28	50%	Linking research to employment creation
Student Competitions	12/28	43%	Visibility and galvanisation
Prototype Funding	6/28	21%	Stage-specific support

NON-FINANCIAL SUPPORT PRIORITIES

Priority Area	Votes	Share	Significance
Mentorship	17/28	61%	Access to experienced practitioners, significant for first-time researchers
Information About Funding	16/28	57%	Students cannot access what they do not know exists
Networking Opportunities	15/28	54%	Connections to practitioners and potential collaborators
Business/Entrepreneurship Training	14/28	50%	Turning research ideas into enterprises
Access to Labs/Workshops	6/28	21%	Physical access remains critical but ranked below relational support

PROPOSED GRANT FRAMEWORK

Grant Level	Amount	Purpose
Ideation	GMD 50,000	Concept development and feasibility studies.
Prototype	GMD 150,000	Prototype development and testing.
Market Pilot	GMD 200,000	Small-scale implementation and market pilot.
Scale-Up	GMD 300,000	Scale-up and institutional research support.

Delivery preference: hybrid model with direct application to NRIF as the primary pathway, and institutional channels as an optional secondary pathway for institutions meeting transparency and capacity standards. Phase-based disbursements linked to verifiable milestones endorsed by all participants.

4.7 TVET INSTITUTIONS • 7 APRIL 2026

7 institutions

100% participation

NAFTI, ITAG, Gaye Njorro, tourism, hospitality, and technical training institutions



THE TVET POSITIONING PROBLEM

TVET in The Gambia faces a foundational challenge that worsens every operational constraint: it is widely perceived as education for school dropouts. This stigma affects enrolment quality, societal standing, institutional investment, and policy attention. ITAG raised this directly: the perception shapes who enters TVET and how the sector is regarded by families, employers, and policymakers. Until this repositioning is addressed, investment in facilities and curricula will yield below potential.

Operational constraints compound the positioning problem: chronic underfunding; outdated curricula misaligned with industry practice; shortage of qualified trainers (Gaye Njorro noted high costs of recruiting foreign personnel); limited industry linkages restricting real-world trainee exposure; and uncertain quality assurance during NAQAA oversight transitions.

CURRICULUM MISALIGNMENT

Curriculum relevance and modernisation is the most pressing operational constraint, ahead of equipment deficits. Curricula have remained unchanged for years; revision processes are slow and contested; institutions lack capacity to write modern, industry-responsive curricula; and institutional resistance to change is a significant barrier. Gaye Njorro has been proactively aligning training with global market realities, including introducing event planning programmes, but these remain pending NAQAA accreditation. The welding curriculum was cited as a concrete example of long-overdue updating.

The NRIF Executive Director noted during the session that NRIF-funded research can and should directly inform TVET curriculum reform through evidence-based labour market analysis, an important direct intersection between NRIF's mandate and TVET's most critical need.

FINANCIAL FUNDING PRIORITIES

Priority	Share	Rank	Rationale
Capacity Building for Trainers	40%	1st	Without skilled instructors, equipment and curriculum investments have limited impact.
Equipment Modernisation	30%	2nd	Industry-standard equipment essential for practical training and graduate employability.
Curriculum Development and Innovation	25%	3rd	Integrating entrepreneurship and aligning with labour market needs.
Other Support	5%	4th	Infrastructure gaps, student enterprise support, accreditation facilitation.

Delivery: unanimous agreement to channel NRIF funding through the NAFTI association as intermediary, with NAFTI represented on all evaluation committees for TVET institution proposals. This is a governance condition, not a preference.

4.8 VICE CHANCELLORS • 10 APRIL 2026

10 university leaders

Mentimeter polling

UTG, UEG, USET, Al-Bukhari, Al-Hikma, Al-Ihsan, IOU, AIUWA, CSU, Sup de Co



QUANTITATIVE CONSENSUS SIGNALS

The Vice Chancellors session generated the clearest quantitative consensus of any consultation. Mentimeter polling produced near-unanimous convergence across 10 institutional leaders:

Question	Consensus Response
Biggest challenge	Funding, dominant response across all participants
Top funding priority	Research infrastructure (laboratories and equipment)
Preferred funding approach	Thematic funding aligned to national priorities, with capacity equity safeguards
Preferred collaboration model	Multi-university collaboration; stronger university–industry linkages
Top non-financial support	Research training and mentorship
Most important funding condition	Alignment with national development priorities
Key trust factor for NRIF	Transparency in funding decisions and selection processes

Vice Chancellor of UTG noted that internal university revenues are almost entirely committed to operational costs, leaving research perpetually underfunded. Vice Chancellor of IOU emphasised prioritising young researchers. USET raised an important point: poorly designed thematic calls risk disadvantaging institutions with different specialisations and capacities. NRIF must design funding conditions that build institutional equity across the sector. MDI highlighted the persistent gap between research output and policy uptake.

4.9 URBAN LOCAL GOVERNMENT AUTHORITIES · 26 MARCH 2026

14 representatives

56% participation

Banjul City Council, Kanifing
Municipality, West Coast
Region

SYSTEMIC CONSTRAINTS

Urban LGAs face significant financial and institutional pressures. Low tax and rates collection, driven by weak record-keeping systems and limited human capacity, constrains the revenue base from which councils fund all local services. Waste management is the most visible service delivery failure. Rapid population growth, inadequate infrastructure, and indiscriminate littering have created a situation that current council resources cannot address.

Youth unemployment is severe, particularly in the West Coast Region, driving pressure towards irregular migration. Environmental degradation from mining activities and the existential risk to Banjul from sea-level rise and coastal erosion add environmental dimensions that councils cannot address without research, innovation, and external partnership.

