

ANNUAL REPORT



2022



GAMBIA
PARTICIPATES

Table of Content

Executive Summary	2
A Word From The Executive Director	3
About Gambia Participates	4
2022 Project Outlook: A Comprehensive Reach and Extensive Outreach	5
Areas of Intervention and Projects	6
Fiscal Transparency	7
Strengthening Accountability Networks Among Civil Society (SANCUS)	8
Strengthening and Sustaining Fiscal Transparency and Accountability (SFTA)	10
2023 Budget Review Retreat	10
Fostering Participatory Budgeting	13
Anti-Corruption	14
Amplifying Victims of Grand Corruption	15
GACC	17
Elections	18
Comprehensive and Systematic Observation of The 2022 Parliamentary Elections	19
Marble III	21
Other Projects	25
Food Aid Research	26
Select Highlight	28
Challenges	30
Our Partners	31
Conclusion	32

Executive Summary

Gambia Participates' annual report gives an overview of the key projects and activities implemented by our organization in the year 2022. Gambia Participates is a civil society organization that works towards improving the lives of communities by promoting good governance through its three main intervention areas; fiscal transparency, anti-corruption, and elections. In 2022, Gambia Participates engaged 1446 people in person, reaching out to the seven regions in the country, including 77 satellite villages. Gambia Participates in facilitated discussions around the budget between parliamentarians and their constituents. This gave members of parliament the chance to engage their constituents and give them a clear understanding of the national budget.

In its quest to minimize the endemic effect of corruption, Gambia Participates has been advocating for the legislation of the 2019 anti-corruption bill and conducted a stakeholder engagement on the 2019 anti-corruption bill. Parliamentarians, members of civil society, and other relevant stakeholders were engaged via a multistakeholder dialogue to discuss strategies that will ensure that the bill is legislated.

Gambia Participates equally conducted a systematic and comprehensive observation of the 2022 parliamentary elections deploying the largest number of long and short terms observers across the country.



A Word From The Executive Director

As I reflect on the past year, I am filled with a sense of pride and gratitude for the remarkable achievements of Gambia Participates. Despite ongoing challenges, our dedicated team has worked tirelessly to strengthen democratic institutions and processes in the Gambia. This 2022 annual report highlights our key accomplishments and demonstrates our unwavering commitment to building a more democratic and just society.

Our work to strengthen parliamentary oversight has been particularly successful. We have provided training and support to parliamentarians on their oversight role, mobilized civil society to engage with parliament, and monitored and reported on parliamentary oversight. As a result, parliamentarians are now more aware of their oversight role, and they are more willing to hold the government to account.

We have also made significant progress in promoting transparency and accountability. We have conducted research, and we have advocated for reforms to government procurement processes. In addition, we have worked to empower communities to monitor and report on the use of public resources.

We are committed to using our platforms to advocate for reforms that promote transparency, accountability, and citizen participation. In 2022, we submitted written position papers and participated in reviewing bills and acts in parliament and proposed solutions.

I am particularly proud of our work to promote the participation of women and youth in civic life. We recruited and trained youth and women across the country to observe the 2022 parliamentary elections allowing them to actively participate in the electoral process of their country.

We also acknowledge the challenges and gaps that we faced and the areas that we need to improve and strengthen. We are committed to learning from our experiences and feedback, and to enhancing our organizational capacity and effectiveness.

As we look ahead, Gambia Participates remains committed to its mission. Sustainability is at the forefront of our planning, ensuring that the impact of accountability networks and citizen engagement initiatives extends beyond the project's duration. We are dedicated to continuous adaptation and enhancement of technology solutions, policy advocacy, and fostering collaborative relationships with all stakeholders.

I am incredibly grateful to the dedicated team at Gambia Participates and our partners for their unwavering commitment to creating a more equitable and prosperous Gambia. Together, we are making a difference, and I am confident that our collective efforts will continue to shape a brighter future for all Gambians.

Thank you,

A portrait of Marr Nyang, the Executive Director, wearing a white traditional Gambia krama with green embroidery and a black kudu hat. He is wearing glasses and has a slight smile.

