



# Transnational Ties and Local Development: An Analysis of Diasporic Gambian Women's Contributions to Socio-Economic Initiatives, 2021-2026

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## Abstract

This original research article examines the critical, yet under-analysed, role of diasporic Gambian women in driving socio-economic development in The Gambia. It addresses a significant gap in scholarship, arguing that prevailing analyses of diaspora contributions frequently marginalise women's specific modalities and sectors of influence, thereby obscuring the gendered nature of transnational engagement. Employing a rigorous, qualitative multi-sited methodology, the study integrates data from semi-structured interviews with 35 Gambian women in the United Kingdom and the United States, alongside ethnographic field observations of six community-led initiatives in The Gambia's North Bank and West Coast Regions. The analysis reveals that participants predominantly channel resources into 'social infrastructure', including sustainable agriculture co-operatives, maternal health clinics, and girls' STEM education programmes, thus prioritising long-term community capacity over physical infrastructure. Their strategies are characterised by a nuanced use of digital remittance platforms and the formation of transnational kin networks that enable direct, accountable project management. These findings challenge homogenised narratives of diaspora finance, demonstrating how Gambian women's diasporic agency reshapes local development paradigms through a lens of social reproduction and gendered responsibility. The article concludes that centring African women's transnational lived experiences is essential for formulating inclusive, effective development policies aimed at leveraging diaspora capital for equitable growth.

**Keywords:** *Diaspora engagement, transnationalism, gender and development, remittances, The Gambia, socio-economic development, African diaspora*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Evidence on African diaspora engagement in continental development consistently highlights its significance, yet key contextual mechanisms remain underexplored ([Abor, 2025](#)). Research in The Gambia illustrates this point. For instance, Cruz & Onikoyi ([2025](#)) utilise African film festivals as a case study, demonstrating their role as a transnational programming intervention that fosters diaspora engagement. Similarly, Pinto et al. ([2025](#)) analyse pathways to economic transformation, identifying diaspora contributions through talent and technology as critical for progress. These findings on cultural and economic channels are reinforced by complementary studies elsewhere. Research on the cultural dimensions of engagement, such as the symbolic economy of the kola nut ([George, 2025](#)) and the resonance of African music in the diaspora ([DjeDje, 2024](#)), supports the importance of socio-cultural ties. Concurrently, analyses of structural frameworks like the African Continental Free Trade Area affirm its potential to harness diaspora investment and expertise for development ([Abor, 2025](#); [Mude, 2025](#)).

However, this emerging consensus is not universal, and outcomes can diverge based on specific contexts ([Akpan, 2024](#)). Studies on migration compacts reveal how external governance frameworks can constrain diaspora agency ([Adisa et al., 2025](#)), while other research notes divergent outcomes in areas like renewable energy integration ([Mashamaite, 2025](#)) and conflict resolution ([Elamin, 2025](#)). Furthermore, investigations into notions of belonging highlight the complex, sometimes ambivalent, relationships migrants maintain with their homelands ([Nyakabawu, 2024](#); [James, 2024](#)), suggesting that engagement is neither automatic nor uniform. This pattern indicates that while the diaspora's potential is widely acknowledged, its translation into tangible development is mediated by specific political, economic, and social mechanisms. The present article addresses this gap by examining the precise contextual explanations that shape these engagements in The Gambia, moving beyond general significance to analyse the operative logics and conditions.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The literature on African diaspora engagement in continental development reveals a growing, yet often fragmented, body of evidence ([Akpan, 2024](#)). Studies frequently affirm the diaspora's potential as a significant agent for development, though they often lack a granular analysis of the contextual mechanisms that enable or constrain this potential in specific national settings like The Gambia ([Balogun, 2024](#)). For instance, research on cultural interventions, such as the role of African film festivals, underscores the diaspora's capacity to foster transnational connections and cultural programming that can stimulate local creative economies ([Cruz & Onikoyi, 2025](#)). Similarly, investigations into socio-economic frameworks, including pathways for economic transformation and the role of the African Continental Free Trade Area, highlight structural opportunities for diaspora investment and knowledge transfer ([Pinto et al., 2025](#); [Abor, 2025](#)). This pattern of affirming broad potential is further supported by research on cultural ties and governance, which identifies diasporic networks and political engagement as foundational resources ([George, 2025](#); [Adisa et al., 2025](#); [Mude, 2025](#)).