FINANCIAL FUNDING PRIORITIES

Priority Area	Votes	Share	Significance
Decentralised Funding	9	25%	Empowers Area Councils to manage resources directly, highest significant potential
Capacity Building for LGAs	8	22%	Financial management, planning, monitoring, and accountability
Youth Innovation Programmes	6	17%	Counter unemployment and reduce migration pressures
Local Research on Community Issues	5	14%	Evidence-based local planning
Community Innovation Projects	5	14%	Grassroots innovation aligned with local needs
Infrastructure / Equipment	3	8%	Physical delivery capacity

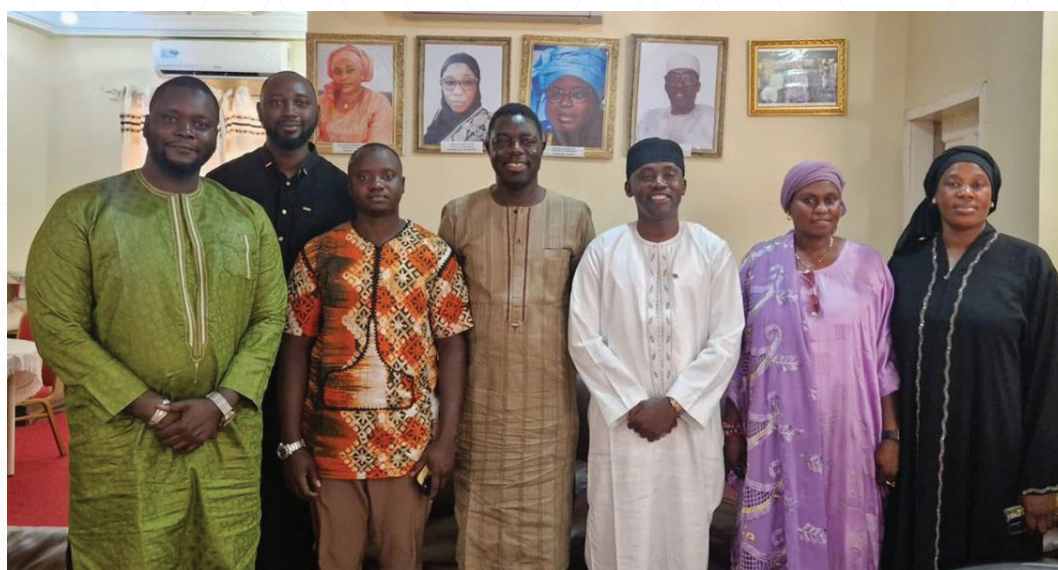
Unanimous governance agreement: NRIF funding must be channelled through Area Councils under the Local Government Act. This is not a preference, it is a governance requirement that protects NRIF from political interference and provides legal clarity. Regional Governors to be routinely updated on NRIF activities and impact in their regions.

NON-FINANCIAL SUPPORT PRIORITIES

Priority Area	Votes	Share	Significance
Partnerships (universities, NGOs, private sector)	7	50%	Single most important non-financial need, LGAs cannot address complex challenges alone
Data Systems	5	36%	Quality data for planning, revenue management, and service design
Community Engagement	4	29%	Inclusive participation in local governance

4.10 PROVINCIAL LOCAL GOVERNMENT AUTHORITIES · 17 APRIL 2026

11 participants	LRR, NBR, URR	Session convened in Soma, participants from three regions; qualitative findings only
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PROVINCIAL CONTEXT

Limited coordination among regional institutions, inadequate resources, and institutional capacity gaps pervade provincial governance. Village Development Committees, the primary community interface, are often ineffective, yet bypassing them risks community exclusion.

Waste management was described as the single most pressing challenge across municipalities, with temporary dumping sites becoming permanently unmanageable. Agriculture is the other dominant concern: difficulties selling locally produced goods (particularly onions), problems with imported seeds not suited to local conditions, and absent market linkages constrain agricultural producers across all three regions.

Governance concerns were raised by multiple participants: political interference, weak accountability, and instances where development support does not reach intended beneficiaries. The Governor of the Lower River Region welcomed NRIF engagement and signalled the Governor's Office as a key coordination anchor.

PRIORITY AREAS FOR NRIF INVESTMENT

- Education and skills development, the most consistently emphasised priority across all three regions
- Agriculture and food systems, market linkages, seed compatibility, and youth sector engagement
- Waste management, community-level research and innovation pilots for sustainable local solutions
- Youth employment, locally anchored programmes offering alternatives to irregular migration

Delivery preference: community-led, partnership-based models. Starting allocation suggested at GMD 10 million for the region. Governor's Office unanimously identified as the appropriate regional coordinating body.

4.11 PRIVATE SECTOR · 24 APRIL 2026

16 representatives	Digital polling + discussion	Manufacturing, financial, entrepreneurship, business associations	ICT, services,
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KEY SYSTEMIC CONSTRAINTS

Human Capital Deficits. Skills gaps, inadequate work readiness, and professional attitudes are the leading constraint on private sector productivity, ahead of access to finance. Graduates are often unprepared for professional environments. Structured workforce transition programmes were proposed.

Data Fragmentation. Financial institutions cannot make reliable credit assessments because SME data is fragmented or absent. Business associations cannot profile members. A centralised national research and business database was the most consistently proposed structural solution.

Weak Research–Industry Linkages. Research outputs are rarely commercially relevant. Industry needs demand-driven, practically applicable research, not academic outputs designed for publication alone.

Financial Access Barriers. High collateral requirements, risk aversion, and weak SME internal financial systems (poor bookkeeping, absent revenue tracking) constrain access to capital. Risk-sharing mechanisms are the most realistic solution.

Regulatory Lag. Innovation frequently outpaces regulatory frameworks, particularly in fintech. Uncertainty about regulatory treatment limits adoption and investment.

FINANCIAL FUNDING PRIORITIES

Priority Area	Votes	Share	Significance
Access to Finance for Research and Innovation	—	Rank 1	Risk-sharing mechanisms, not one-size-fits-all grants
Skills Development	—	Rank 2	Workforce readiness and human capital investment
Technology Adoption and Digitalisation	—	Rank 3	Digital tools to improve SME productivity and data management

Matching grants and co-financing were identified as the most realistic instruments. Financial institutions indicated potential willingness to participate in syndication arrangements under appropriate risk-sharing conditions. Private sector engagement in research and innovation is conditional, not absent, the conditions are access to finance, reduced risk, clearer national priorities, and credible delivery mechanisms.

