THE REPUBLIC OF THE GAMBIA

THE GAMBIA
NATIONAL DRUG POLICY

MINISTRY OF HEALTH, SOCIAL WELFARE & WOMEN'S AFFAIRS,
BANJUL
THE GAMBIA

NATIONAL DRUG POLICY

MINISTRY OF HEALTH, SOCIAL WELFARE & WOMEN'S AFFAIRS

BANJUL
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<tr>
<td>ADR</td>
<td>Adverse Drug Reaction</td>
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<td>ADRM</td>
<td>Adverse Drug Reaction Monitoring</td>
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<td>BI</td>
<td>Bamako Initiative</td>
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<td>CMS</td>
<td>Central Medical Stores</td>
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<td>DIS</td>
<td>Drug Information System</td>
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<td>DRY</td>
<td>Drug Revolving Fund</td>
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<td>DRS</td>
<td>Drug Registration Section</td>
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<td>GEDP</td>
<td>Gambia Essential Drugs Programme</td>
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<td>GNF</td>
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<td>GSDL</td>
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<td>GSTM</td>
<td>Gambia Standard Treatment Manual</td>
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<td>IEC</td>
<td>Information Education and Communication</td>
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<td>INN</td>
<td>International Non-proprietary Name</td>
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<td>MOH</td>
<td>Ministry of Health</td>
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<td>NDC</td>
<td>National Drugs Committee</td>
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<td>NDP</td>
<td>National Drug Policy</td>
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<td>NDQCL</td>
<td>National Drug Quality Control Laboratory</td>
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<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non Governmental Organization</td>
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<td>NPS</td>
<td>National Pharmaceutical Services</td>
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<td>OTC</td>
<td>Over the Counter</td>
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<td>PIS</td>
<td>Poisons Information Service</td>
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<td>QC</td>
<td>Quality Control</td>
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<td>TC</td>
<td>Therapeutic Committees</td>
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<td>UNCTAD</td>
<td>United Nations Commission on Trade and Development</td>
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<td>UNIDO</td>
<td>United Nations Industrial Development Organization</td>
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<td>WHO</td>
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Foreword

In recognising the importance of drugs as essential component of Health Care Delivery System, the Ministry of Health adopted the World Health Organization (WHO) concept of Essential Drugs through the implementation of an Essential Drugs Programme in 1984. This led to the development of the policy formulation process within the Pharmaceutical Sector, regarding Drugs supply, Drug Legislation and Quality Control. However, there was still the lack of a comprehensive framework for the future development and strengthening of the pharmaceutical services in The Gambia, thus the need for a National Drug Policy.

In line with the National Health Policy (1994-2000), this policy provides both the framework and direction for the development of the National Pharmaceutical Services.

Our Special Thanks go to the World Health Organization (WHO) Drug Action Programme (DAP) for the technical and financial assistance, which made the publication of this policy possible.

On behalf of my Ministry, I wish to thank all those; the health professionals in the public and private sector, the NGOs as well as those from the donor agencies, who participated in the formulation and development of the policy.

Honourable Nyimasata Sanneh-Bojang
Minister of Health, Social Welfare and Women’s Affairs
Executive Summary

Objectives

The overall goal of the National Drug Policy is to maximise, within the available resources, the full potential that drugs have to control common diseases, alleviate suffering and promote health.

The specific objectives are to:

1. Ensure that essential, efficacious, safe, good quality and cost-effective drugs are made available and accessible to the population at a price the individual and the community can afford;

2. Promote the rational use of drugs both in the public and private sector, and to provide systematic public information, professional training and re-training of health workers;

3. Ensure adequate regulatory mechanisms leading to effective regulations on manufacture, production, importation, exportation, marketing and use of essential drugs, and the strengthening of the system of drug registration and licensing of pharmaceutical premises;

4. Increase knowledge on drugs through promotion of research in all drugs related activities including traditional medicines;

5. Comply with the international regulations in drugs including the conventions on narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances under international control.


