

Annual Report

2021
2021

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Executive Summary

Our Annual Report provides a comprehensive overview of Gambia Participates' activities throughout the year from January 2021 to December 2021. As a Civil Society organization, Gambia Participates is dedicated to continuously improving fiscal transparency, combating corruption, and promoting credible elections. During 2021, Gambia Participates successfully engaged a total of 340 individuals, reaching out to six out of the seven regions in the country, including 60 satellite villages. To increase awareness and participation in the budget process, Gambia Participates facilitated constructive discussions between parliamentarians and their constituents. These discussions focused on the budget's composition, the parliamentarians' oversight role in the budget process, and the identification of priority needs for the constituents. Additionally, Gambia Participates played a crucial role in producing a simplified citizen version of the budget, making it more accessible to the general public.

Gambia Participates has consistently advocated for the legislation of the 2019 anti-corruption bill as part of its ongoing fight against corruption. The organization actively engaged the West Coast Region (WCR) and the Lower River Region (LRR) to popularize the bill and encouraged citizens to demand their representatives to support its legislation.

Furthermore, Gambia Participates has been dedicated to enhancing transparency and credibility in the electoral processes and systems. In this regard, the organization conducted a systematic and comprehensive observation of the 2021 presidential elections. Notably, it deployed the largest number of observers across the country to ensure a thorough assessment of the election proceedings.

In conclusion, Gambia Participates has been committed to its mission throughout 2021, diligently working towards augmenting fiscal transparency, combating corruption, and promoting credible elections in The Gambia.

From the Executive Director

Gambia Participates has been at the forefront of the fight against corruption, advocating for transparent and accountable governance, responsible budgeting, and fair elections. The organization have made significant strides in promoting integrity and ethical practices in public administration, protecting the interests of citizens, and ensuring that public resources are used judiciously.

Corruption continues to pose a significant threat to our societies, undermining development, eroding public trust, and impeding progress. However, we remain resolute in our commitment to combat this menace. We believe that by fostering a culture of transparency, accountability, and good governance, we can create lasting change and build a better future for all.

In pursuit of our goals, we have been actively engaging with governments, civil society organizations, and international institutions to promote anti-corruption measures, strengthen budgetary processes, and advocate for electoral reforms. Through research, advocacy campaigns, capacity building, and technical assistance, we have been able to raise awareness, influence policies, and drive positive change at various levels.

As we move forward, we will continue to adapt and respond to emerging challenges and evolving trends in corruption. We recognize that corruption takes on new forms and requires innovative approaches to address its root causes. We will embrace new technologies, foster partnerships, and leverage data-driven insights to strengthen our impact. Our commitment to fiscal transparency remains unwavering. We will work with governments to ensure that budgetary processes are inclusive, participatory, and accountable. By engaging citizens and civil society in budget formulation and implementation, we can create a sense of ownership and enhance public confidence in financial management.

Furthermore, we are fully dedicated to promoting free and fair elections as a cornerstone of democracy. We will advocate for electoral reforms that enhance transparency, safeguard the integrity of the electoral process, and ensure equal participation and representation for all citizens. Together, we can make a difference in the fight against corruption and create a world where integrity, transparency, and accountability thrive.



About Gambia Participates

Gambia Participates actively supports the growing demand for enhanced accountability from Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to donors, governments, partners, and communities. Our organization has been involved in various initiatives focused on promoting accountability and transparency. These initiatives encompass a wide range of areas such as Fiscal Transparency, Anti-Corruption efforts, Elections, Strategic Litigation, Advocacy, Access to Information, and Research.

Within the realm of Fiscal Transparency, a significant aspect of our work involves conducting comprehensive budget research for The Gambia through the Open Budget Survey. This valuable information enables us to assist government institutions in enhancing their management of public finances, while also fostering transparency and public involvement in the budgetary process. In addition to our research efforts, we extend pro bono technical assistance to government institutions and legislators.