4.12 DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS · 15 APRIL 2026

7 participants

Mentimeter + facilitated discussion

UNDP, UNICEF, FAO, WHO, ITC, AfDB, commercial banking



CREDIBILITY CRITERIA AND ENGAGEMENT CONDITIONS

Development partners were direct: NRIF credibility cannot be declared, it must be demonstrated. The four criteria against which NRIF will be assessed are impact (measurable outcomes, not outputs), relevance (alignment with national priorities and partner frameworks), sustainability (beyond initial funding cycles), and accountability (transparent reporting, governance, and fiduciary management).

UNDP noted that institutional micro-assessments, including financial management and governance reviews, are standard requirements before funding can be channelled through new national entities. FAO outlined structured co-financing arrangements with clear accountability expectations. WHO highlighted the importance of sustaining existing capacities over an exclusive focus on new initiatives.

PRIORITY SECTORS AND PREFERRED INSTRUMENTS

- Agri-food systems change, strengthening value chains, food safety, irrigation efficiency (FAO)
- Climate resilience, integrated research and innovation responses to environmental vulnerability
- Health, implementation research including a One Health approach (WHO)
- Financial sector development, supporting SME finance and investment readiness
- Youth-focused innovation, digital engagement and skills development (UNDP, UNICEF)

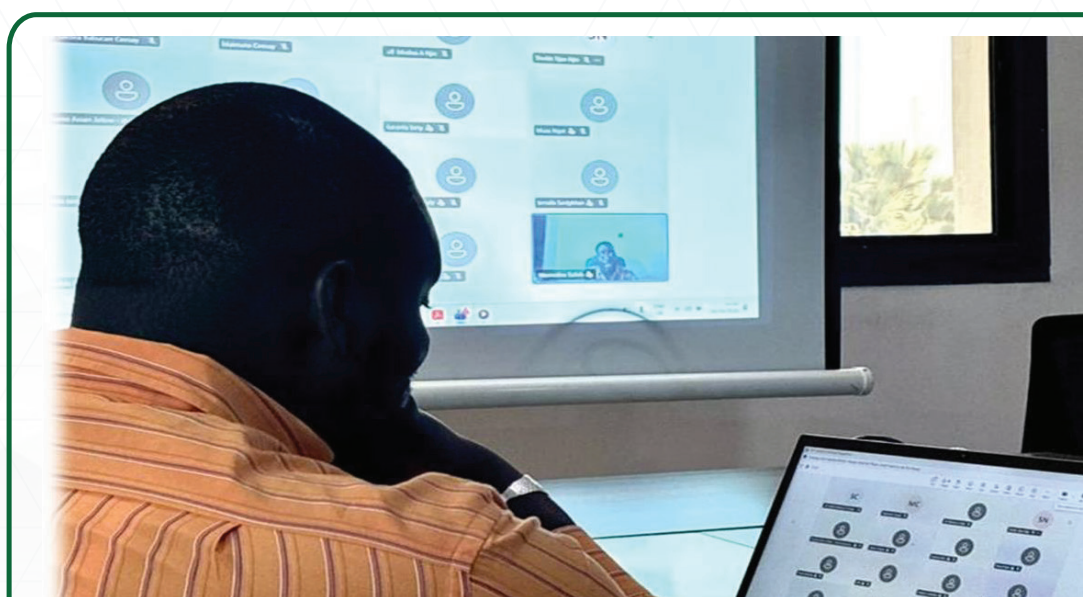
Results-based financing was the most preferred instrument; blended finance mechanisms were also strongly supported. 8 of 9 participants indicated that moderate risk is acceptable if appropriate safeguards are in place. NRIF was cautioned against proliferating new research infrastructure, but to rather optimise existing facilities. Key risks identified: unfunded mandates, limited project impact, fragmentation, weak financial management, politicisation, and limited private sector involvement.

4.13 GAMBIAN DIASPORA • SESSIONS I AND II

34 participants across two sessions

Both sessions virtual

Finance, technology, health, climate, research, education, creative industries



STRUCTURAL BARRIERS TO ENGAGEMENT

Both sessions revealed a diaspora that is willing, professionally capable, and frustrated. Participants are already attempting to engage: one described efforts to establish an MOU between his university and the University of The Gambia, stalled by the absence of an institutional contact point.

A fintech entrepreneur described bureaucratic processes and high financial requirements that made regulatory engagement effectively impossible. A transport technology innovator encountered resistance due to limited understanding of the innovation within existing structures.

Systemic barriers: absence of clear institutional entry points; limited access to reliable information about national priorities; bureaucratic delays; weak coordination across institutions; and concerns about trust and transparency accumulated over time.

PRIORITY ENGAGEMENT AREAS

Engagement Area	Selections	What This Means in Practice
Mentorship Programmes	5	Structured ongoing mentorship for students and early-career researchers, not one-off guest lectures.
Innovation Partnerships	5	Formal partnerships between diaspora professionals and local institutions on defined projects.
Co-Funding Mechanisms	4	Diaspora co-investment in NRIF-supported projects with appropriate governance.
Diaspora Research Collaboration	2	Joint research projects linking diaspora institutions with Gambian universities.
Visiting Expert Programmes	2	Structured placements within Gambian institutions for skills transfer.

Key enabling conditions: clear and transparent processes (the single most important factor); policy support; co-investment. Strategic principle established in Session II: 'Whatever the diaspora is doing must have a local partner', sustainability requires domestic institutional anchoring. A demand-driven approach was proposed: NRIF defines national priority areas first, then identifies diaspora expertise to match.

