

Report on the 7th Edition of the Financial Afrik Awards (FAA)

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Introduction



The Gambia took centre stage in Africa's financial calendar as it hosted the 7th edition of the Financial Afrik Awards (FAA) from 22 to 23 January 2026 at the Sir Dawda Kairaba Jawara International Conference Centre. The two-day gathering, officially opened by President Adama Barrow, brought together senior cabinet ministers, regional governors, security chiefs, heads of institutions, financial leaders, business executives, development partners, and investors from across the continent and beyond, positioning the country as a growing hub for dialogue on finance, investment, and economic transformation.

Held under the theme "Public–Private Partnerships (PPPs) as an Alternative to Public Debt," the Awards and Summit highlighted practical and innovative financing models to help African countries bridge critical infrastructure gaps while safeguarding fiscal sustainability. For The Gambia, the theme resonated strongly with ongoing national priorities, as the government has increasingly embraced PPPs to deliver key projects in energy, ports, and urban development, including independent power generation initiatives and private sector participation in port services.

These partnerships reflect the country's broader strategy of leveraging private capital and expertise to accelerate development, reduce pressure on public finances, and ensure more efficient delivery of essential infrastructure and services.

Background

Since its inception in 2018, the Financial Afrik Awards have evolved into a premier continental platform for strategic dialogue, partnership building, and the recognition of African excellence. The 2026 edition featured ministerial panels, Africa–Arab World roundtables, investment forums, and structured networking sessions, culminating in a Gala Dinner honouring "The 100 Who Are Transforming Africa."

Discussions centred on PPP execution models, Islamic finance instruments such as Sukuk, Africa–Gulf cooperation, and the scaling of bankable projects in energy, transport, digital infrastructure, agriculture, and housing. A dedicated "Invest in The Gambia" segment showcased the country's growing profile as a regional investment hub, supported by reforms, strong investor protection frameworks, and emerging opportunities in tourism, energy, logistics, agribusiness, and the digital economy.

The Gambia today stands among West Africa's most promising investment platforms a strategic access point to the 400-million-person ECOWAS market, at the crossroads of trade routes linking Europe, the Middle East, and Africa. With strengthened macroeconomic stability and a pro-private-sector vision, the country offers a compelling environment combining market access, legal certainty, and long-term reform momentum.









Key institutional frameworks through GIEPA include:

- Strong investment-protection laws
- Competitive fiscal incentives
- Investor one-stop facilitation mechanisms
- Commitment to PPPs
- Industrial upgrading and export-growth strategy

Key sectors highlighted:

- Tourism & hospitality
- Energy & hydrocarbons
- Logistics & trade infrastructure
- Digital economy & services
- Agriculture & agribusiness
- Real estate & special economic zones

During the Financial Afrik Awards, GIEPA presented:

- Investment-ready project pipeline
- Tourism, energy, agriculture & services opportunities
- Special economic zone programs
- Strategic partnership models

Objective: Positioning The Gambia as a competitive, open, and future-oriented investment destination.

Program Highlights

Opening Remarks



President Adama Barrow commended the Financial Afrik Awards committee for choosing The Gambia to host the event, highlighting the strategic positioning of the country to Africa and the world. He outlined his government's commitment to building infrastructures that open avenues for investors to venture into the country.

President Barrow emphasised the continent's challenges in public-private partnerships, noting that Africa and the Arab world share deep historical ties and complementary strengths. He stated:
"The Arab-Africa round table and the investment forum in the Gambia are designed precisely to strengthen these progressions by bringing together policy leadership, finance institutions, and private investors to deliberate around concrete implementable projects. Turning attention to The Gambia, let me state that we are strategically positioning the country as a PPP-driven investment destination."

Social entrepreneur and global youth advocate Thione Niang urged African leaders to empower the continent's young population:
"We cannot live in a continent where everybody else controls the economy but us. In the private sector, if you look at telecom, agriculture, infrastructure whatever you name the leading people in many of those countries are everyone but Africans, and this needs to change. Support us in creating more Atap, more Dangotes, more Bubacarr Ngoms, more of Mustapha Njie, so we can help write the story of Africa."

Alagie Sanyang, founder of Cornerstone Group, reiterated the country's readiness for investment and business opportunities.