Among our notable projects are "Know Your Budget," "Follow the Money," and "Marble." These initiatives aim to empower individuals and communities by providing them with the necessary knowledge and tools to understand and engage with budgetary matters effectively. Through these projects, we strive to create a more informed and engaged citizenry, thereby fostering a culture of transparency and accountability in The Gambia.



From the Executive Director

The following are eight impactful projects that have made a difference in various demographic areas, reaching out to a significant number of people. These projects have successfully addressed key challenges and positively impacted communities.



Areas of Intervention and Projects

In 2021, Gambia Participates actively engaged in three primary areas of intervention, conducting a variety of activities through distinct projects, all with a common objective of advancing good governance.

Within the scope of our work, we focused on promoting good governance through specific projects that targeted different aspects of societal improvement. These projects encompassed various activities aimed at fostering transparency, accountability, and effective decision-making processes.

Through our initiatives, we endeavored to enhance the overall governance landscape by advocating for increased accountability, promoting transparency in public affairs, and encouraging participatory decision-making. Our projects aimed to empower citizens, government institutions, and other stakeholders to actively engage in the governance process, ultimately creating a more inclusive and democratic society.





FISCAL TRANSPARENCY

Gambia Participates work with multiple stakeholders to improve fiscal transparency and increase public participation in the national budget process and budget accountability.

Strengthening Accountability Networks among Civil Society (SANCUS)

The project – Strengthening Accountability Networks among Civil Society (SANCUS) – aims to contribute to greater democratic accountability of public institutions globally, specifically by empowering civil society organisations (CSOs) to demand systemic change to address accountability and anti-corruption deficits in 21 countries.

The SANCUS partners include seven national CSOs from Sub-Saharan Africa (Cameroon, Rwanda, the Gambia, Nigeria, Kenya, Zambia, and Zimbabwe), five from Latin America (Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Guatemala and Honduras), four from the Middle East and North Africa (Morocco, Lebanon, Jordan and Palestine), three from Asia Pacific (Sri Lanka, Indonesia and Maldives) and two from Eastern Europe and Central Asia (Armenia and Bosnia and Herzegovina).

The budget process of the Gambia is a top-bottom approach with citizens having less participation from budget formulation, execution and reporting. The Open Budget Survey 2019 scored Gambia 9/100 on public participation in The Budget. Citizens as a result see the budget as a government matter as they do not comprehend the bulky and technical budget itself. In order to stirrup the interest on public participation and accountability on the national budget Gambia Participates facilitated budget discussion in all the Seven (7) regions of The Gambia between lawmakers and constituents.

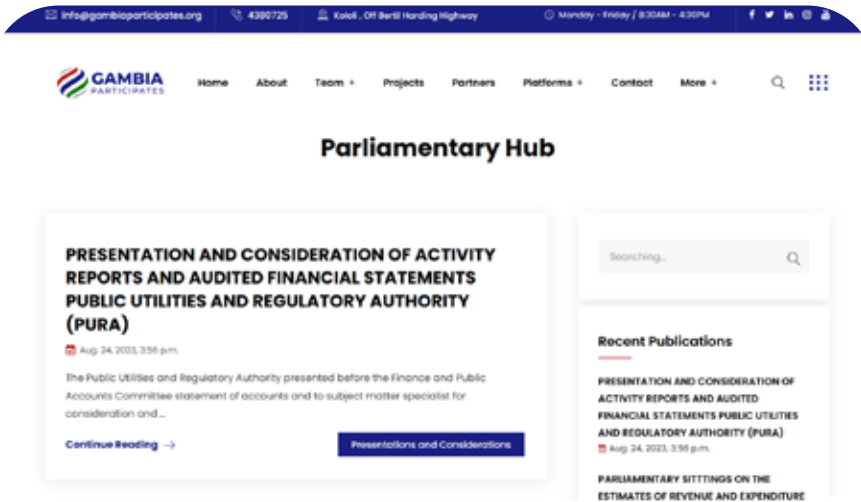
In a bid to entrench budget understanding amongst citizens and to bridge the communication gap between parliamentarians and their constituents Gambia Participates under the SANCUS project, from October 8th -10th 2021 convened a three-day rigorous community sensitization on the national budget. This was geared towards enhancing citizens understanding of the budget initiation, allocations and most importantly implementation but also ignite and open up opportunities for more citizen participation and strengthen oversight institutions in the budgetary process.