4.14 DIPLOMATIC CORPS · 16 APRIL 2026

6 missions

Facilitated discussion only

ACHPR, China, Senegal,
United Kingdom, Turkey,
Cuba

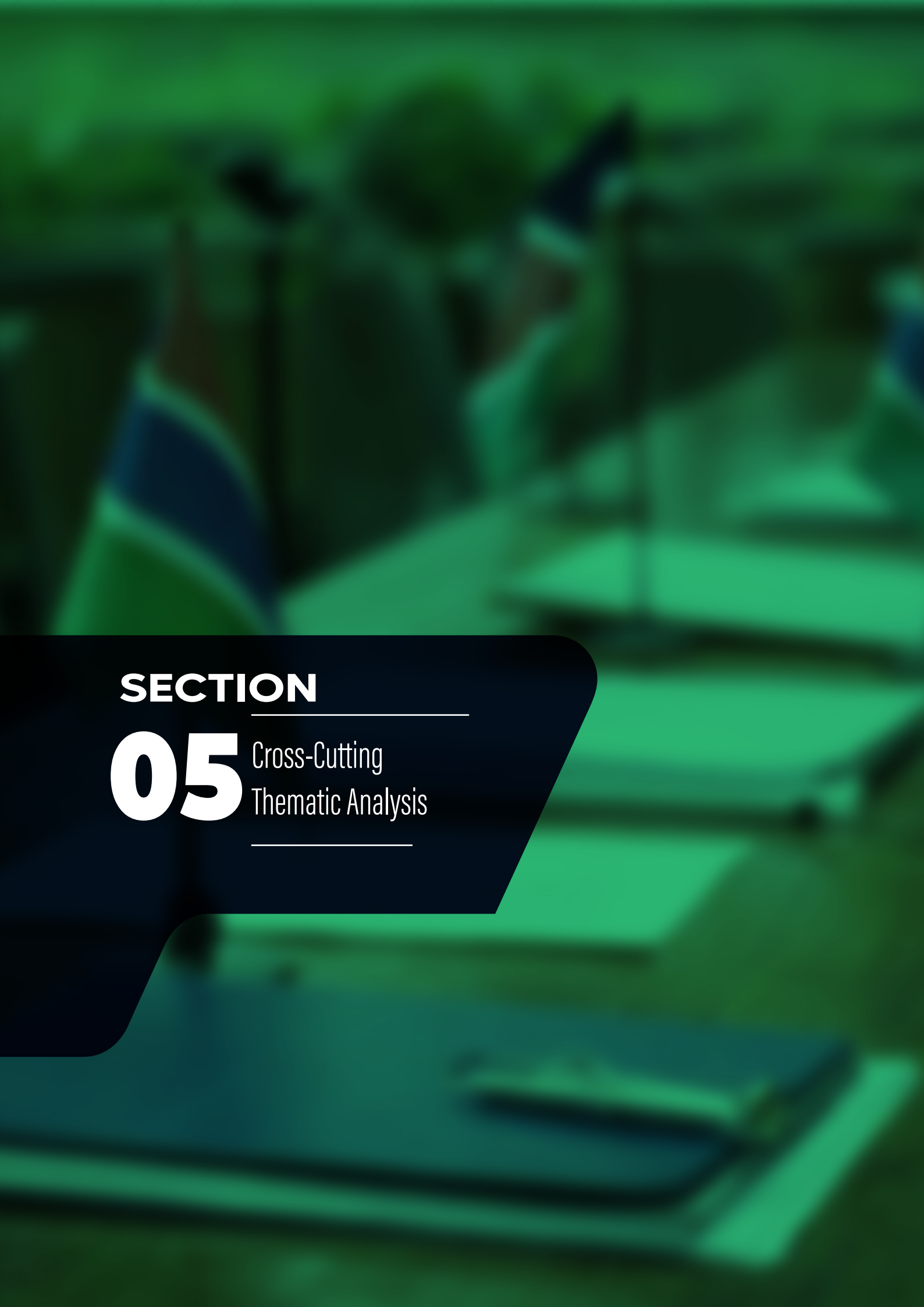


GLOBAL POSITIONING AND COLLABORATION

The dominant and recurring theme was collaboration, not isolation: The Gambia must position itself as a collaborative partner within the global research and innovation ecosystem, not as a beneficiary looking inward.

Cuba emphasised human capital development as the foundational investment. Long-term development begins with building technical and professional capacity. China emphasised the importance of adapting global practices to Gambian realities. The British High Commission stressed that partnerships must be accompanied by deliberate domestic capacity strengthening, to ensure that they are mutually beneficial. Senegal raised internet infrastructure and research centre development as physical prerequisites for international collaboration. Turkey indicated readiness to support capacity-building initiatives. The UK highlighted opportunities for expert exchange.

Limited international visibility of Gambia's research efforts was identified as a structural barrier to attracting and sustaining partnerships. Cuba made a specific point about proactively presenting national research achievements as a tool for strengthening global engagement. NRIF should position itself, and The Gambia's research and innovation sector, as an active, credible, and results-oriented contributor to regional and global knowledge networks. The characteristics that will attract serious international partners: excellence, innovation, results, integrity, and prudence.

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SECTION

05 Cross-Cutting
Thematic Analysis

CROSS-CUTTING THEMATIC ANALYSIS

The fourteen consultation sessions were conducted independently, with different stakeholder groups, different facilitation teams, and different methodological instruments. The convergence of findings across these sessions is analytically significant: themes appearing consistently across unrelated groups are not incidental, they reflect deep structural features of The Gambia's research and innovation landscape. This section synthesises those themes, analyses their analytical weight, and identifies their implications for NRIF's programme design.

Theme	Primary Sources	Signal Strength	Key Manifestations
Access to Finance	All 14 groups	Universal	Prototype-to-market financing gap; lack of predictable long-term funding; high entry barriers; SME collateral constraints; student research finance absent; TVET institutions chronically under-resourced
Data Systems and Evidence Use	Sub-Vented Agencies, Ministries, Universities, LGAs	Very strong — 10+ groups	Fragmented, outdated, inaccessible data; limited analytical capacity; weak data-to-decision pipelines across regulation, social protection, planning, and disaster response
Waste Management	Urban LGAs, Provincial LGAs, CSOs, Innovation Ecosystem	Strong — 6+ groups	Absent infrastructure; unmanageable dumping sites; public health and flooding linkages; youth employment opportunity; circular economy potential
Youth Employment and Migration	LGAs, Ministries, CSOs, Private Sector, Student Unions	Strong — 7+ groups	Irregular migration; youth excluded from programme design; skills-market mismatch; high-potential sectors: agriculture, waste, digital