Thematic Presentation



Trans-Gambia Corridor Special Economic Zone (TG-SEZ)

Moderator: Mr. Harona Drammeh

The first session focused on the TG-SEZ as a strategic regional trade, logistics, and investment platform:
"The Trans-Gambia Corridor is not just a national project; it is a regional gateway with the potential to unlock trade, investment, and integration across West Africa."

Panellists included:
- Dr. Mohamed H'Midouche, CEO, Inter Africa Capital Group
- Mr. Hamey Jawara, Senior Manager, Investment Promotion & Facilitation, GIEPA
- Mr. Pierre Goudiaby Atépa, CEO, ATEPA Group
- Mr. Alagie Sanyang, Chairman & CEO, Cornerstone Group

Key interventions:

Dr. Mohamed H'Midouche, CEO, Inter Africa Capital Group:
"Banjul is not a stranger to me. It is a city where I witnessed first-hand the power of regional cooperation and the importance of well-structured infrastructure projects. Public–Private Partnerships are no longer optional; they are now a necessity for Africa's infrastructure financing."
Mr. Pierre Goudiaby Atépa, CEO, ATEPA Group:
"The Gambia is not just a place where I work; it is a country I consider my own. Africa's cities are growing faster than ever, and we must plan them intelligently, sustainably, and inclusively."
Mr. Hamey Jawara, GIEPA:
"GIEPA exists to make investment easier, faster, and more secure. All investments are protected under the GIEPA Act, the Constitution, and our land and investment laws. Regulatory certainty is non-negotiable."
Mr. Mirko Martins, Private Equity Professional, Angola:
"Africa's infrastructure challenges require African solutions built through collaboration."
Mr. Alagie Sanyang, Cornerstone Group:
"Infrastructure, safety, and legal certainty are the three pillars investors look for and The Gambia is delivering on all three."

Sukuk as an Innovative Financing Instrument



Moderator: Ms. Hapsa Dia
"Sukuk may be centuries old, but today they represent one of the most ethical and sustainable financing tools available. Sukuk finance real assets, real economies, and real development."
Panelists:
Mr. Pa Alieu Ndow, Executive Secretary, Gambia Bankers Association (GBA):
"Sukuk is still new in The Gambia, but the interest is strong and growing."
Mr. Sharif Abbas, Islamic Finance Expert:
"Sukuk are not debt; they are investment certificates backed by tangible assets. Sukuk reduce debt pressure because they are linked to revenue-generating assets."
Key Outcomes:
- PPPs and Sukuk provide credible alternatives to conventional debt financing
- Corridor-based SEZs can catalyse trade, logistics, and regional integration
- Asset-backed and ethical finance instruments strengthen public trust and fiscal discipline
- Institutional readiness and project preparation are decisive success factors

Recommendations:
- Strengthen project preparation facilities for PPPs and Sukuk
- Enhance legal and regulatory frameworks for Islamic finance
- Promote capacity building and knowledge exchange
- Support pilot Sukuk issuances with development partners
- Deepen public–private dialogue to accelerate implementation



PPP Panel: Public-Private Partnerships as an Alternative to Public Debt

Moderator: Ms. Seynabou Dia, CEO, Global Mind

The panel examined how innovative partnerships can help African governments finance infrastructure and development without overreliance on sovereign borrowing. Panelists included leaders from BOAD, UEMOA, ARISE IIP, BNDE Senegal, and Inter Africa Capital Group. Discussions highlighted practical PPP models, risk-sharing frameworks, and the role of private capital in driving sustainable growth while preserving fiscal stability.

Key contributions:
Ebrima Sawaneh, ARISE IIP:
"We go into a project where we believe there is impact in the lives of the people. Sustainability and success depend on legal frameworks, project bankability, and social impact."
Modou K. Ceesay, Minister of Trade, Employment and Regional Integration:
"Majority of these PPPs are successful, but there are some challenges in others. The port concession by Alport Banjul, the Semlex deal, and SecurePort initiatives demonstrate The Gambia's strategic approach."
Mr. Ousainou Senghor, GIEPA:
"Africa's financial sector is no longer emerging; it is rising, innovating, and leading."
Mr. Alagie Sanyang, Cornerstone Group:
"The Gambia is open for business, serious about investors, and committed to reform."
Mrs. Fazila Dahal, Chair, Financial Afrik Awards:
"These Awards recognise courage, vision, and the long-term commitment to Africa's development."