MARR NYANG

About Gambia Participates

Gambia Participates is a dynamic and impactful civil society organization at the forefront of fostering civic engagement, transparency, and accountability in The Gambia. Established with a commitment to promoting a vibrant democracy, the organization has been instrumental in empowering citizens and civil society organizations (CSOs) to actively participate in shaping the nation's socio-political and economic landscape. At the heart of Gambia Participates' mission is the belief that an informed and engaged citizenry is vital for the growth and development of a nation. The organization is dedicated to advancing principles of good governance, accountability, and social justice. Through a range of initiatives, Gambia Participates seeks to amplify the voices of citizens and CSOs, creating a more inclusive and responsive society.

Through our dedicated efforts, we:

Empower citizens: We equip communities with knowledge and skills to actively engage in decisions that affect their lives, particularly regarding budgeting and public finances.

Strengthen oversight: We work with civil society organizations to monitor public resource allocation and advocate for transparency and accountability in government institutions.

Promote dialogue: We bridge the gap between citizens and decision-makers, fostering open communication and collaborative solutions to pressing challenges.

Build capacity: We provide training and resources to civil society organizations, enabling them to champion citizen rights and contribute effectively to development processes.

Our impact is measured in increased citizen participation, more equitable budget allocations, and stronger trust in government institutions. We strive to create a Gambia where every voice is heard, every penny counts, and every citizen plays a role in shaping the nation's destiny.



2022 Project Outlook: A Comprehensive View and Extensive Reach

9



PROJECTS

1446



IN-PERSON
ENGAGEMENT
WITH CITIZENS

77



SATELLITE
COMMUNITIES

7



REGIONS

63%



YOUTH

58



PARLIAMEN-
TARIANS

25



NATIONAL ASSEMBLY
SUPPORT STAFF

4



GOVERNMENT
OFFICIALS



Areas of Interventions and Projects



In 2022, 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

A photograph of two men in a discussion, overlaid with a green tint. The man on the left is wearing a dark jacket and has his hand near his face. The man on the right is wearing a blue t-shirt with 'DOL' and 'CORR' visible and is gesturing with his hands. The background shows trees.

Fiscal Transparency

Gambia Participates works 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)

Strengthening Accountability Networks among Civil Society is a project that aims at positively impacting the democratic accountability of public institutions globally by empowering civil society organizations to work with relevant stakeholders and increase transparency and accountability in the public sector.

The SANCUS partners include civil society organizations from different countries around the globe. These partners include; Cameroon, Rwanda, The Gambia, Nigeria, Kenya, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Guatemala, Honduras, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Maldives, Morocco, Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Basic understanding of the national budget by citizens is key to asking the right and relevant questions but also a key ingredient of budget transparency and public participation.

Gambia Participates with funding from Transparency International convened an intense community engagement on the 18th, 22nd and 29th September 2022 on the budget in both rural and urban settlements engaging the newly elected parliamentarians to discuss in depth the budget in relation to the role of a national assembly member.

The engagement saw the presence of influential youth, women and community leaders alike from within 45 neighboring satellite villages that graced the occasion. Gambia Participates were able to converge a total of 4 parliamentarians and 183 participants 86 of whom were male and 97 females. The constituents engaged were from Kerewan in Lower Badibu (North Bank Region), Sibanor in Foni Brefet (West Coast Region), Garba Jahumpa in Banjul North and Tallinding in Kanifing Municipality.





The rationale behind the engagement was to enhance citizen participation in respect of the budget to essentially understand what the budget entails, the manner and avenue in which government accrues revenue and how the budget completed their plans and policies. The engagement also covered the budget cycle, the budget formulation process, the debate and approval process, budget bilateral, and subsequently budget implementation, monitoring and evaluation and most specifically oversight.

Since the tabling of the Anti-Corruption Bill before Parliament in 2019, it has procedurally taken some positive steps, although with delays. In light foregoing, Gambia Participates believed reenacting conversation and engagement on the AC Bill was key with the 6th Legislature. In this light, Gambia Participates under the SANCUS project on July 22nd, 2022, held a day engagement with various relevant stakeholders on the Anti-Corruption bill. In attendance were 8 parliamentarians, 5 members from civil society organizations, representatives from the European Union, and the media. Through this activity, the accurate status of the anti-corruption bill was known by stakeholders as well as the general public. Major concerns about the Bill were raised by representatives from civil society organizations and parliamentarians in attendance showed strong will to pass the anti-corruption bill into law.

Strengthening and Sustaining Fiscal Transparency and Accountability (SFTA)

Strengthening and Sustaining Fiscal Transparency and Accountability is a project that seeks to improve fiscal transparency, public participation and budget oversight by supporting key government offices effectively implement their mandates.