Prototype Development and Commercialisation	Innovation Ecosystem, Private Sector, Student Unions, Development Partners	Clear — 5+ groups	No certified testing facilities; innovations stall before market entry; absent commercialisation support; students cannot progress beyond ideation
Research Infrastructure	Universities, Chancellors, Student Unions	Vice TVET, groups	Strong — 5+ Chronic underfunding; laboratory and equipment gaps; inaccessible facilities; sharp institutional disparities
Research–Policy Linkage	Ministries, Vented Universities	Sub-Agencies, Cross-cutting — 6+ groups	Research does not reach policymakers; externally-driven agendas; weak feedback loops between evidence, regulation, and service delivery
Coordination and Fragmentation	All groups	Universal	Siloed working; duplication; weak inter-institutional communication; no national research coordination mechanism
Capacity Building	All groups	Universal	Technical skills gaps; limited grant-writing capacity; research administration weaknesses; trainer shortages in TVET; underdeveloped postgraduate pipelines
Curriculum and Skills Alignment	TVET, Private Sector, Student Unions, Provincial LGAs	Clear — 4+ groups	TVET curricula outdated and misaligned; graduates not work-ready; skills-market gap limits productivity; TVET stigma affects enrolment quality
Diaspora and International Engagement	Diaspora, Diplomatic Corps, Development Partners	Clear — 3 groups	Absence of clear entry points; bureaucratic barriers; untapped mentorship and co-financing potential; demand for structured mechanisms

5.1 THE STRUCTURAL CHALLENGE

The most important cross-cutting finding is not a single theme but a structural observation: every component of The Gambia's research and innovation ecosystem is simultaneously underfunded, under-capacitated, and under-connected. Innovation hubs lack prototype testing infrastructure. Universities lack laboratory equipment. TVET institutions have outdated curricula and inadequate trainers. Students have ideas but no pathway from concept to prototype. Government agencies lack data systems. Local councils lack revenue.

CSOs lack coordination support. The private sector lacks reliable SME data. The diaspora lacks institutional entry points.

These are not independent problems that can be solved sequentially. They are interdependent constraints that reinforce one another. A university without research infrastructure cannot produce the applied research that agencies need. Agencies without analytical capacity cannot use evidence that universities might produce. Councils without data systems cannot plan the community programmes that CSOs could support. This systemic inter-dependence is why stakeholders across every group called not for a grant-making body, but for a system integrator.

The collective expectation placed on NRIF across all fourteen consultation sessions is clear: do not simply distribute money. Build the connective tissue of a national research and innovation ecosystem, connecting actors who do not yet work together, filling gaps that no single institution can address alone, and setting the standards of transparency and accountability that will give the ecosystem the credibility it needs to attract sustained investment.

5.2 UNIVERSAL THEMES

Five themes achieved the status of truly universal findings, raised by every significant stakeholder group across all sectors and levels of the governance hierarchy:

Access to Finance. No stakeholder group was immune from this constraint. The nature of the financing gap varies, prototype funding for innovators, research infrastructure for universities, decentralised grants for councils, risk-sharing for the private sector, but the underlying diagnosis is identical: the ecosystem is chronically underfunded and the existing funding architecture is fragmented, unpredictable, and misaligned with institutional needs.

Coordination and Fragmentation. Siloed working, duplication of effort, and weak inter-institutional communication were raised by every group. CSOs duplicate programmes without awareness of one another. Ministries do not share data or coordinate research agendas. Innovation hubs do not connect to universities. This fragmentation is both a cause of inefficiency and a symptom of absent national coordination infrastructure.

Capacity Building. Technical skills gaps, limited grant-writing capacity, research administration weaknesses, and underdeveloped postgraduate pipelines were identified across all groups. Capacity is the precondition for all other investments, without it, data systems are unused, laboratories are idle, and funding is mismanaged.

Transparency and Accountability. Across every session, from innovation hubs to the diplomatic corps, transparency in NRIF's own processes was identified as a non-negotiable precondition for participation and trust. This reflects hard experience with institutions that have not delivered on their commitments. NRIF must earn credibility through action, not assertion.

Research–Policy Disconnect. Research does not reach policymakers. Evidence does not inform enforcement. Data does not drive planning. This disconnect operates at every level, between universities and ministries, between regulatory agencies and their mandates, between community knowledge and programme design. Closing this gap is arguably NRIF's most consequential contribution to national development.

5.3 STRONG THEMES

Four additional themes achieved strong convergence across multiple unrelated stakeholder groups:

Data Systems and Evidence Infrastructure. A binding constraint on governance, planning, regulation, and service delivery. Investment in data systems is a prerequisite for evidence-based governance, and NRIF has a unique opportunity to catalyse national investment in this shared infrastructure.

Youth Employment and Irregular Migration. Raised with striking consistency across local government, civil society, ministries, the private sector, and student unions. Innovation, agriculture, waste management, and digital sectors were identified as high-potential pathways to meaningful youth employment. NRIF investments should be designed with youth employment creation as a primary, not ancillary, objective.

Waste Management as a Cross-Sectoral Development Challenge. Emerging from multiple independent sessions, urban LGAs, provincial LGAs, CSOs, and the innovation ecosystem, waste management is one of the most visible and under-addressed national challenges. It is simultaneously a public health issue, a governance failure, a youth employment opportunity, and an innovation challenge.

Curriculum and Skills Alignment. The gap between what educational institutions produce and what the labour market requires was raised independently by TVET institutions, the private sector, student unions, and provincial LGAs. This is a structural economic constraint, a structural economic constraint, and one where NRIF-funded applied research on skills-labour market alignment could have direct, practical policy impact.

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SECTION

06

NRIF Funding
Windows

FUNDING WINDOWS

The ten funding windows below are derived directly from the stakeholder consultation evidence. Each window responds to one or more cross-cutting themes identified in Section 05. Together, they constitute a portfolio-based national funding architecture that recognises the heterogeneity of the ecosystem and matches instruments to institutional maturity, capacity, and function. Note that the previous draft proposed eight windows; this version adds dedicated windows for student research and innovation, and for TVET and skills innovation, in response to the full findings from those sessions.