7. Promote the quality of drugs in the public and private sector;

Activities

General

The pharmaceutical services will be established within the Directorate of Health Services in the Ministry of Health. It will be adequately staffed and suitably equipped to undertake the functions arising from the implementation of the National Drugs Policy, the National Essential Drugs Program and the provisions of the Medicines Act (1984), the Medicines Regulation (1986) and the Drug Control Act (1993). These functions are:

Supply of Essential Drugs

The Gambian Essential Drugs List will be revised and printed every two years; the list will be used as the basis for the supply and use of drugs in the public sector, for the training and supervision of health workers and for the promotion of local manufacture of drugs.
Essential drugs will be selected through national consensus, and in accordance with the essential drugs concept as defined by the World Health Organization. Adequate financial resources will be made available for the supply of essential drugs for the public sector, taking into consideration the Primary Health Care and cost-sharing policy of the Government. Standard operation procedures will be developed for the procurement of drugs and medical items.

Adequate drug storage facilities and procedures for systematic inventory control and distribution of drugs will be developed at national and divisional level to ensure the quality, security and efficient distribution of drugs from the time entry into the country to issue to the patient.

A government policy on drug donations will be developed and enforced. All unwanted, damaged and expired drugs and medical items will be disposed of efficiently and correctly.

Quality Assurance
The quality of drugs in the public and private sector will be assured through adequate procedures for drug registration, licensing, prequalification of suppliers, supplier monitoring, drug inspection and drug quality control. The government drug quality control laboratory will be strengthened further.

Rational Drug Use
Basic education and in-service training programs will be developed and implemented to ensure that all health workers involved in the diagnosis of disease, and prescription and dispensing of treatment receive adequate and relevant education and training to perform these activities correctly and efficiently.

Drug information services will be developed to ensure the provision of practical, unbiased information on the correct handling and rational use of drugs to health workers at all levels, patients and the general public.

Standard treatment manual will be updated, further developed, widely disseminated and used as the basis for training, prescribing and supervision.

Training in drug management and correct dispensing will be intensified and adequate numbers of pharmaceutical staff will be trained.

Therapeutic Committees will be established in each hospital, public and private, to ensure the correct, efficient, and cost-effective handling and prescribing of drugs within the hospital.

Advertising and promotion of drugs will be regulated to ensure high professional standards and conformation with the requirements of the Medicines Act.
The Overall Goal and Main Objectives

The overall goal of the National Drug Policy (NDP) is:

**To maximise within the available resources, the full potential that drugs have to control common diseases, alleviate suffering and promote health.**

The objectives of the National Drug Policy are to:

1. Ensure that essential, efficacious, safe, good quality and cost-effective drugs are made available and accessible to the population at a price the individual and the community can afford;

2. Promote the rational use of drugs both in the public and private sector, and to provide systematic public information, professional training and re-training of health workers;

3. Ensure adequate regulatory mechanisms leading to effective regulations on manufacture, production, importation, exportation, marketing and use of essential drugs, and the strengthening of the system of drug registration and licensing of pharmaceutical premises;

4. Increase knowledge on drugs through promotion of research in all drugs related activities including traditional medicines;

5. Comply with the international regulations in drugs including the conventions on narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances under international control.

POLICY AREAS

1. National Pharmaceutical Services Administration

The aim of the policy is to ensure that the National Pharmaceutical Services is adequately staffed and suitably equipped to co-ordinate and supervise the implementation of the National Drug Policy.

1.1 The Ministry of Health will support and facilitate the expansion of the Pharmaceutical Services to enable it to effectively undertake its existing functions and an expanded range of functions arising from implementation of the Gambia Essential Drugs Programme and the National Drug Policy. These functions will include:

- Essential Drugs Programme Management
- Drug Regulatory Services
  - Registration
  - Licensing
  - Inspection
- Information Services
  - Drug Information
  - Poisons Information
  - Adverse Drug Reaction Monitoring
  - Laboratory Services
  - Drug Quality Control

1.2 The Ministry of Health will train sufficient numbers of pharmacists, pharmacy technicians, pharmacy assistants and other relevant staff to ensure the effective functioning of the pharmaceutical services.