2023 Budget Review Retreat

Gambia Participates with funding from the US Embassy, Gambia under the Strengthening and Sustaining Fiscal Transparency and Accountability in The Gambia (SFTA) project from the 14th to the 16th of November 2022 at the Ocean Bay Hotel and Resort facilitated a three (3) day retreat for parliamentarians and support staff of the National Assembly to review the 2023 Executive Budget Proposal. The notion behind the 3-day retreat was to support the Legislature in reviewing the 2023 Executive Budget Proposal (EBP) and making strategic amendments to the proposed budget. The 3-day retreat, which initially targeted at least 96% of Parliamentarians ended up having 100% of the parliamentarians in attendance and 70% of its key support staff reviewing the Fiscal Year 2023 Executive Budget Proposal. The retreat included a complete review of the key sectors in the Fiscal Year 2023 budget. The review exercise was supported by the staff of the Budget Advisory Office. The outcome of the retreat was to have a revised Executive Budget Proposal with amendments made by parliamentarians. There was significant capacity building for both parliamentarians and support staff and the retreat was included in the National Assembly's business agenda. The retreat captured media attention and was aired both on print and online media houses. A total of 58 parliamentarians, 22 parliamentary support staff, and 4 government officials were fully engaged.

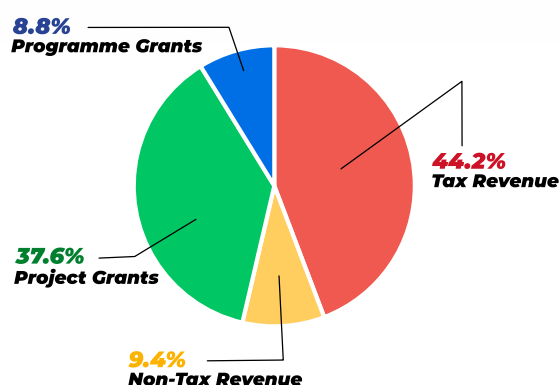


Furthermore, Gambia Participates supported the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs to develop for the first time a citizen's version of the 2023 Executive Budget Proposal (EBP). The citizen's version of the executive budget proposal contained simplified budget data on citizen interest on the budget, which includes budget allocations and development programs on crucial sectors such as agriculture, health, tourism, gender, children & social welfare, petroleum and energy, transport works and infrastructure. A list of the top 10 funded entities, budget deficit, debt repayments, recurrent spending and capital spending were captured in the citizen's version. The citizens version of the executive budget proposal was endorsed and published by the Ministry of Finance and Economic affairs. They equally had it published on their website and social media platforms

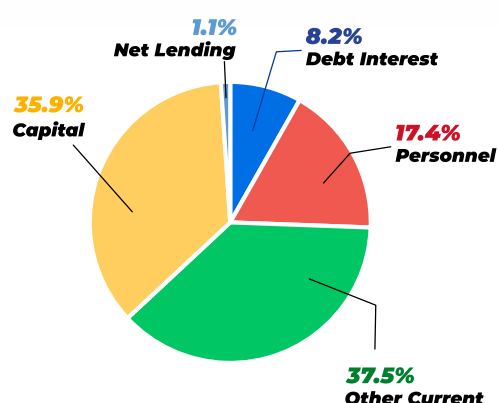


CITIZENS' VERSION OF THE 2023 EXECUTIVE BUDGET PROPOSAL

SOURCES OF GOVERNMENT MONEY



GOVERNMENT SPENDING AREAS



AGRICULTURE



- D400 Million Support
- 12 Centers Rehabilitation Projects

- D400 million for crop financing and fertilizer subsidy to increase self-sufficiency.
- 12 mixed farming centres currently operating across the country and plans to rehabilitate the mixed farming centres

TOURISM



- 2 Rehabilitation Projects
- 30 Jobs To Be Created

- 30 jobs to be created through the Mausoleum at the National Assembly
- Rehabilitation of Mungo Park Memorial and Musa Molloh Memorial to attract more tourists and increase revenue in the sector.

HEALTH



- \$30 Million Diagnostic Center
- National Health Insurance Scheme Implementation

- \$30 million from World Bank for the construction of Farato diagnostic center
- Implementation of the National Health Scheme which will offer access to affordable medicines and vaccines to the most vulnerable.