#	Funding Window	Primary Beneficiaries	Eligible Activities
I	Government Systems and Evidence Window	Ministries, sub-vented agencies, regulatory bodies	Integrated data platforms; research repositories; evidence systems for regulation, disaster response, social protection; applied analytics
II	Cross-Cutting Capacity Strengthening Facility	Universities, government agencies, LGAs, CSOs, innovation intermediaries	Staff training; grant-writing capacity; postgraduate fellowships; early-career researcher and specialist support
III	Research Infrastructure and Systems Window	Universities, research institutions, TVET centres	Laboratories; shared research equipment; innovation hubs; prototype testing and certification infrastructure; research management systems
IV	Innovation Lifecycle and Market Readiness Window	Innovation hubs, startups, SMEs, private sector actors	Prototype development grants; scale-up financing; market access support; commercialisation mentorship; testing and standards compliance
V	Student Research and Innovation Window	Student unions, undergraduate and postgraduate researchers	Ideation grants (GMD 50k); prototype grants (GMD 150k); pilot grants (GMD 200k); scale-up grants (GMD 300k); mentorship matching
VI	TVET and Skills Innovation Window	TVET institutions, NAFTI association	Trainer capacity building (40%); equipment modernisation (30%); curriculum development and research-informed reform (25%)
VII	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Window	All grantees and implementing partners	M&E system development; results management; independent evaluation; learning and knowledge translation platforms

VIII	Local Government and Provincial Development Window	Urban and provincial LGAs, Area Councils, community organisations	Decentralised management employment pilots; local data systems; community co-design programmes	funding; innovation; waste youth
IX	Partnerships and Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration Window	Consortia spanning universities, government, CSOs, private sector	Cross-sector partnership grants; consortium formation; university-industry linkages; collaborative and thematic research programmes	
X	Diaspora and International Collaboration Window	Gambian diaspora professionals, diplomatic partners, international institutions	Mentorship programmes; co-financing mechanisms; visiting expert placements; joint research and institutional partnerships	

6.1 DELIVERY ARCHITECTURE PRINCIPLES

The following delivery principles were collectively agreed across multiple sessions and must be embedded in NRIF's operational framework:

- Alignment with the National Development Plan for all funding allocations.
- Clearly defined funding ceilings per instrument to ensure equitable distribution.
- Explicit eligibility and affiliation criteria for all delivery channels.
- Phase-based disbursement structures linked to independently verified milestone achievement.
- A digital workflow portal enabling online application, real-time tracking, and public reporting on all funding decisions.
- For urban LGAs: mandatory channelling through Area Councils as provided by the Local Government Act.
- For innovation ecosystem: hub- and lab-based intermediation, subject to rigorous accountability standards.
- For CSOs: direct funding eligibility, alongside partner and implementer roles.
- For universities: competitive calls, thematic programme funding, and commissioned research as valid modalities, designed to build institutional equity, not compound disparities.
- For TVET: delivery through NAFTI association, with NAFTI represented on all evaluation committees.
- For student research: direct application to NRIF as primary pathway; institutional channels as secondary option for institutions meeting transparency standards.

6.2 NON-FINANCIAL SUPPORT PLATFORM

Financial instruments alone will not resolve the ecosystem's constraints. NRIF should establish four national non-financial support platforms, accessible across all funding windows:

Research and Grant Development Support. Proposal writing clinics, research management training, and M&E reporting support, building the institutional competencies that transform ideas into fundable, implementable projects.

Mentorship and Human Capital Development. Structured early-career researcher mentorship, diaspora expert mentoring, and innovation and entrepreneurship mentoring, investing in the people who will sustain the ecosystem across generations.

Partnership and Brokerage Platform. University-industry-CSO-government matching, diaspora-local institution matchmaking, and multi-stakeholder consortium formation, reducing fragmentation and maximising the use of every NRIF investment.

Visibility and Knowledge Translation. A national research dissemination platform and communication tools to demonstrate the value of Gambian research and innovation to policymakers, the public, and international partners.

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SECTION

07

Strategic
Recommendations

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

The following seven recommendations were distilled from the collective evidence and consensus generated across all fourteen consultation sessions. Each is framed to be immediately practical, appropriately sequenced, and directly traceable to the consultation evidence from which it derives. These recommendations are presented to the NRIF Board and Secretariat as the primary basis for translating the consultation process into funded programme design.

RECOMMENDATION 1 · ESTABLISH A PORTFOLIO-BASED NATIONAL FUNDING ARCHITECTURE

The Gambia's research and innovation ecosystem is profoundly heterogeneous. A single funding instrument would inevitably exclude critical actors or misalign resources with institutional needs. A portfolio-based architecture across ten funding windows enables NRIF to address multiple system gaps simultaneously; match instruments to institutional maturity and function; balance high-risk innovation investment with lower-risk systems strengthening; and build in sequencing, learning, and adaptive management over time.

RECOMMENDATION 2 · TREAT DATA SYSTEMS AND CAPACITY BUILDING AS FOUNDATIONAL INVESTMENTS

Data infrastructure and analytical capacity are preconditions for NRIF's mandate. Sub-vented agencies, ministries, universities, councils, and the private sector all identified the data-to-decision gap as a binding constraint. The Government Systems and Evidence Window should treat data collection, digitisation, storage capacity, analytical tools, and staff training as high-priority eligible activities, sequenced alongside, not after, research and innovation funding.

RECOMMENDATION 3 · REQUIRE IMPLEMENTATION AND UPTAKE PATHWAYS IN ALL FUNDED ACTIVITIES

The most consistent message from all fourteen sessions was that research must not end at publication. NRIF should require all applicants to specify who will use the findings; how results will inform policy, regulation, or service delivery; which institution carries responsibility for uptake; and what resources are allocated to translation and implementation. Projects without realistic uptake pathways should not be prioritised for funding, regardless of technical merit.

