

**SPEECH DELIVERED BY  
HIS EXCELLENCY, THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF THE GAMBIA,  
MR. ADAMA BARROW,  
AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE MINISTERIAL PROJECT STEERING  
COMMITTEE MEETING AND THE 8<sup>TH</sup> IN-PERSON REGIONAL WORKSHOP OF  
THE ACE IMPACT PROJECT.**

**VENUE: SDKJ ICC, BIJLO**

**DATE: 15 NOVEMBER 2022**

His Lordship, the Chief Justice,  
Honourable Ministers of the ACE Impact Beneficiary Countries,  
Honourable Ministers of the Republic of The Gambia,  
National Assembly Members,  
Members of the Diplomatic and Consular Corps,  
The World Bank Country Director,  
The Secretary-General of the Association of African Universities,  
Vice-Chancellors, Centre Leaders, and Representatives from Centres of Excellence,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my singular honour and privilege to personally welcome you all to the **Eighth (8<sup>th</sup>) ACE Impact Regional Workshop**. I especially welcome the international guests in our midst to The Gambia and urge you to make the most of your stay in our beloved country, the Smiling Coast of Africa.

As a Member State of ECOWAS, The Gambia is not only pleased to participate in this important regional event, but also grateful and happy to partner with the World Bank, through ECOWAS, to be at the centre of such a potentially impactful initiative.

As the African continent continues to redress its capacity gaps, particularly in the area of human resource development, nothing is more relevant than working towards building the capacity of African universities.

Doing so empowers them to competently contribute to addressing the continent's development challenges.

Incidentally, this workshop is organised at a time when my government is making concerted efforts to transform our higher education system through reforms that would put the youth at the forefront of national development.

Specific to the ACE Project, The Gambia is working towards establishing a full-fledged Centre of Excellence in Science, Technology, and Engineering for Entrepreneurship. The purpose for this focus is obvious; we need adequate human capital that is equipped with entrepreneurial mindsets to match our development strides and aspirations.

We are eager, and cannot wait, to graduate our first home-grown engineers who are able and ready to move and provide solutions to local and international industries. This is a vision I share with all of my colleagues in West Africa and Djibouti. Together, we are optimistic key beneficiaries of the ACE Impact Project.

Ladies and gentlemen, The Gambia's education reform endeavours put due emphasis on hands-on education and training. To push this agenda forward, my government, through the Ministry of Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology, is setting up regional skills centres with the required accompanying curriculum for technical education and training.

In the same vein, besides strengthening the existing tertiary institutions, we are committed to expanding opportunities in the Applied Sciences at the new University of Applied Sciences, Engineering, and Technology (USET).

Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Through this project, we can certainly lay a solid foundation for this new university, focusing primarily on the emerging Centre of Excellence in Science, Technology, and Engineering for Entrepreneurship.

It is gratifying and quite reassuring that, already, USET has enrolled two cohorts of students in electrical, electronics, civil, and mechanical engineering. Entrepreneurship training is an integral part of the curriculum in each of these disciplines.

The ongoing PhD training and mentorship of Gambians, which is part of the project, is a step in the right direction. Among other things, it ensures sustainability of the much desired administrative and leadership roles that USET has to fulfil.

On behalf of the Government and People of The Gambia, I thank the World Bank, the Association of African Universities, and the Ministerial and Steering Committees of the ACE Impact Project for our participation in this worthwhile venture. Thank you all for giving our dear nation the opportunity to create new development paths nationally and, specifically, within the education sector.

This is a major capital project that will address the current skill gaps and human resource requirements of various sectors of development in the country.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

Higher education is a critical factor for development. For this reason, I am convinced that the discussions that will be held during the workshop will provide realistic recommendations and solutions to the current health, economic, and food-security challenges of our respective countries.

I must re-iterate that the continent relies heavily on you, the academics, researchers and policymakers, to pave the way for a better Africa. As such, I entreat you to regard higher education as an investment. I invite the World Bank also to support the Government's development agenda on Technical and Vocational Education and Training in order to address the rural-urban drift within the country and the involvement of our youth in irregular migration.

Distinguished Personalities,

We highly appreciate such regional initiatives as the ACE Impact Project. The continent needs support for our respective national priority needs. Through the Centres of Excellence, we can do a lot towards delivering the African continent we need and dream to develop. Obviously, with lots more similar projects, we will produce the competent mass of human capital to ensure national resilience and preparedness to take bigger strides.

Against this backdrop, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, it is now my singular privilege to declare the **Eighth (8<sup>th</sup>) ACE Impact Regional Workshop** officially open.

I wish you successful deliberations.