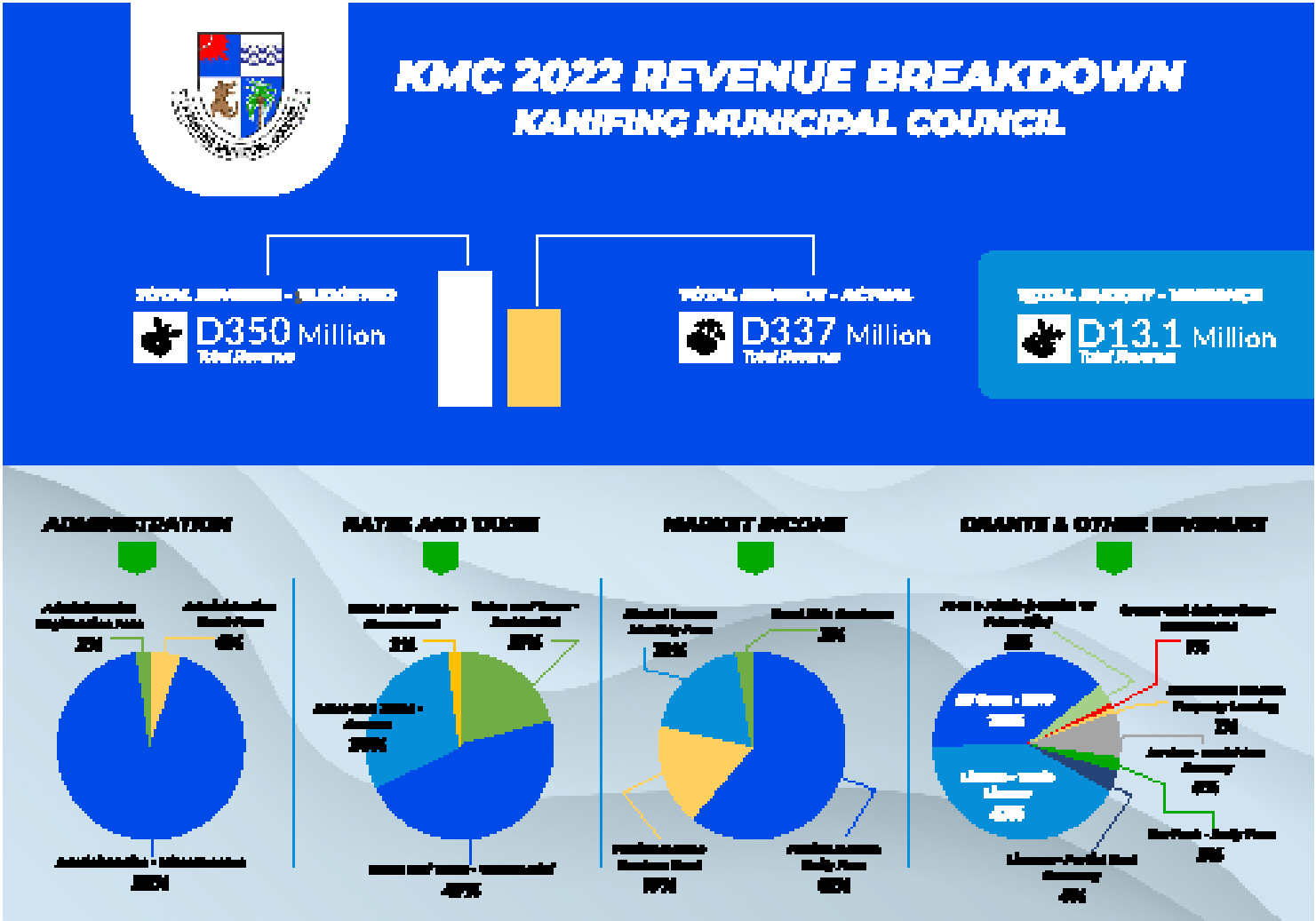
GENDER, CHILDREN & SOCIAL WELFARE



- Disability Policy and Fund
- Support 100 Women Groups

- Develop the disability policy and establish a disability Fund.
- Disburse funds to 100 women groups under the Women Empowerment Project (WEF).

Similarly, to increase local government budget transparency, Gambia Participates has worked with the Kanifing Municipal Council (KMC) to develop a Citizens' Budget for its 2023 budget. Through the support provided by GP under this project, this is for the first time a local government budget has been made available in a citizen friendly manner. The citizen's budget contained an expenditure breakdown which included recurrent and capital expenditures. A further breakdown on recurrent expenditure was highlighted the percentage of the council's budget as well for the National Gross Domestic Product (GDP). A breakdown of the Council's revenue estimates was captured with an inclusion of the KMC's development programs for the year 2023. The citizens version of the Kanifing Municipal Council's was endorsed by the council. It was published on the council's website and social media pages. As a result, citizens for the first time got the opportunity to know the council's budget and its development programs to the people.