1.3 The Ministry of Health will strive to improve the career prospects of all pharmaceutical personnel, and will encourage and support opportunities for the upgrading and refresher courses for existing personnel.

2. Essential Drug Supply

2.1 Drug Selection

The aim of the policy is the selection of drugs in accordance with the essential drugs concept as defined by the World Health Organization. Essential drugs are those which are of the utmost importance, and necessary to satisfy the health needs of the majority of the population.
2.1.1 Selection of drugs for the public sector is made by the National Drugs and Medical Supplies Committee as established by the Ministry of Health. The committee is composed of experts in all the medical and pharmaceutical fields from both the public and private sector. However, selection will reflect broad policy objectives and the process of selection by the committee will be carried out independently.

2.1.2 Selection of drugs is based on the concept of essential drugs as defined by the World Health Organisation.

2.1.3 Selection of drugs is by generic name or International Non-proprietary Name (INN) only.

2.1.4 A Gambia Essential Drug List containing all the drugs selected for use in the public sector will continue to be produced and distributed to all health institutions including training schools for health personnel. New editions of this will be prepared at least once every two years.

The Gambia Essential Drug List will be used for supply for the Ministry of Health facilities, for training, as basis for importation by the private sector and eventually for local production.

2.1.5 Suggestions for amendments to the Gambia Essential Drug List should be made in writing to the National Drugs and Medical Supplies Committee.

2.1.6 For emergency circumstances and specific health care programmes, non-standard items may be requested by the physician in charge upon completion of a standard form used for this purpose. The completed form should be sent for consideration to the National Drug and Medical supplies Committee.

2.1.7 Drugs for use by the private sector must be registered by the Medicines Board.

2.2 Financial Resources

The aim of the policy is to ensure that sufficient funding is made available to the public sector to provide adequate quantities of good quality essential drugs at the lowest possible cost to all those who need them.

2.2.1 Requirements for financial resources will be based on the careful estimation of the total quantities of drugs and medical supplies needed in the country using data from all available sources.

2.2.2 The policy will take into consideration the cost-sharing policy of the Government through the Drug Revolving Fund and the Bamako Initiative programmes.

2.2.3 The policy will be directed towards the joint involvement of different parties, including government, donors, parastatals, Non Governmental Organizations and individuals, in the funding of drug supplies.
2.2.4 The Ministry of Health will work in close collaboration with all interested parties, including the Ministry of Finance, the Central Bank of The Gambia, and the Department of Customs and Excise, so that due priority is given to the financing and importation of essential drugs for the country.

2.2.5 Within the total health budget, adequate provision will be made for the implementation of the national drug policy strategies.

2.3 Drug Procurement

The aim of the policy is to obtain the necessary quality and quantity of drugs which will meet the health needs of the majority of the population, at the lowest possible cost.

2.3.1 For both the public and private sectors:

2.3.1.1 Procurement of drugs, including donations, will be limited to items registered for use in the country, unless otherwise approved by the Minister of Health.

2.3.1.2 Procurement of drugs will be restricted to items registered for use and currently marketed in their country of origin with the exception of certain drugs for treatment of specified tropical diseases.

2.3.1.3 Foreign suppliers of branded drugs will be requested, and local suppliers required, to label their product packages and containers with the generic name of the drug at least the same size of, and displayed adjacent to, the trade name.

2.3.2 For the public sector:

2.3.2.1 Drug procurement is carried out by the Ministry of Health based on international tender with pre-qualified suppliers, except in emergency situations where negotiated procurement or direct procurement may be used.