2021

Gambia Participates team engaged the constituents in the communities of Kani Kunda in Jarra Central – Lower River Region, Jallow Kunda Mat in Niani Central River Region (North) and Fatoto in Kantora Upper River Region. During the series of engagements, a total of 120 people were reached of whom 50 were male and 70 females. The 3-day intensive engagement witnessed the convergence of 3 National Assembly Members, 2 Councilors and 3 village youth chairpersons, members of the Village Development Committees, influential members of the community, women and youth.



GP under the SANCUS project has equally developed a dedicated webpage under its website where Parliament information covering, committee reports, votes, debates and other key information are made available on the website for the general public.



Click

Know Your Budget (KYB)

Know Your budget has been active since 2017 and is a mission to change the national budget process from a complicated technical process concerning only the executive and legislative sectors of Government, into one that involves the people who the budget is meant to serve. Gambia Participates with funding from the International Republican Institute (IRI) implemented phase III of the 'Know Your Budget' project. As part of the project implementation plans, Gambia Participates from August 27th – 30th 2021 conducted a rigorous community engagement in 4 regions in the Gambia via a vis the Central River Region North and South (CRR), Lower River Region (LRR), North Bank Region (NBR) understanding basic budget processes, the importance advocating for fiscal transparency, public participation and effective oversight functions exercised by various relevant stakeholders and the critical role of citizens in confronting their representatives in respect of the budget process and holding their central government and Local Government Councils (LGA) to account. The engagement equally served as an opportunity to clear common misconceptions on connected issues.

The team visited and engaged the communities of Genyeri in Kiang East, Kabakoto in Lower Niumi North Bank Region, Simbara Hai in Lower Saloum and Mamud Fanna in Niamina East in both Central River Region North and South Respectively reaching 27 satellite communities within the communities visited. The engagement registered a total reach of 154 participants of whom 86 were male and 68 females, 4 District Youth Chairpersons, 2 National Assembly Members, a Ward Councilor, Alkalos, Imams and other influential members in the respective communities. For an effective and intensive public participation on budget processes, citizens must first understand the existence, the basic concepts and the avenues through which the government earns income and revenue before seeking to meaningfully participate in budget advocacy and transparency, and oversight functions.



ANTI-CORRUPTION

We actively work in a wide range of anti-corruption programs that encompass various initiatives, including social audits and projects focused on legislative and institutional reform.

Within the realm of anti-corruption efforts, we employ a multifaceted approach to address this pervasive issue. Our diverse programs aim to combat corruption through different strategies and interventions, tailored to the specific needs and challenges of each context. One significant aspect of our work is conducting social audits, which involve engaging citizens and civil society organizations in the assessment and monitoring of public services and government projects. These audits serve as a tool to promote transparency, identify corruption risks, and hold public officials accountable for their actions.

In addition to social audits, we also undertake projects that focus on legislative and institutional reform. Through these initiatives, we collaborate with stakeholders, including government bodies and lawmakers, to develop and implement effective anti-corruption policies, laws, and institutional frameworks. By addressing systemic weaknesses and enhancing accountability mechanisms, we strive to create an environment that is resistant to corruption.

Giving a Voice to Victims of Land Corruption (ATJLF)

In 2021, Gambia Participates produced two documentaries featuring victims of land related corruption in two Gambian Communities.