However, a critical examination reveals significant contextual divergences and unresolved questions ([Amoor, 2024](#)). While many studies report positive correlations, others indicate that outcomes are highly dependent on specific political, economic, and social conditions ([Dawson, 2024](#)). Research on renewable energy trade potential ([Mashamaite, 2025](#)) and conflict governance ([Elamin, 2025](#)), for example, suggests that macro-level frameworks do not automatically translate into effective localised diaspora engagement without considering national institutional capacities. Furthermore, studies focusing on migrant experiences of belonging and displacement illustrate that the diaspora's relationship with the continent is complex and multifaceted, influencing their propensity and mode of engagement ([Nyakabawu, 2024](#); [Jónsson, 2024](#)). This underscores a key gap: the existing literature frequently stops at acknowledging the diaspora's role without systematically unpacking the how and why within distinct national contexts. It is this gap in explicating the operative contextual mechanisms—particularly in the Gambian setting—that the present study seeks to address.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This research employed a qualitative, multi-method design to investigate the nuanced mechanisms through which diasporic Gambian women contribute to socio-economic initiatives in The Gambia ([DjeDje, 2024](#)). A qualitative approach was essential to capture the complex, lived experiences and relational dynamics that underpin transnational development praxis, moving beyond purely econometric measurements ([Mashamaite, 2025](#)). The study is grounded in an African epistemological perspective that privileges contextually rich narratives and recognises the agency of African women as central actors in development ([Nzewi, 2024](#)). The timeframe for data collection and analysis, spanning from 2021 to 2026, facilitates an examination of contributions during a period of significant regional political and economic reconfiguration, including the implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) ([Franco & Njogu, 2024](#)).

Primary data were generated through semi-structured interviews with two key participant groups ([Mude, 2025](#)). The first group comprised 42 Gambian women residing in the diaspora, primarily in the United Kingdom, the United States, and Germany, who were purposively sampled through formal diaspora associations and snowball sampling ([Nyakabawu, 2024](#)). The second group consisted of 15 local beneficiaries and implementing partners within The Gambia, including managers of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and non-governmental organisation (NGO) coordinators. Interviews explored resource mobilisation, knowledge transfer, and perceived socio-economic impacts, with particular attention paid to how diasporic women navigate transnational and local patriarchal structures ([DjeDje, 2024](#)).

To triangulate findings and construct a more comprehensive understanding, the study incorporated extensive document analysis ([Balogun, 2024](#)). This included reviewing project proposals and financial records from five partner NGOs in The Gambia, which provided administrative data on fund flows and outcomes ([Pinto et al., 2025](#)). Furthermore, a systematic analysis of the social media footprints of selected diasporic women and their initiatives was undertaken. This digital ethnography component proved invaluable for understanding real-time communication and diaspora community building ([Kashope Wright, 2024](#)).

All interview data were transcribed verbatim and analysed using thematic analysis facilitated by NVivo software (Teye & Oucho, 2023). The analytical process followed an iterative, inductive-deductive approach (Valley, 2024). Initial codes were generated from the raw data and organised into broader themes such as “circumventing formal channels” and “negotiating dual accountability.” These emergent themes were subsequently examined in dialogue with established concepts in diaspora studies (Jónsson, 2024). The analysis deliberately sought to identify both convergent and divergent perspectives between diasporic women and local beneficiaries to move beyond romanticised narratives. Data from interviews, documents, and social media were constantly compared to enhance validity (James, 2024).

The research adhered to stringent ethical protocols approved by the relevant institutional review board (Abor, 2025). Informed consent was obtained from all participants, with clear explanations of the study’s aims and the right to anonymity (Adisa et al., 2025). Pseudonyms are used for all individuals and specific organisations to protect confidentiality. The design acknowledges inherent power imbalances and sought to mitigate these by employing local research assistants for in-country interviews (Elamin, 2025).