2.3.2.2 Drugs are procured by generic name and according to the Gambia Essential Drug List.

2.3.2.3 The Gambia Government Donor Guidelines for drugs will be developed.

The guidelines will include the following criteria:
- drugs should be registered for use in the country
- drugs should be on the Gambia Essential Drug List
- the drug should have sufficient shelf life to allow consumption
- the labels and package insert should be in or translated to English.
2.3.2.4 The Ministry of Health will actively encourage the improvement of procurement efficiency by ensuring the adequate provision of facilities for procurement including computisation.

2.4 Local Drug Production

The aim of the policy is to promote the national drug production capacity, both in the public and private sectors, with the overall goal of increasing self-sufficiency in the production and packaging of essential drugs and reducing the dependence on foreign suppliers.

2.4.1 The Government will promote and develop the national pharmaceutical industry as a multisectoral activity involving all interested parties, such as the MOH, the Ministry of Finance, the Central Bank of Gambia, the Ministry of Trade and Industry, the Department of Customs and Excise, and public and private manufacturers. Considerations will include both national and international investment and the transfer of the necessary technology. The collaboration and advice of relevant organisations eg. UNIDO, UNCTAD in this exercise will be actively pursued. The Government will provide the necessary support of these industries until they have matured to full competitiveness.

2.5 Drug Storage

The aim of the policy is to ensure the maintenance of the quality and security of drugs from the time of arrival into the country up to the time of issue to the patient.

2.5.1 The Ministry of Health will endeavour to ensure the provision and regular maintenance of adequately sized, suitably constructed and equipped storage facilities at every level in the public sector drug distribution system.

2.5.2 Regular checks will be carried out on the quality of stored drugs in the public and private sectors at all levels to ensure that they have not deteriorated under the storage conditions prevailing at each location.

2.5.3 The Medicines Board will ensure that adequate and suitable storage is maintained at all levels in the private sector.

2.5.4 In order to encourage the correct maintenance and organisation of drug stores throughout the country, the Ministry of Health will maintain an up-to-date stores procedures manual containing practical guidelines on the required procedures for all drug storekeepers.

2.6 Inventory Control

The aim of the policy is to ensure the continued availability of sufficient quantities of the required essential drugs at all levels of the health system, through the accurate and systematic recording, monitoring and reporting of stock levels of all items.

2.6.1 The Ministry of Health will strive to improve and standardise inventory control procedures at all levels of the public drug supply system.
2.6.2 The computerised inventory control system will, at the earliest possible opportunity be introduced at the Regional Medical Stores and Hospitals, and staff trained in its use.

2.6.3 The Ministry of Health will introduce and maintain systematic, practical and accurate procedures for the estimation and regular reporting of drug consumption at all levels so that this data in the compilation of correct estimates for national drug procurement needs.

2.7 Drug Distribution

The aim of the policy is to ensure the prompt, safe and efficient distribution of drugs and medical products from central storage facilities to the end-users, so that the quality of the products is maintained throughout the process and essential drugs are always available and accessible to those who need them.

2.7.1 Only medicines registered in The Gambia will be allowed to be distributed in the country.

2.7.2 Drugs will be distributed through the public, parastatals and private sectors. The Pharmaceutical Services will be responsible for the distribution of drugs to the public health sector. The Ministry of Health will continue to strive to extend the distribution chain to include health workers at the community level as well as the non-commercial NGOs. Licensed wholesalers will be responsible for distribution of drugs to licence holders in the private sector.

2.7.3 The Ministry of Health will ensure the provision of adequate and appropriate transportation, maintenance and communication facilities and the personnel necessary to maintain the efficient operation of the public sector distribution system.

2.7.4 The Ministry of Health will ensure that the decentralisation of the public sector distribution system is rationally and efficiently implemented.

2.7.5 The Pharmaceutical Services Unit in coordination with user units will institute an efficient and practical clearing-house system for the identification, collection and redistribution of excess stocks of drugs and medical supplies.

2.8 Disposal of Unwanted Items

The aim of the policy is to ensure that all unwanted drugs and medical supplies items and associated waste are disposed of promptly, efficiently and safely.