In order to conduct an all-inclusive participatory video, victim identification and participation was central in the entire process. Gambia Participates began its “Participant Selection” activity in the adversely affected communities faced with challenges of land disputes. The team headed by the Executive Director visited the communities of Lamin (Babylon) and Kafuta from the 26th and 27th of September 2020 to introduce to them the project and its objectives. With the sole aim of making the project implementation 100% victim led, the team seized the opportunity to inform the community members that Gambia Participates’ and its team of experts and staff’s role is to only facilitate and that, the entire process will be led by representatives that are selected by the communities.

The community members were then allowed to share their ordeals and expectations and possible solutions beyond the project in a very interactive way. The victims voluntarily gave a clear account of their struggle in land disputes and new revelations showcased in addition to our initial findings. Among the key revelations was the emergence of two more communities that are part of the struggle of land abuse as recommended by victims in Lamin (Babylon). These communities are; Mandinaring and Makumbaya all neighboring with Lamin (Babylon). The two videos were screened in the presence of relevant government stakeholders who have pledged to take actions to remedy the plight of the victims.



Government Accountability Project (GAP)

The GAP amplifies the voices of marginalised communities demanding better public services. Gambia Participates used community score cards (CSC) to audit public service delivery and based on that data, we help communities push for change by engaging the relevant authorities. Gambia Participates with funding from the International Republican Institute (IRI) implemented a 4-month project dubbed Gambia Accountability Project, a project that seeks to ensure service provider institutions are held to account for the services offered to the citizenry. Gambia Participates looked into quality and affordable water service delivery by the sole water provider institution, National Water and Electricity Company (NAWEC). Access to clean and portable drinking water is eminent in the lives of citizens and as such, Gambia Participates with the use of Community Score Card (CSC) collected data from direct users of NAWEC water services.

The Community Scorecard was used to collect independent citizen perspective on the quality and affordability of the water services in their respective households. The score card was devised to gauge the water service, the condition of the water supplied to households, user satisfaction and affordability. The purpose of the survey was to collect data from citizens and use the data to meaningfully engage government to increase the quality of water service delivery while holding them accountable. This was a pilot project to test the use of CSC within the Greater Banjul Area for government accountability and an improved public service delivery and the indicators of the success of the project was worth extending beyond the Greater Banjul Area.



ELECTION

We have made significant progress in enhancing the transparency and participation in election processes in The Gambia. Our ongoing efforts focus on introducing innovative measures to further improve these aspects. By leveraging technology and implementing best practices, we aim to create a fair and inclusive electoral system.

Know Your Budget Comprehensive and Systematic Observation of the 2021 Presidential and 2022 Parliamentary Elections (CSO 2021-2022) (KYB)

Gambia Participates with funding from the International Republic Institute (IRI) conducted a long-term and short-term election observation of the 2021 presidential and 2022 parliamentary elections in The Gambia. Since credible elections require credible election monitoring from pre, during and post-election activities. Gambia Participates was able to establish a more robust, technical and sophisticated election observation using contemporary approaches and technology to monitor the 2021 Presidential and 2022 parliamentary elections, which was the first presidential elections since Jammeh's administration was voted out of dictatorship in 2016.

Since the organization was limited in capacity to conduct such initiatives, Gambia Participates (GP) worked with Yiaga Africa to better improve GPs election monitoring processes and procedures. The organization was able to leverage on the expertise of Yiaga Africa to conduct these activities. Gambia Participates deployed 65 trained and accredited long-term observers in all 53 constituencies of the country to observe the pre-election period and 500 trained short-term observers to monitor and observe the election day processes from opening, set-up, voting, closing and counting of results for the presidential elections.



Gambia Participates equally deployed 65 trained observers trained and accredited observers to monitor the pre-elections period as well as 300 trained and accredited short-term observers to monitor the elections day processes from opening, set-up, voting, closing and counting of votes for parliamentary elections. Gambia Participates shared all reports of the different period to all relevant stakeholders and was in constant engagement with media houses both local and international to disseminate report findings. A fully equipped data centre was set up and was open on election day to stakeholders working on the electoral process, important delegates and media houses passed by to have an understanding on how the data centre operated. Though there were constraints and major hitches the project was a huge success with Gambia Participates deploying the highest number of observers and were able to deliver key report findings and also make recommendations to the different stakeholders.