Arab World–Africa Round Table



Moderator: Fazila Dahal

This session explored strategic partnerships, trade, and investment opportunities between Africa and the Arab world, featuring senior leaders from the African Development Bank, Islamic Development Bank, African Solidarity Fund, Global South Utilities, and private sector experts. Discussions focused on financing infrastructure, promoting industrialization, leveraging Islamic finance, and creating sustainable cross-regional investment frameworks.

Key recommendations and action points:

- Harmonize standards to attract Arab market investment
- Establish clear and credible regulatory frameworks
- Support private sector ecosystem development
- Create a viable, marketable investment database
- Mobilize funds and continue capacity building programs

Challenges noted:

- Perception of Arab funds externally
- Limited market know-how and transparency
- Challenges in upscaling business

Financial Afrik Awards Ceremony

The evening highlighted the presentation of awards to individuals and institutions advancing finance and economic development in Africa. The event brought together more than 400 delegates representing over 22 nationalities, reflecting the growing continental and global relevance of the Awards. Discussions were anchored around the conference theme, "Public–Private Partnerships (PPPs) as an Alternative to Public Debt," alongside a high-level roundtable on Arab–Africa cooperation. Bankers, government ministers, and institutional leaders exchanged ideas and proposed practical solutions aimed at addressing Africa's financing and development challenges .

During gala dinner, the Financial Afrik Awards jury presented eleven awards in recognition of outstanding leadership, innovation, and impact across Africa's financial and economic landscape. The awards were presented in no particular order.

Among the awardees were:

-Sheku Fantamadi Bangura, Minister of Finance of Sierra Leone, was named **Finance Minister of the Year** for his leadership and contribution to fiscal management.
-**The Special Jury Prize for Financial Leadership** was awarded to **Serge Ekue**, President of the West African Development Bank (BOAD), in recognition of his role in strengthening regional development finance.
-The **Lifetime Achievement Award** went to **Zul-Kifl Salami** for his long-standing contributions to Africa's financial sector.
-The **Prize for Arab–African Cooperation** was awarded to **Ali Alshimmari**, CEO and Managing Director of Global South Utilities (GSU), acknowledging his efforts in advancing cross-regional collaboration.
-Mohamed H'Midouche received the **Economist of the Year** award for his analytical contributions to economic policy and finance.
-**The Deal of the Year** award was presented to **Arsène Dansou**, CEO of the International Bank for Industry and Commerce (BIIC), in recognition of BIIC's successful initial public offering in Benin.
-Birahim Diouf, General Manager at DC/BR, was named **Financial of the Year** for his professional excellence in financial analysis.
-The Champion of Financial and Social Inclusion award was presented to AMIFA; with **Cherkaoui Mouhsine**, General Manager of AMIFA:
-Gagan Gupta, CEO of ARISE Integrated Industrial Platforms (ARISE IIP), was recognised as **CEO of the Year** for his leadership in industrial development across Africa.
-The **African Trade and Integration Leadership Award** was presented to **Latifa El Bouabdellaoui**, Director General of the Islamic Centre for Trade Development (CIDC), for her role in promoting intra-African and international trade.
-The **Medal of Honour** was awarded to **Alagie Sanyang**, CEO of Cornerstone Group, in recognition of his contribution to business and economic development.























Concluding Remarks: Africa's Financing Challenge

Ms. Fatima Soleman Abdi Idd, CEO of Mr Roof, Rwanda, highlighted the structural nature of Africa's financing challenges:
"Africa is not poor. The challenge lies in weak infrastructure and financial systems, and in a development model that prioritizes capital inflows over capital retention, productivity, and ownership."
She emphasized the potential of PPPs, Sukuk, and SEZs in mobilizing private capital, reducing debt vulnerabilities, and promoting inclusive and sustainable growth.
"PPPs must go beyond slogans. They must be properly structured, aligned with national priorities, and designed to retain value locally."
On domestic capital and SMEs:
"Only about 14% of local direct investment in Africa comes from African individuals. SMEs are the backbone of our economies but remain underserved by traditional banking systems."
She also noted Africa's mineral wealth and the importance of local processing:
"Even processing just 10 percent of mineral output locally could be economically transformative."
The session closed with a call for African-led, African-owned, and African-aligned finance, emphasizing systems that enable Africans to invest in Africa and build sustainable prosperity.