2.8.1 The Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Finances Board of Survey will ensure that suitable measures are instituted for the regular identification, collection and safe disposal of expired or otherwise unwanted items of drugs and medical supplies in public sector health facilities.
2.8.2  The Ministry of Health will ensure, through health institution administrators and in co-ordination with local waste disposal agencies, that all waste medical and surgical items are disposed of efficiently and safely in order to minimise hazard to the community and damage to the environment.

2.8.3  The Medicines Board will ensure that suitable methods of disposal of unwanted or waste pharmaceutical, medical and surgical items are in operation in the private sector including the department of livestock services.

3.  Quality Assurance

The aim of the policy is to ensure that drugs reaching the patient are safe, effective and meet approved specifications and standards. The quality assurance system will include managerial, technical and legal aspects.

3.1  The Medicines Board will maintain an efficient and adequate Drug Inspectorate to ensure that quality assurance policies are implemented in all aspects and at all levels of the drug supply system.

3.2  Only drugs conforming to internationally recognised quality control standards will be permitted to be procured and distributed in the country.

3.3  As additional safeguards, drugs, whenever possible, will only be procured from pre qualified reputable suppliers and the World Health Organisation’s Certification Scheme will be applied where appropriate to drug products procured from outside the country.

3.4  Upon receipt of drug supplies, relevant documentation, including certificates of analysis for raw materials and finished products, will be carefully checked to ensure that the quality of the drug is of the required standard.

3.5  The Ministry of Health will maintain a suitably housed and adequately equipped, funded and staffed National Drug Quality Control Laboratory. When necessary, in circumstances where specific testing facilities are not available, other local quality control testing facilities or internationally recognised quality control laboratories in other countries in the region or abroad will be used to carry out the required tests.

3.6  In efforts to achieve the required quality of local pharmaceutical manufacturing output, both public and private, the Ministry of Health will be guided by the World Health Organisation publication “Good Practices in the Manufacture and Quality Control of Drugs”

3.7  The Ministry of Health, through the Medicines Board, will institute a system for withdrawal of drug products from circulation which have been shown by testing or demonstrated otherwise to be of unacceptable quality.

3.8  The use of expired drugs or medical supplies will not be permitted.
4 Drug Legislation

The aim of the policy is to ensure rapid and full implementation of the provisions of the Medicines Act (1984) and the Medicines Regulations (1986), and full compliance with this act and the Drug Control Act (1993).

4.1 The Government will support the activities of the Medicines Board, the National Drug Control Council, and associated advisory committees whose function is to ensure compliance with all aspects of the laws related to drug handling and use and misuse in The Gambia.

4.2 The functioning of the current pharmaceutical legislation and its compatibility with other legislation affecting implementation of the National Drug Policy will be monitored by the Board to ensure that it supports and facilitates the objectives of the Policy.

Any deficiencies in the legislation will be rectified by amendments to the legislation, and/or drafting of additional legislation or regulations, which will be carried out in consultation with all affected parties.

4.3 The Ministry of Health will maintain an adequately staffed computerised Drug Registration Section whose function will be to keep details of all drug product registration information.

4.4 Only medicinal products which have been duly registered by the Board will be permitted to be imported, exported, manufactured, wholesaled, retailed, prescribed and dispensed in the country subject to the granting of the relevant licenses for these activities. Drugs imported in non-commercial quantities for the specific use of individual patients will be exempted from registration requirements.

4.5 The Board will review, update and publish as required schedules of medicinal products in order to control the sale and supply of the various classes of product, or to define the range of medicinal products which may be dispensed by various categories of drug outlets.

4.6 Drug information provided by manufacturers to prescribers in the form of package inserts, or drug data information sheets and also the labelling of the original drug package should conform with the requirements detailed in regulations under the Medicines Act.

5 Drug Advertising and Promotion

The aim of the policy is to ensure that advertising and promotion of drugs are of a high professional standard and conform with the requirements of the Medicines Act.