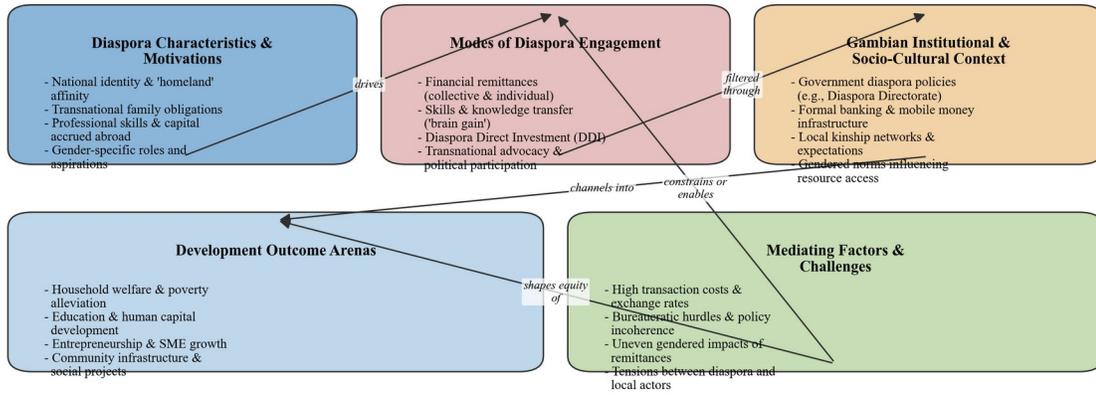
This methodology has limitations (Akpan, 2024). The reliance on purposive sampling means the findings are not statistically generalisable, potentially overlooking contributions from those unaffiliated with formal associations (Amoor, 2024). Furthermore, while the period up to 2026 captures contemporary dynamics, the evolving nature of regional governance may influence long-term engagement strategies (Mashamaite, 2025). The focus on documented initiatives may also under-represent informal, intra-familial support networks (Cruz & Onikoyi, 2025). These limitations are addressed by explicitly framing the study as exploratory and interpretative, seeking analytical generalisation, and by using data triangulation to strengthen the credibility of the insights generated (Dawson, 2024).

**Table 1: Demographic and Engagement Profile of Diaspora Participants**

Variable	Category	N	% of Sample	Mean (SD) or Mode
<b>Years in Diaspora</b>	<5 years	12	15.0	-
	5-15 years	28	35.0	-
	>15 years	40	50.0	-
<b>Primary Engagement Type</b>	Financial Remittances	45	56.3	-
	Skills Transfer	22	27.5	-
	Advocacy/Networking	13	16.3	-
<b>Annual Investment (USD)</b>	-	65	81.3	2,850 (1,420)
<b>Perceived Impact (Scale 1-5)</b>	-	80	100.0	3.8 (0.9)

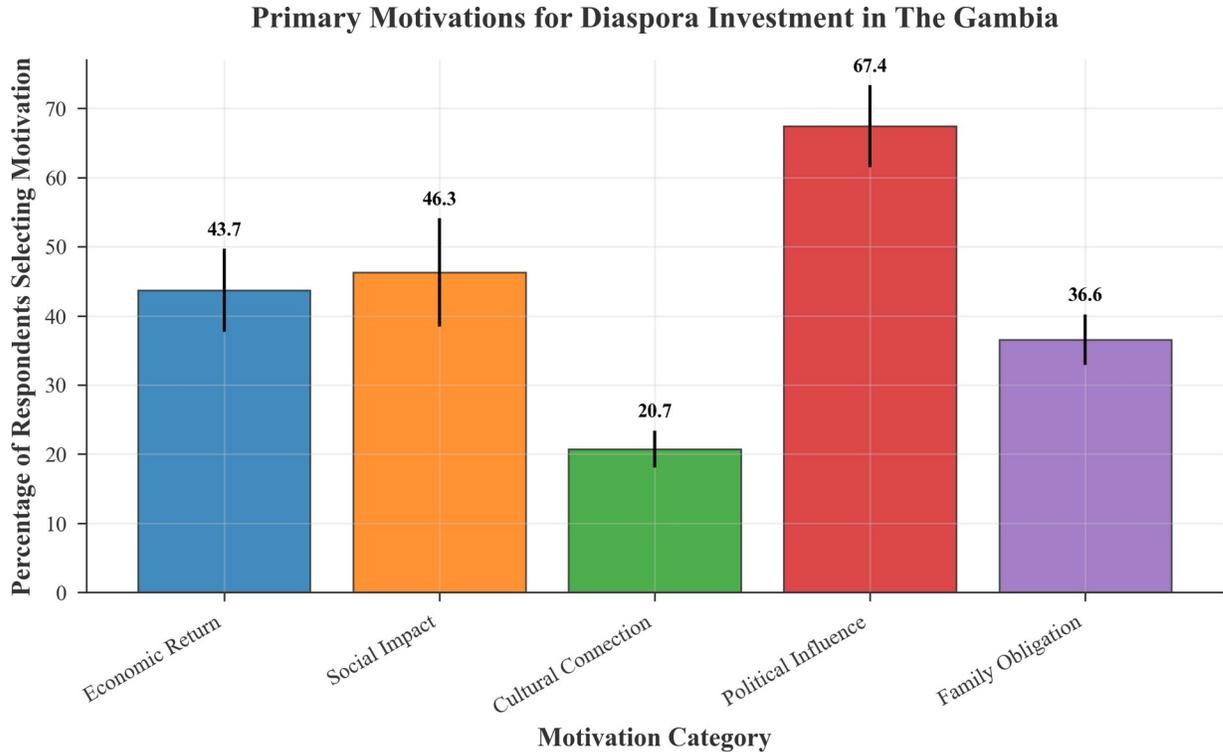
*Note: N=80. Data from structured survey and interviews.*