Marble Project (up to phase III)

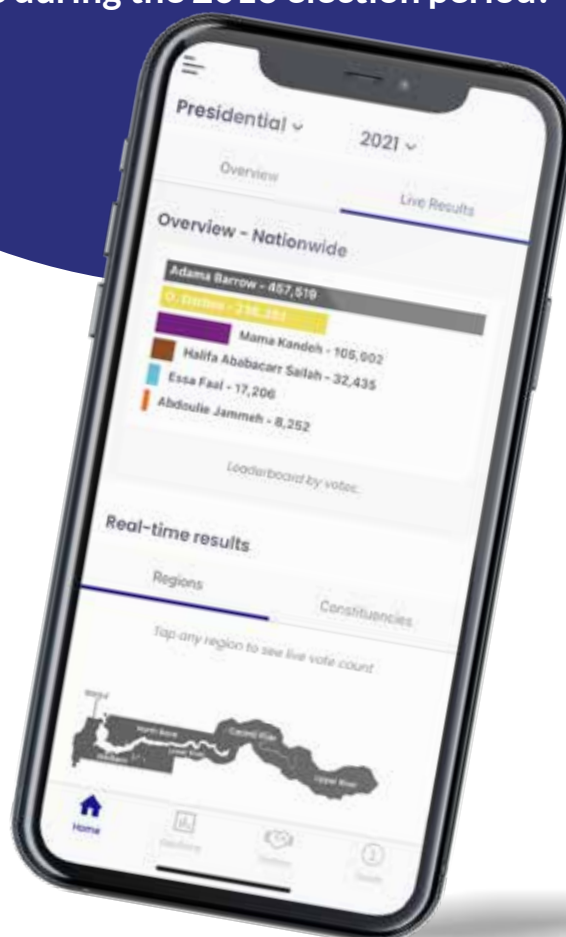
In order to make election information as accessible as possible, we partnered with Assutech, a Gambian software development company, to develop The Gambia's first election app, the Marble app. The Marble app allowed Gambians everywhere including the diaspora and election observers to receive election results and other key election information in real time. Votes were counted on the spot at each polling station and the results were fed into the app as soon as they were verified by the IEC. The User Interface is friendly, making the features easy to use and the data easy to understand. The app is a very convenient alternative to the traditional method, where each family gathered around their TV with notepads and a pencil to write down the number of votes as they were being announced.

The app features all the political parties and all four of the state/government elections held in The Gambia. It also has other features like polling station navigation, access to voter education messaging (including our animation videos), an "I Voted" sticker for voters to share, and a feedback form.

It was downloaded by roughly 30,000 people during the 2016 election period!



MARBLE GAMBIA
Elections Made Easy!



Marble II

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ON VOTER EDUCATION AND PARTICIPATION

Amidst an intense volatile political atmosphere, sensitizing the citizenry on observing peaceful, free, and fair elections is critical to the democratization process. The rationale behind the activity was to ignite citizens' understanding of the need to participate in the democratization process of their country by casting their votes in elections to limit voter apathy while maintaining peace and stability. The political space of the Gambia is currently influenced and driven by partisan politics thus the need to amplify messages of peace in the minds of citizens targeting young people.

Gambia Participates, from July, 2nd -5th 2021 with funding from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) conducted a three-day intensive voter education community engagement in rural Gambia ahead of the December 2021 Presidential polls in the Gambia. The team engaged the communities of Bohum Kunda in Wuli East, Upper River Region, Balangharr in the Central River Region (North), Bakalarr, Central River Region (Lower Niumi), and Masembe Kiang East in the Lower River Region. The engagement saw the presence of women, young people, District Chairpersons, and community elders from all four communities.