5.1 Ethical criteria for drug promotion and advertising will be established in accordance with the World Health Organisation's developed Ethical criteria for medical drug promotion. The criteria will be published for distribution to all interested parties.
5.2 The Medicines Board will monitor drug advertising and promotional activities to ensure that they conform with the relevant ethical criteria.

5.3 Labelling and advertising for drugs must be based on scientifically established evidence. Advertising must also be objective, educational in purpose and in the case of public advertising, restricted to over the counter drugs. All drug promotional and advertising materials, whether in printed form or not, will be vetted by the Medicines Board and the approval of the Board must be obtained before the material may be used.

5.4 Drug promotional activities will be in line with national drug policy objectives. In this respect, whenever the brand name of a drug is used in any form of promotional or educational material, including radio advertising, the generic name of the drug must be given due prominence. In the case of printed materials, such as advertisements, billboards, posters, etc. the generic name must be at least the same size and positioned adjacent to the brand name.

5.5 Medicines Board will ensure that scientific studies and surveillance must not be misused as a disguised form of promotion. Drugs used in clinical trials will be identified by a code number and not by name.

5.6 Promotion and advertising of prescription-only medicines will be restricted to professional medical, pharmaceutical, dental, veterinary or nursing publications.

6 Rational Drug Use

The aim of the policy is to ensure that drugs are prescribed, dispensed, and used rationally in order to maximise the therapeutic benefit to the patient and reduce loss, wastage and hazards arising from irrational practices, including ignorance, theft and misappropriation.

6.1 Education and Training

The aim of the policy is to ensure that all individuals involved in diagnosis and the prescribing and dispensing of drugs receive adequate and relevant theoretical and practical training from well-trained teachers to enable them to perform these activities correctly and efficiently.

6.1.1 The curricula of all training courses for health workers involved in diagnosis, prescribing and dispensing will be revised and updated as required to ensure inter alia adequate coverage of Primary Health Care, essential drugs concept, and the rational use of drugs.

6.1.2 A systematic and comprehensive programme of refresher courses and other suitable continuing education activities will be developed and implemented for the further training of practising health workers in the above areas.

6.1.3 All training activities will include, where drugs are not indicated, instructions on the use of alternative non-drug therapies, eg dietary advice, changes of lifestyle. Training must also include patient counselling and communication techniques.
6.1.4 Suitable training materials on rational drug use will be developed in consultation with health workers at all levels for use both in initial and continuing education activities.

6.1.5 Where appropriate, the Ministry of Health and other appropriate organisations will organise training programmes, symposia, workshops, and lectures in order to aid the dissemination and understanding of drug information for the various groups of health personnel.

6.1.6 The Gambia Standard Treatment Manual will continue to be produced and distributed in order to provide guidance on the treatment of the commonly presenting conditions encountered in the country. This is subject to continual revision and updating and new editions will be prepared and distributed at regular intervals to take account of changes in current therapeutic practices.

6.1.7 The Ministry of Health will produce and distribute The Gambia National Formulary in order to provide relevant and practical information on all the drugs on the Gambia Standard Drug List. It will also include guidelines on rational prescribing and dispensing practices, drug interaction tables, and other information useful to prescribers. This will likewise be subject to continual revision, and new editions will be prepared and distributed at regular intervals to reflect changes in the composition of the Gambia Standard Drug List and in clinical practice.

6.2 Drug Information

The aim of the policy is to ensure the provision of practical, unbiased information on the correct handling and rational use of drugs to health workers at all levels as well as to opinion leaders, retailers, patients and the general public.

6.2.1 To facilitate the collection, compilation, presentation and distribution of drug information the Ministry of Health will establish and maintain an appropriately equipped and staffed Drug Information Service under the supervision of the Pharmaceutical Services of the Ministry of Health. The Drug Information Service will be gradually developed and expanded so that it will eventually also have an Adverse Drug Reaction Monitoring function and will provide a Poisons Information Service.

6.2.2 Independent and reliable, scientifically-based literature aimed at rationalising prescribing and dispensing will be distributed to health institutions and the relevant health workers throughout both the public and private health care sectors.