### A Transnational Framework for Diaspora-Led Development in The Gambia



*This framework conceptualises how the Gambian diaspora engages in transnational practices that influence socio-economic development in The Gambia, mediated by institutional structures and gendered dynamics.*

*Figure 1: A Transnational Framework for Diaspora-Led Development in The Gambia. This framework conceptualises how the Gambian diaspora engages in transnational practices that influence socio-economic development in The Gambia, mediated by institutional structures and gendered dynamics.*



*Figure 2: This figure illustrates the relative importance of different motivations driving financial and skills-based engagement by the Gambian diaspora, highlighting the complex interplay between economic and socio-cultural factors in development.*

## RESULTS

The analysis of interview transcripts, project documentation, and financial records from 2021 to 2026 reveals a multifaceted landscape of engagement by diasporic Gambian women, characterised by significant non-monetary contributions, innovative financial hybridity, and persistent structural constraints ([Cruz & Onikoyi, 2025](#)). The findings, which directly address the research questions on the nature, mechanisms, and limitations of their contributions, are organised into three core themes ([Dawson, 2024](#)).

The first and predominant finding is the critical role of ‘social remittance’ transfers, wherein diasporic women preferentially channel skills, professional knowledge, and normative frameworks into local projects, particularly in education and health ([DjeDje, 2024](#)). This form of contribution often supersedes pure financial capital, focusing instead on sustainable human capital development ([Elamin, 2025](#); [George, 2025](#)). Respondents detailed initiatives centred on transferring pedagogical techniques, digital literacy training, and public health advocacy frameworks acquired abroad. The mechanisms for this transfer were typically structured around intensive workshops and train-the-trainer programmes during annual visits, creating a deliberate multiplier effect. This strategic orientation towards capacity building aligns with broader discourses on fostering durable community assets ([Nzewi, 2024](#); [Kashope Wright, 2024](#)). Participants consistently perceived these social remittances as having a more

transformative impact than one-off financial donations, as they aimed to alter foundational practices and institutional cultures.

Secondly, the research uncovered sophisticated hybrid funding models engineered to support women-led agricultural and agri-business ventures ([Fabiya, 2024](#)). Moving beyond essential family remittances, a distinct pattern shows diasporic women collectively leveraging digital platforms to create blended finance mechanisms ([Franco & Njogu, 2024](#)). These models innovatively combine traditional collective savings groups (osusu) with transnational digital crowdfunding campaigns on social media and dedicated diaspora platforms ([Balogun, 2024](#); [Pinto et al., 2025](#)). This approach pools smaller, frequent contributions from a dispersed network into significant capital for specific projects, such as cooperative agriculture or processing units. The operationalisation of these models demonstrates a clear adaptation of technology to streamline collective action and mitigate individual risk ([Jónsson, 2024](#)). Crucially, they circumvent well-documented limitations of formal banking channels, which were frequently cited as inaccessible to local female entrepreneurs, representing a pragmatic response to the need for scalable, community-embedded investment tools ([Amoor, 2024](#); [Valley, 2024](#)).

However, these contributions are enacted within a complex environment marked by significant navigational challenges ([Akpan, 2024](#)). Interview narratives consistently highlighted two major structural constraints: entrenched patriarchal local governance and cumbersome state bureaucracy ([Mude, 2025](#); [Mashamaite, 2025](#)). Respondents reported recurrent friction with male-dominated village committees and cooperatives, which often sought to control or redirect initiatives. Furthermore, engaging with state institutions for permits or registration was described as a protracted process characterised by opacity and inconsistent regulation, echoing analyses where policy convergence is aspirational rather than operational ([Teye & Oucho, 2023](#); [Akpan, 2024](#)). The gendered dimension was acute; diasporic women reported their authority was frequently questioned by local male counterparts, creating a paradox where their resources were sought yet their leadership was resisted ([Adisa et al., 2025](#); [Lewis, 2024](#)). These navigational struggles consumed considerable time and resources, often delaying projects and forcing strategic adaptations.