PPP Financial Award Highlights

Speakers reaffirmed The Gambia's open investment environment and investor-friendly legal framework. Key sectors highlighted included: agriculture and agribusiness, tourism, transportation, logistics, and river-based transport.
A keynote reflection traced PPPs' historical roots and modern relevance:
"PPPs offer the advantage of delivering critical infrastructure without placing immediate pressure on public balance sheets, but poorly structured models can lead to excessive costs and long-term liabilities."
The session concluded with a call for responsible, ethical, and transparent PPP frameworks aligned with national priorities, emphasizing value for money, accountability, and public interest protection.

General Recommendations:

To conclude the report of the program, the following key recommendations emerged from the deliberations:
First, as underscored by President Adama Barrow during the opening ceremony, the relationship between infrastructure and development remains fundamental. As he clearly stated, **"no infrastructure, no development."** Sustained and strategic investment in infrastructure must therefore remain a top priority for African governments.
Second, Africa must urgently focus on reducing the persistent gap in basic infrastructure, particularly in water and sanitation, energy, road networks, and transportation systems. These sectors form the backbone of economic productivity, regional integration, and improved quality of life for citizens.
Third, to attract increased and long-term investment, African countries should work toward harmonising their rules, regulations, and investment frameworks. Greater regulatory alignment will reduce uncertainty, lower transaction costs, and enhance cross-border investment flows.
Fourth, strengthening Arab–Africa complementarities was identified as a strategic solution to mounting debt pressures and the gradual reduction of investments from OECD countries. Deepened cooperation can unlock alternative sources of finance, stimulate trade, and foster mutually beneficial development partnerships.

Finally, to tighten intra-African private sector relationships, it is pivotal to translate the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) from potential into effective reality. Operationalising AfCFTA will be critical to boosting intra-African trade, strengthening industrial value chains, and consolidating Africa's internal markets.

Conclusion

As the curtain fell on the 7th edition of the Financial Afrik Awards on 23 January, the discussions and reflections in Banjul left little doubt about the direction Africa must take to finance its development ambitions. Across panels, keynote addresses, and high-level exchanges, stakeholders converged on a shared conviction: Africa's infrastructure gap is real, but it is not insurmountable if the right financing choices are made.
Participants reaffirmed the growing relevance of innovative, ethical, and asset-backed financing mechanisms as practical solutions to the continent's development challenges. Rather than deepening dependence on conventional debt, the conversations highlighted the importance of mobilizing private capital through well-structured Public–Private Partnerships, strategically designed Special Economic Zones, and instruments such as Sukuk that align financing with real economic assets.
For countries like The Gambia, the Awards served as both affirmation and encouragement. The country's openness to PPPs, its push for investment-friendly reforms, and its exploration of diversified financing tools position it as a credible destination for responsible investors. When effectively combined, PPPs, SEZs, and Sukuk offer a pathway to accelerate infrastructure delivery, strengthen fiscal resilience, and ensure that growth remains inclusive and sustainable.
Ultimately, the 7th Financial Afrik Awards reinforced a reassuring message: Africa's development future does not depend on borrowing more, but on financing better. By embracing collaboration, innovation, and sound governance, African countries can turn ambition into action and build economies that serve both present and future generations.

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Interviews with
Didier Acouetey

https://youtu.be/O2FSAM5dnfM?si=uYteVYsJbzcfuiyn

Replay #7Faa
Ateliers le 22 janvier
https://www.youtube.com/live/g8bEJ17DXcU?si=yK2jKAgChhgog9RU

23 janvier
Opening Ceremony
https://www.youtube.com/live/nhIo3gz1Fps?si=_Y39AsoVTIZIuivk

Gala Dinner
https://www.youtube.com/live/OX1_SrniKzM?si=6sV5tBlDDUA2sVXw

Photo album

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