6.2.3 Comprehensive Information, Education and Communication activities will be developed and implemented by the Ministry of Health. All available forms of mass communication, in order to ensure the adequate provision of information on rational drug use and storage, and alternatives to drug treatments, to patients and the general public.
6.3 Prescribing

The aim of the policy is to ensure that drugs are prescribed correctly by appropriately trained and dully authorised personnel according to the essential drugs concept and recommended standard treatment.

6.3.1 In the public sector, all drugs will be prescribed by generic name (INN) only. In the private sector drugs will also be prescribed by generic name, however a required brand name of the drug may be included in brackets after the generic name. Efforts will be made to encourage prescribing by generic name and all prescribers should write all prescriptions legibly.

6.3.2 The Ministry of Health will strive to constantly monitor and assess prescribing practices in the country in order to ensure efficient, cost-effective and safe prescribing.

6.4 Dispensing

The aim of the policy is to ensure that drugs are dispensed efficiently and correctly by appropriately trained and dully authorised personnel according to the essential drugs concept and recommended dispensing practices.

6.4.1 In the public sector, all drugs will be dispensed and labelled using generic names (INN) only. The Ministry of Health will strive to improve dispensing practices by ensuring the provision of adequate packaging and labelling materials and by promoting the use of pre-packaged courses of therapy for treatment of common conditions at all levels of health institution.

6.4.2 In the private sector drugs must only be dispensed by holders of a valid dispensing licence. All drugs will be dispensed and labelled using generic (INN) names, but the trade name of a drug product may appear on the dispensing label after the generic name. The Ministry of Health will assist, in co-ordination and collaboration with all relevant parties in the preparation of a cross-index of generic and proprietary names for all drug products on the market.

6.4.3 The Medicines Board will ensure that regular inspections of premises where dispensing operations are performed are carried out.

6.4.4 The Ministry of Health will institute and maintain a system for the monitoring and evaluation of dispensing practices in both the public and private sectors in order to ensure the provision of efficient and cost-effective and safe dispensing services.

6.5 Patient Compliance and Self-Medication

The aim of the policy on patient compliance is to ensure that compliance with prescribed treatments is maximised through the implementation of rational prescribing and dispensing practices by health professionals and individuals.
The aim of the policy on self-medication is to ensure that the informed public has ready access to sufficient unbiased and practical information prior to embarking on self-treatment.

6.5.1 The Ministry of Health will endeavour to ensure that adequate patient counselling on the use of prescribed medicines is given as part of the prescribing and dispensing process. Training curricula and continuing education programmes for all health professionals will be revised where necessary to include a component on patient counselling.

6.5.2 In the private sector, the Government will ensure that information on generic names and equivalent trade names of over-the-counter drug products is properly displayed in all retail drug outlets.

6.5.3 Information Education and Communication for the public on subjects including disease prevention, limited self-diagnosis, on what constitutes appropriate and inappropriate self-medication, and on suitable alternative non-drug treatments will be promoted.

6.6 Therapeutic Committees

The aim of the policy is to establish and maintain therapeutic committees in each hospital and major health centre in the country in order to ensure correct, efficient, and cost-effective safe handling and use of drugs within the such institutions.

6.6.1 The Ministry of Health will promote the formation and activities of therapeutic committees, whose membership will include the senior staff of the health facility.

6.6.2 The Ministry of Health and relevant organisations will facilitate the effective functioning of these committees by the compilation and issuing of guidelines on methods of operation and responsibilities of the committees, after consultation with relevant organisation.

6.6.3 The Ministry of Health will establish a system for monitoring the function and evaluating the effectiveness of the committees.

6.7 Research

6.7.1 The Ministry of Health will promote research on the social and cultural factors which affect the use of drugs and will endeavour, through health education and provision of relevant drug information, to alter any attitudes and beliefs which are found to contribute to irrational drug use or non-use.