Gambia Participates designed key election information on billboards to raise awareness around the forthcoming Presidential election to inspire citizen participation in electoral processes and remind them of their civic rights and responsibility in leading their country's decision-making. These billboards were stationed in four strategic zones within the Greater Banjul Area. These places were; Banjul, (Opposite the National Assembly building), Traffic lights, Kairaba Avenue (Zenith Bank), and Bijilo.

Gambia Participates also developed animation videos in the most widely spoken dialects in The Gambia notably English, Mandinka, Wollof, and Fula to ignite and broaden the understanding of the citizenry on the electoral processes which covers the registration process, how to vote, election date and time, and what is expected of every Gambian during political campaigns and after casting their votes. The animation videos are published on our various social media platforms and have attracted Gambians from divergent backgrounds who appreciated and understood their civic duties due to the clarity of the messaging tailored to suit their understanding in there and in a language, they could relate to.

In a bid to foster understanding bearing in mind the literacy levels and comprehending that the majority of Gambians still listen to radio stations than any other medium of communication, Gambia Participates prepared election jingles in English, Mandinka, Wollof, and Fula to spread its election messages to reaching the wider communities that do not have access to the visual media also to have equal opportunity in understanding their roles and responsibilities as citizens and eligible voters in the electoral process. These jingles were aired by the two most widely followed radio stations in The Gambia (Star FM and Taranga FM). The jingle adverts ran on these stations for three weeks and three times a day during and after the radio stations' most imperative programs to humanely escort the election information to the public



Impacts

Gambia Participates in partnership with the International Foundations for Electoral System (IFES) and the CEELI Institute conducted research identifying The Gambia's international anti-corruption commitments and the level to which the country has enacted domestic laws corresponding those commitments. The research report also identified legal gaps and make recommendations to bridge the gaps in order to strengthen the legal framework to guard against corruption and increase accountability.

In November 2020, Gambia Participates convened a stakeholder consultation and engaged stakeholders in the prioritization and implementation of the recommendations in the research report. The stakeholders who participated in the consultation included government officials, Parliamentarians, CSOs, media, and political parties. Stakeholders unanimously agreed and adopted key anti-corruption recommendations with a commitment to ensure its implementations within their various sectors.

Gambia Participates developed action plans to implement the identified prioritized recommendations during the stakeholder consultation in series of activities which has been covered over time.



Investigative Research

During the early days of covid-19 in The Gambia, I led a team that investigated the spending of the D500m covid-19 emergency funds with concerning outcomes over the misappropriation of this fund in a report called “Corona the Gambia and the Millions”. With the not-so-good record of health sector corruption in the Gambia, the question we asked ourselves at Gambia Participates is; how do we ensure high level of transparency in the management of these funds during emergency crisis? Thus, we commissioned this survey to establish how transparent, corruption free and effective the government’s distribution of the food aid package is. While vulnerable citizens were preventing themselves from contracting the corona virus, their main source of revenue was affected due to the pandemic. Most of these vulnerable citizens in rural communities needed financial and food aid. The government of The Gambia created the D734m to support these families by procuring more than a million food products (rice, sugar and oil) in April 2020.

There is limited comprehensive information on the government’s procurement and spending on the D734m emergency food aid meant for the distribution of food products to the 84% of the population. More concerning is the discrepancies in government’s report on covid-19 expenditures. For us, we take these deficiencies as factors that compromises credible budget, widespread public sector corruption with no accountability. Corruption will thrive in an environment where there is no accountability and The Gambia’s anti-corruption efforts are largely ineffective which opportunity for improvement. We commissioned this report, which comes with journalist investigative reports to establish the facts surrounding the management of the food aid emergency funds in order to provide transparency and budget accountability. The findings of the report could also be used by the government of the Gambia, civil society and development partners to strengthen anti-corruption measures in The Gambia and budget credibility.