RECOMMENDATION 4 · INSTITUTIONALISE NON-FINANCIAL SUPPORT AS A NATIONAL PLATFORM

Financing alone will not address the ecosystem's structural challenges. Mentorship, capacity building, partnerships, market access, and data governance support were identified as equally important as direct financial instruments across every stakeholder group. NRIF should establish four permanent non-financial support platforms, available to all grantees and potential applicants across all funding windows, and treat them as a core programme offering, not an add-on.

RECOMMENDATION 5 · ADOPT INTERMEDIATED AND DECENTRALISED DELIVERY, WITH NON-NEGOTIABLE SAFEGUARDS

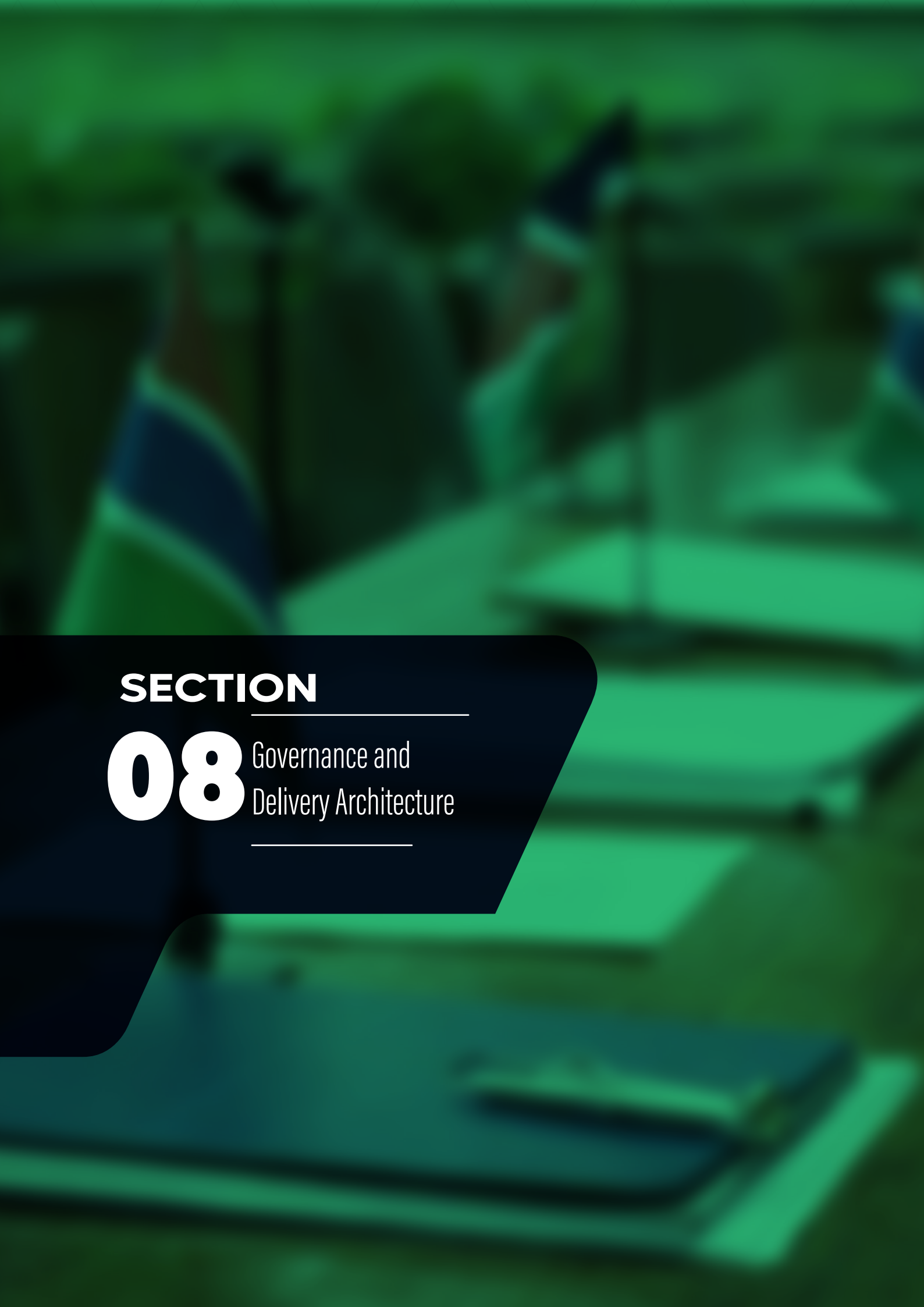
Stakeholders across multiple sessions supported intermediated delivery, subject to specific and explicit governance conditions. NRIF must implement: independent, conflict-free proposal review panels; a digital application, tracking, and reporting system with public visibility; defined funding ceilings and phased disbursement linked to verified milestones; mandatory alignment with national priorities; and independent verification and audits of grantees. Specific governance conditions established by stakeholders include: NRIF funding to LGAs must flow through Area Councils under the Local Government Act; and NRIF funding to TVET institutions must be evaluated with NAFTI representation on the assessment panel.

RECOMMENDATION 6 · FORMALISE DIASPORA AND INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT MECHANISMS

The Gambian diaspora represents a significant and largely untapped strategic asset. NRIF should establish a Diaspora and International Collaboration Window with dedicated operational mechanisms: a named focal point within the NRIF Secretariat; a published, demand-driven engagement process; and formal protocols for mentorship placements, co-financing arrangements, and joint research partnerships. International engagement should be developed through NRIF's strategic communications and results reporting, building the international visibility of Gambian research that the Diplomatic Corps identified as currently absent.

RECOMMENDATION 7 · POSITION NRIF AS THE NATIONAL SYSTEM INTEGRATOR

The most consistent expectation placed on NRIF across all fourteen sessions, from innovation hubs to the diplomatic corps, is that it should function as a national system integrator, not solely as a grant-making body. Stakeholders want NRIF to connect actors who do not yet work together; fill structural gaps no single institution can address; set and enforce standards for transparency and results; and bridge the persistent distance between evidence generation and real-world implementation. This integrative role should be the organising principle of NRIF's strategy, communications, and institutional design.