Fostering Participatory Budgeting

Since 2019, Gambia Participates have been facilitating budget dialogues between Parliamentarians and over 200 communities in rural Gambia. There has been manifested citizen interest and basic knowledge on the budget since GP's widely reached citizen engagement on the budget.

In 2022, Gambia Participates shifted their focus from rural to urban. The rationale behind this shifting is since, many believe rural communities lack information on the budget, which is true but urban communities lack the same information and where they have the information, they are unable to understand how to use the information.

As a result, Gambia Participates facilitated participatory budgeting sessions in 4 communities within Banjul and the Greater Banjul Area. During these sessions, 165 participants from 26 communities and 4 Parliamentarians (2 of which are newly elected) were engaged on the budget. The participatory budget engagements in all the 4 communities were filmed in a video documentary which shows how the participants were participating with interest, the activity methodology and side interviews involving the engaged Parliamentarians and their constituents. This documentary was aired on QTV on September 12 at 22:30 GMT.

Under this project, GP also facilitated 2 special TV programs on QTV to discuss participatory budgeting, budget transparency and accountability in The Gambia.



GP also developed a simplified version of the revised 2022 citizens' budget which was validated by the Ministry of Finance. The one-pager citizens' budget was developed following the amendments made in the 2022 national budget, which was adopted by Parliament in July 2022. The project also used animated pictures to explain in detail the 2022 citizens budget in English, Mandinka and Wolof.

Some newly elected and other re-elected Parliamentarians benefited from a 2 days' workshop on budget oversight, participatory budgeting and fiscal transparency that was convened by Gambia Participates under this project. The training was attended by 24 Parliamentarians (41% of the Members of Parliament) of which 12 are newly elected NAMs (36% of the newly elected NAMs). The 2 deputy clerks of the National Assembly, 1 staff of the Parliamentary Budget office and 1 staff of the National Assembly are amongst the workshop participants. Both the majority and minority leaders of the National Assembly were also there.



Anti- Corruption

We work on a diverse range of anti-corruption programs, from social audits to legislative and institutional reform projects

Amplifying Victims of Grand Corruption (ATJLF)

In 2022, Gambia Participates produced a participatory video documentary featuring victims of grand corruption in The Gambia.

A workshop was organized to train young people in the transitional justice process how to film and document stories of victims. The participants were intentionally selected to be diverse to create a collective of people who can work together in telling a complete story encompassing the before, during and after stages of the transitional justice process of the Gambia through its various apparatuses, especially the TRRC (Truth Reconciliation and Reparation Commission) from historical, institutional, and personal perspectives. A participatory video approach with its inherent quality being putting participants center stage in telling their own stories was the chosen format of such engagement. 8 participants were selected to be part of this process.

The workshop provided a platform for experts, and victims of human rights abuses of the past to share their stories, personal and professional opinions and to document the transitional justice process of the Gambia holistically. It also provided a medium documentary through which stories of victims and opinions of their representatives can be captured and amplified in the fight for the adoption of recommendations that seeks to remedy, provide justice, and redress, and instill the #NeverAgain spirit. As well provided a platform for unionism amongst participants and facilitators and helped them understand the need to work collaboratively in tackling human rights issues and those of national interest.





Launching of the video

Taught skills, and techniques essential in trying to reach and influence decision-makers and mobilizing support for social change to empower the marginalized communities. It was a platform to offer healing for the victims and a reminder that they are still being fought for, and through them, future generations enabled the participants to represent themselves and their communities in their own words. It is source of learning technical, creative, and collaborative approaches to problem solving in general and self-directed storytelling specifically. The training lasted from May 6th to May 11th, 2022.

The filming of the documentary went from May 12th to May 14th, 2022. The documentary video featured direct and indirect victims of human rights violations. On May 17th 2022, the rough-cut documentary was screened. On October 20th, 2022, the video documentary was launched at the Kairaba Beach Hotel to share the stories of human rights violations with the general public. 65 participants attended the video launch. The video is now available on Gambia Participates YouTube Channel.