Download Report



Key 2021 Highlights

As The Gambia was about to head to the polls, the political atmosphere remained volatile as the emergence of new political parties and political propaganda took the center stage in the politics of the country. The independent electoral commission as constitutionally mandated to oversee and conduct election, conducts a voter registration exercise every 10 years, the register of voters is updated in a voter decentralized registration process for ease of registration throughout the Gambia which gives every citizen the opportunity to be registered in their communities. That year, the Independent Electoral Commission outlines key documents to be presented for the purpose of registration; the National ID card, the Gambian Passport, Birth Certificate and the Attestation.

The attestation to be acquired for the purpose of registration, is issued by the Independent Electoral Commission but stamped and validated by the Alkalo or Sefoe attesting that the individual in possession of the attestation is indeed a born citizen of the community where he or she seeks to be attested. However, the issuance of attestation in the voter registration process for the purpose of elections has been subjected to serious misinterpretations thus the provision in the Election Act did not expressly mention or vest in the Mayor the authority to issue attestations in the city of Banjul for the purpose of elections. The Independent Electoral Commission acted beyond the powers conferred on them to give authority to the Mayor of Banjul to issue attestations to constituents born in Banjul which is in violation of the Elections Act 2010.

Gambia Participates on June 23rd 2021 mounted a legal battle before the High Court in Banjul challenging the act of the Independent Electoral Commission to confer on the authority to issue attestations as this violates the Electoral laws.



High Court Judgement:

The High Court in its sound reasoning declared the following;

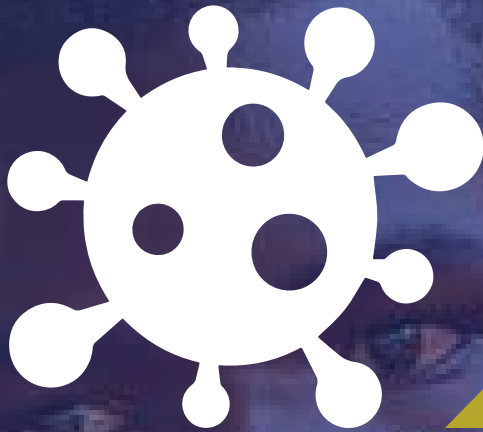
- That the actions of the Mayor of Banjul in issuing attestations to constituents of the city of Banjul in the ongoing Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) general registration of voter's process are in contravention with section 12 (2) (e) of the Elections Act.
- A declaration that the actions of the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) in conferring the power to the office of the Mayor of Banjul to administer attestation forms generated by the IEC for the purpose of claiming voter cards in the city of Banjul are a contravention of section 12 (2) (e) of the Elections Act;
- An order quashing the decision of the IEC to bestow upon the Mayor of Banjul the powers and authority to issue attestations to the constituents of the city of Banjul;
- An order setting aside all attestations forms endorsed and issued by the Mayor of Banjul for which voter cards were issued by the IEC.
- An order striking out and or cancelling all voter cards issued by the IEC that were supported by attestations forms issued and or endorsed by the Mayor of Banjul.

The judgment of the court reaffirms the independence of the Judiciary free from external influence and again confirms trust and confidence of the citizenry in the justice system of the country.



Challenges

The year 2021 presented a couple of challenges that have impacted GP one way or the other. Some of major challenges we encountered this year included;



**The Covid-19
Pandemic**

Underfunding



PARTNERS



**OPEN SOCIETY
FOUNDATIONS**



IRI INTERNATIONAL
REPUBLICAN
INSTITUTE
Advancing Democracy Worldwide

STAKEHOLDERS



2021





CONCLUSION

Undoubtedly, 2021 proved to be a year filled with significant trials and accomplishments for our organization. However, due to our unwavering determination and a distinct understanding of the requirements at hand, we managed to address emerging needs while staying committed to executing our strategic priorities. This report aims to effectively outline the progress made thus far as well as the persistent challenges we face.

Our journey in this endeavor is a lengthy one, yet we remain confident that every individual involved, including our dedicated staff, volunteers, and supporters, is actively treading the correct path.



GAMBIA
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SCAN ME



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