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SECTION

08

Governance and
Delivery Architecture

GOVERNANCE AND DELIVERY ARCHITECTURE

Participants across all fourteen sessions contributed to detailed discussions on how NRIF should structure its funding delivery and governance. Their contributions reflect a sophisticated understanding of the ecosystem's operational realities and. The endorsement of NRIF's approach was conditional on demonstrated fairness, transparency, and accountability.

8.1 GOVERNANCE PRINCIPLES

- Disbursement decisions must be explicitly and demonstrably linked to national development priorities, minimising discretionary or politically influenced allocation.
- All steering and oversight committees must include representatives from across the ecosystem and relevant subject-matter experts.
- Proposal review panels must be constituted with appropriate sectoral expertise, independence, and declared conflict-of-interest protocols.
- A digital workflow portal must be deployed on the NRIF website, enabling online application, real-time tracking, and public visibility of funding decisions.
- Regular public reporting on portfolio performance, funding allocations, and results, accessible to all stakeholders, is a condition of institutional legitimacy.
- Structured feedback must be provided to all applicants following proposal reviews, including unsuccessful applications.

8.2 THREE-TIER MONITORING, EVALUATION AND LEARNING FRAMEWORK

M&E must function as a core institutional capability of NRIF, serving three simultaneous functions: accountability for the use of public and partner resources; performance management for funded activities; and learning and system improvement for NRIF and the broader ecosystem.

Report Type	Timing	Purpose
Inception Report	Start of grant period	Establishes baselines, milestones, and workplan commitments.
Mid-Term Report	Mid-point of grant	Tracks progress against milestones; identifies implementation challenges and agrees course corrections.
Final Report	On grant completion	Comprehensive account of outputs, outcomes, and lessons learned; basis for independent evaluation.

Additional accountability mechanisms: independent verification and spot checks for high-value or high-risk grants; quarterly internal portfolio reviews; activity-based reporting requirements; standardised reporting templates calibrated to grant size and institutional capacity.

Actor	M&E and Governance Responsibilities
NRIF Secretariat	Operates the M&E and grants management system; provides technical guidance to grantees; consolidates results and reports to the Board on portfolio performance; manages the digital transparency portal.
Grantees and Implementing Partners	Monitor and report against agreed indicators and milestones; maintain accurate financial and programmatic records; participate in learning reviews and verification exercises.
NRIF Board / Portfolio Oversight Committee	Reviews portfolio performance at scheduled intervals; uses evidence to adjust funding priorities and adapt delivery modalities; ensures strategic coherence across all funding windows.
Independent Evaluators	Conduct spot checks for high-value or high-risk grants; undertake independent evaluations of selected thematic programmes to assess impact and value for money.
Stakeholders and Civil Society	Provide ongoing feedback through structured engagement channels; contribute to learning reviews; hold NRIF publicly accountable through transparent access to funding decisions and results.

8.4 OPERATIONAL STANDARDS

Timeliness. Acknowledgement, decision notification, and disbursement within clearly published and consistently observed timelines.

Consistency. Equal application of eligibility criteria, assessment standards, and reporting requirements across all applicants.

Proportionality. Reporting and compliance requirements calibrated to grant size and institutional capacity, the same burden cannot be placed on a small CSO and a major university.

Responsiveness. Accessible contact points and structured feedback mechanisms for applicants at every stage.

Learning Culture. Systematic documentation and dissemination of lessons from funded activities, ensuring that what NRIF learns through implementation is shared with the broader ecosystem.



SECTION

09

Conclusion and Next Steps

CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

This report is the consolidated evidence base from fourteen consultation sessions conducted over thirty-one days across The Gambia. It represents the considered views of one hundred and seventy-seven stakeholders from one hundred and eight institutions, practitioners, leaders, students, communities, researchers, and international partners, on what the country needs from a national research and innovation fund.

The evidence is clear, consistent, and in several respects urgent. Every component of the ecosystem is simultaneously underfunded, under-capacitated, and under-connected. The challenges are systemic and mutually reinforcing. Addressing funding without building capacity will not work. Building capacity without connecting actors will not work. Connecting actors without transparency and accountability will not work. The ecosystem needs a system integrator: an institution that operates at the level of the whole.

Five findings carry particular weight. First: the data-to-decision gap is a national governance failure that NRIF is uniquely positioned to address. Second: prototype development and testing infrastructure is the most acute bottleneck in the innovation pipeline. Third: youth employment and irregular migration are the human cost of an economy that does not yet fully harness its young people's productive capacity, NRIF investments in innovation, agriculture, skills, and TVET must be designed explicitly to change this. Fourth: student research and TVET represent an under-invested gateway to national innovation, the 100% participation rates at both sessions signal a sector with motivation, ideas, and acute need. Fifth: transparency is not a procedural preference, it is the single most important factor determining whether stakeholders across every group will trust, engage with, and invest in NRIF.

Stakeholders were clear: the value of this consultation process will be measured by the quality of the action that follows. They expect their inputs to be reflected in NRIF's funding windows, operational guidelines, and governance arrangements. They expect to be engaged on a continuing basis. And they expect NRIF to report back, openly and honestly, on how their contributions shaped what was built.

Action	Responsible	Timeline
Circulate this report to all consulted stakeholders for validation and comment	NRIF Secretariat	Within 2 weeks of publication
Follow up with the 23% of invited participants who were unable to attend sessions	NRIF Secretariat	Within 4 weeks
Establish formal stakeholder engagement calendar and communication channels	NRIF Secretariat	Within 6 weeks
Translate priority findings into draft funding window designs and eligibility criteria	NRIF Programme Team	Within 6 weeks
Convene national stakeholder validation workshop to review draft programme framework	NRIF Management	Within 10 weeks
Publish finalised funding framework on NRIF website with full stakeholder acknowledgement	NRIF Secretariat	Within 14 weeks
Commission independent review of funding window designs against the stakeholder evidence base	NRIF Board	Within 12 weeks

Prepared by the NRIF Secretariat

National Research and Innovation Fund · Republic of The Gambia · May 2026

For further information or to provide feedback on this report, please contact the NRIF Secretariat.