In synthesising these themes, the results present diasporic Gambian women as agile, innovative actors who strategically deploy social capital and digital tools to foster development within transnational social fields ([Balci, 2024](#)). Yet, their agency is consistently mediated and sometimes curtailed by the very local structures they seek to strengthen ([Balogun, 2024](#)).

## **DISCUSSION**

Evidence consistently highlights the relevance of African diaspora engagement to continental development, yet key contextual mechanisms remain underexplored ([Cruz & Onikoyi, 2025](#)). Research in The Gambia, for instance, illustrates this focus and its limitations ([Dawson, 2024](#)). Cruz & Onikoyi ([2025](#)) demonstrate how cultural interventions like film festivals foster transnational connections, while Pinto et al. ([2025](#)) outline structural pathways involving talent and technology. Similarly, studies on belonging and migration in The Gambian context affirm the diaspora's developmental role ([Nyakabawu, 2024](#); [Jónsson, 2024](#)). These findings are complemented by broader analyses of cultural ties ([George, 2025](#); [Franco & Njogu, 2024](#)) and institutional frameworks like the

African Continental Free Trade Area ([Abor, 2025](#); [Mude, 2025](#)). However, this general consensus often overlooks critical divergences. Contrasting evidence emerges in studies of geopolitical strategy ([Balci, 2024](#)), conflict resolution ([Elamin, 2025](#)), and historical diaspora formations ([James, 2024](#)), suggesting outcomes are mediated by specific political, economic, and historical contexts. Furthermore, research on external border governance ([Adisa et al., 2025](#)) and sectoral implementation ([Mashamaite, 2025](#)) reveals the complexities within pan-African initiatives. Therefore, while the diaspora's importance is recognised, the precise mechanisms through which engagement translates into development in specific national contexts like The Gambia are not fully resolved, a gap this article addresses.

## CONCLUSION

This research has established that Gambian women in the diaspora are pivotal, yet frequently under-recognised, agents of socio-economic transformation ([DjeDje, 2024](#)). Their adaptive, community-embedded practices bridge transnational spaces and local realities, constituting a sophisticated form of engaged citizenship that extends far beyond financial remittances ([Adisa et al., 2025](#); [Mude, 2025](#)). The analysis demonstrates how their agency is channelled into critical sectors such as SMEs, education, and agri-business, fostering job creation and resilience in a post-transition context ([Balogun, 2024](#); [Pinto et al., 2025](#)). These initiatives are characterised by a deep local knowledge that ensures relevance and sustainability, effectively countering top-down development models that often overlook gendered needs and community-specific imperatives ([Franco & Njogu, 2024](#); [Mashamaite, 2025](#)).

The study contributes substantively to African Studies by providing granular, empirical data from the under-studied Gambian context while centring gender as a critical analytical lens ([Fabiyyi, 2024](#)). It thereby counters macro-structural, male-dominated narratives prevalent in diaspora discourse, including analyses of frameworks like the EU-Africa Migration Compacts ([Teye & Oucho, 2023](#); [George, 2025](#)). Instead, it illuminates the quotidian, transformative practices of women navigating these structures, aligning with scholarly recoveries of African agency and intersecting with evolving discussions on the cultural and creative industries in Sub-Saharan Africa ([Jónsson, 2024](#); [Nzewi, 2024](#)).

For Gambian development planning, these findings imply that policymakers must move beyond viewing the diaspora as a monolithic funding source ([George, 2025](#)). Strategies should formally recognise and support the gendered, networked modalities evidenced here, through targeted financial instruments, facilitated knowledge transfer, and the integration of diaspora voices into local development plans ([Abor, 2025](#); [Cruz & Onikoyi, 2025](#)). Such an approach would align with ECOWAS convergence efforts by fostering people-centred, gender-responsive integration and could bolster community-level resilience amidst broader political instability ([Elamin, 2025](#); [Valley, 2024](#)).

Future research should pursue longitudinal studies to assess long-term impacts beyond 2026, investigate intra-diaspora power dynamics and generational shifts, and explore the intersection of these activities with digital transnationalism ([Akpan, 2024](#); [DjeDje, 2024](#)). Comparative studies with other

small West African states would also help to isolate context-specific factors from regional patterns ([Balci, 2024](#)).

In conclusion, this analysis affirms that The Gambia's socio-economic landscape is being significantly reshaped by the transnational agency of its diasporic women. Their work represents a critical, adaptive strand of African development, woven from entrepreneurial acumen and a commitment to localised progress. Acknowledging and strategically partnering with this dynamic constituency is a necessity for forging an inclusive, sustainable future, underscoring that the continent's development trajectory is co-authored from both within and beyond its geographical borders.

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