

JEUNE AFRIQUE ÉCONOMIE

Eni Entry into Gambia Block A1 Signals Renewed Offshore Exploration Interest

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The arrival of Eni on Gambian block A1 marks a significant development in West Africa's evolving exploration landscape. For a small country long overshadowed by Senegal's accelerating oil and gas programme, the entry of a major international operator sends a clear signal: Gambia's offshore acreage is being taken seriously at the highest levels of the industry.

The move is widely interpreted as a validation of the area's geological potential. Gambia sits along the same Atlantic-facing margin as Senegal, where the Sangomar oil field and the Greater Tortue Ahmeyim LNG project have already demonstrated the basin's commercial viability. Eni's decision to commit to block A1 suggests that subsurface data — whether from regional seismic surveys or proximity to proven Senegalese structures — has met the company's internal investment threshold.

Beyond geology, the Eni commitment carries a broader message about investor confidence in Gambia's political and regulatory environment. The country has undergone significant institutional reforms since 2017, and the willingness of a major European operator to take an equity position reflects improved perceptions of governance and contract security. For Banjul, attracting a credible anchor investor in the upstream space is a prerequisite for building out the wider supply chain and service sector infrastructure that monetising any future discovery would require.

The article frames the core question as competitive: can Gambia position itself alongside Senegal rather than being permanently eclipsed by its larger neighbour? Senegal's head start — with Woodside-operated Sangomar now in production and the BP-co-developed Tortue LNG project advancing — means Gambia faces a steep catch-

up curve. However, history in the region suggests that frontier markets with proven neighbouring geology can attract serious capital once a credible operator plants its flag. Eni's entry into A1 may function as precisely that inflection point.

For the Gambian government, the challenge will be translating upstream interest into durable economic diversification. Regulatory capacity, local content frameworks, and revenue management structures will all need to mature in parallel with any exploration programme. The presence of Eni — an operator with substantial African upstream experience — may accelerate that institutional development, but the work of building a functional petroleum sector from a low base remains substantial. How Banjul manages this next phase will determine whether Gambia becomes a genuine participant in West Africa's offshore story or remains a footnote to Senegal's.

Why this matters to partners and clients of Saga

Eni's entry into block A1 positions Gambia as an early-stage monitored market for Norwegian service companies, particularly those already active on the Senegalese margin who could extend mobilisation economics across the border. The exploration phase will require drilling services and subsurface data acquisition before any development infrastructure decisions are made, making this a pipeline opportunity rather than an immediate bid situation. Norwegian firms should track Eni's exploration schedule and begin early-stage relationship-building with both Eni's local entity and the Gambian Petroleum Directorate.

PARTNER ANGLES

- **Drilling:** Eni's exploration commitment on A1 will require drilling campaign planning; Norwegian drilling contractors already operating in West Africa should position early for rig and well services contracts.
- **Subsea/FPSO:** If exploration on A1 confirms commercial hydrocarbons, the Gambian margin's proximity to Senegal's Sangomar development creates a potential template for FPSO deployment that Norwegian FPSO operators should model now.
- **LNG:** The Tortue LNG precedent on the Senegal-Mauritania border demonstrates that cross-border gas development is feasible in this region; Norwegian LNG service

providers should assess whether any Gambian gas discovery could follow a similar unitisation path.

- **Service:** Gambia's nascent petroleum sector will need regulatory and technical capacity support; Norwegian advisory and well-services firms with African frontier market experience are well placed to engage at this early institutional-building stage.
- **Pipeline:** Any future gas commercialisation in Gambia would likely require export infrastructure linked to regional networks; pipeline engineering firms should monitor exploration outcomes before assessing route and tie-in options.

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