6.7.2 The Ministry of Health will endeavour to continuously collect accurate and useful information and data on drugs and drug utilisation, which will be evaluated and disseminated to health professionals.
7 Monitoring and Evaluation

The aim of the policy is to ensure the successful implementation of the National Drug Policy in all its aspects by the establishment of mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating performance under the policy.

7.1 The Ministry of Health will establish and maintain a monitoring and evaluation system with the function of following the implementation of the Policy and defining indicators for measurement of progress towards achieving policy objectives.

7.2 As the Gambia Essential Drugs Programme is the cornerstone for implementation of much of the drug policy, a mid-term review of this programme will be held after 3 years, and a final evaluation after 5 years, to determine progress towards achievement of its stated objectives.

7.3 As one of the major objectives of the National Drug Policy is to make essential drugs available to all those who need them at all times, data on procurement, storage, and distribution will be compiled and evaluated annually together with data on drug stocks, receipts, issues and consumption at all levels of health institutions.

7.4 Performance of drugs registered for use in the country will be monitored for efficacy, safety and quality, as new information may come to light during widespread use which was not available at registration, and which may require changes in the conditions of drug registration or even withdrawal of a drug from the market.

7.5 The Ministry of Health will establish and maintain an Adverse Drug Reaction Monitoring system, including suitable reporting procedures. In establishing such a service the experience of other countries will be carefully considered.

A committee of experts will also be set up to regularly review reported adverse reactions and advise the government on what action to take. The government will cooperate with other agencies such as the World Health Organisation in the compilation and exchange of information on Adverse Drug Reactions.

7.6 Monitoring of rational drug use will be carried out by a variety of methods including prescribing, dispensing and patient compliance surveys, and the comparison of epidemiological data with data on drug consumption and utilisation.

8 Intersectoral Cooperation

The aim of the policy is to maximise intersectoral Cooperation and collaboration in order to achieve the overall goal of an efficient and cost-effective pharmaceutical services which contributes both to the personal health of the population and the economic development of the country.
8.1 The Ministry of Health will be the focal point for promotion of this Cooperation, and will ensure that the National Drug Policy is duly co-ordinated between the various sectors and that collaboration is contributing effectively to achievement of the objectives of the drug policy.

8.2 The sectors involved will include:
- the Ministry of Trade and Industry
- the Ministry of Local Government
- the Ministry of Finance
- the Department of Customs and Excise
- the Central Bank of The Gambia
- the Ministry of the Interior
- the Ministry of Agriculture
- the Department of Livestock Services
- the Ports Authority
- the Civil Aviation Authority
- the Airline agencies
- the Pharmaceutical Society of The Gambia
- the Medical and Dental Council of The Gambia
- the Nurses and Midwives Council of The Gambia
- the health training institutions of The Gambia
- local pharmaceutical producers, wholesalers and retailers
- traditional practitioners.

9 Technical Cooperation with other Countries and International Agencies

The aim of the policy is to actively pursue all forms of technical Cooperation in order to maximise the efficient utilisation of the limited resources available in implementation of the drug policy.

9.1 Technical Cooperation within the region, the West African Pharmaceutical Federation, an agency of the West African Health Community, will be encouraged and supported in various areas including the following:

- evaluation of drugs
- application of the WHO Certification Scheme
- regional procurement schemes and exchange of information on pharmaceutical suppliers
- quality assurance and collaboration with regional and other Quality Control laboratories
- computerisation of inventory control and drug registration
- production and formulation of drug products
- transfer of appropriate technology
- research and development
- training and manpower development
- studies on drug utilisation
- exchange of drug information
- emergency situations, e.g. epidemics, disasters.
9.2 The technical assistance of international agencies, such as that of the World Health Organisation in the operation and development of the Gambia Essential Drugs Programme, will continue to be actively sought, for the effective implementation of the policy.

9.3 As problems of drug supply and utilisation affect many countries, the Government will promote the exchange of research findings with other countries and with international agencies such as the World Health Organisation and will encourage and support the participation of local drug researchers and research institutions in international drug research activities.