

## **(The) Gambia**

**Last updated: 31-01-2004**

### **Location and area**

The Gambia is a republic on the western coast of Africa, surrounded on the north, east, and south by Senegal, and bounded on the west by the Atlantic Ocean. The country has an area of 11,295 km<sup>2</sup>. (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

### **Topography**

The country extends for about 320 km inland from the Atlantic Ocean on both sides of the lower River Gambia. It is only some 50 km wide at its widest point and just 3 km wide at its narrowest, on the coast. The river is lined with mangrove swamps. (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

### **Climate**

The Gambia has a subtropical climate with two distinct seasons: hot and wet; and cool and dry. During the cool season, from December to April, the hot, dry, dusty winds of the harmattan blow from the Sahara. Rainfall during this season is light and humidity moderate. The rainy season lasts from June to October. Temperatures during the year range from 7° to 43° C. The average annual rainfall is about 1,300 mm. (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

### **Land use**

The soil is mostly poor and sandy, except in the riverine swamps. A relatively densely populated country, The Gambia has lost 90 % of its original forests. Approximately one-sixth of the land is arable. The economy is dependent largely on the production of a single crop, the peanut. As rainfall has dropped 30 % since 1960, salt water has intruded further upriver, causing agricultural lands to become saline, and desertification has increased (Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia 2002).

### **Wetlands**

The Gambia Basin in The Gambia, Senegal, and Guinea, covers a total area of 70,000 km<sup>2</sup> of which 1,042 km<sup>2</sup> of swamps (of which 33,5 km<sup>2</sup> are cultivated) and 670 km<sup>2</sup> of mangroves ([www.africanfront.com/water\\_sheds/water\\_sheds2/water\\_sheds3.php](http://www.africanfront.com/water_sheds/water_sheds2/water_sheds3.php)).

Mangrove swamps dominate in the lower reaches of the river, with raffia/reed swamps above the limit of saline intrusion. The marshes are dominated by large stands of *Phragmites karka* ([http://home3.inet.tele.dk/mcamara/nature/bao\\_bolong.html](http://home3.inet.tele.dk/mcamara/nature/bao_bolong.html)).

### **Peatlands**

According to the interpreted World Soil Map (Van Engelen & Huting 2002) no histosols exist in the Gambia and 264 km<sup>2</sup> of gley soils.