GACC

On May 24, 2022, a court order was made by the US Department of Justice to forfeit Yaya Jammeh's \$3.5m potomac mansion and the plan to return the proceeds to The Gambia. Gambia Participates with the goal to ensure that the funds acquired from the sale of the proceeds goes to victim reparation, partnered with the Victims Center to engage stakeholders to facilitate the receipt and disposal of the Potomac mansion proceeds. In this process, Gambia Participates together with the Victims Center engaged the Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Finance and National Human Rights Commission to form a task force that will facilitate the development of a documented framework for the disposal of the proceeds. However, the Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Justice applauded GP for this initiative but did not form part of the taskforce. Gambia Participates met and formed a task force with the Victims Center and NHRC.

On November 10, the taskforce met with other victim-led organizations to develop a spending plan. This spending plan would serve as a guide as to how the proceeds from the potomac mansion will be used to support the government of The Gambia in the implementation of its white paper on the TRRC's report which includes providing reparation for the recognized victims.





Elections

We're continuously finding new ways to make election processes in The Gambia more transparent and participatory.

Comprehensive and Systematic Observation of the 2022 Parliamentary Elections.

Gambia Participates with funding from the International Republican Institute conducted a long-term and short-term observation of the 2022 parliamentary elections. On 9 April 2022, Gambians gathered at the polls to vote 53 parliamentarians for the National Assembly out of 247 candidates who contested. These parliamentarians elected are to serve for another five years, everyone was given the chance as far as stated by the law. The elections were conducted in a transparent, free and fair manner and added credit to the rebuilding of democratic processes in The Gambia.

Gambia Participates after a successful Presidential Election Observation, was again privileged to observe the Parliamentary Election. Gambia Participates did the pre-election observation by observing the nominations, campaigns, and the general environment, this was done by the long-term observers. Also, the E-day election was observed and reported.

Gambia Participates recruited 12 regional focal points. The RFPs were resident in the regions and were responsible for managing the regional project implementation activities including the recruiting Constituency supervisors and Gambia Participates Election Day observers. The Regional Focal Points served as Long Term Observers in this project, and they were monitoring, observing, and reporting on the political development ahead of the elections to the GP Secretariat.

Gambia Participates also recruited 53 Constituency supervisors. They were tasked with recruiting polling unit observers and observing the pre-election environment. Recruitment of Supervisors took into consideration gender balance and PWD representation. All recruited supervisors were vetted and verified by the GP team.



Gambia Participates with its Regional Focal Point and Constituency supervisors recruited 343 Election Day polling unit observers based on the project's approved recruitment guidelines which was introduced during the training on observer recruitment. The GP team verified all recruited observers. Recruitment criteria included that Observers must be recruited from the vicinity of the assigned polling unit, that each has a national identification card, a means of verification that they were resident in their assigned polling unit, a mobile phone that can send text messages, among other requirements that were determined.

The GP team recruited 30 data clerks that were deployed to operate at the Gambia Participates Data Centre. Data clerks were recruited according to a set of recruitment criteria, which included a minimum level of education, ICT literacy and residence in the greater Banjul area. Recruitment of Supervisors took into consideration gender balance and PWD representation.

The recruited observers were all trained by the Gambia Participates team after which two simulation exercises were conducted to test the preparedness of its systems and personnel ahead of the elections.

Gambia Participates situation room was set up in an easy to access but discreet atmosphere in Kololi, for a period of 3 days. It was equipped with 15 networked computers, internet and back up facilities, toll-free lines and mobile phone, stationery, projector, hardware server and two television sets. The situation room was set up to collect accurate and authentic real time data from the election observers on the field throughout all the covered polling stations during and after elections. The situation room had 30 data entry clerks who were segmented according to the regions and ran in 2 shifts – 15 in the morning and the other 15 in the afternoon, the clerks were supervised by data managers. The situation room was open on election day to stakeholders working on the electoral process, journalists, and other visitors, and served as the data collection and analysis centre for election day activities with the Data Entry Clerks in the same room with the Experts. With the help of projectors, the data collected was visualized for easy analysis and the collection of missing data from the observation field.



Marble III

Owing to the huge voter apathy attached to Parliamentary elections as opposed to Presidential elections there is a high need and demand to counter the narrative through intense voter sensitization to ignite electoral participation, especially among young people between the ages of 18-35 constituting more than half the number of people living in The Gambia of about 65% to strengthen the lost trust and confidence of young people and the entire citizenry who have lost hope and trust in the governance and leadership of the country.

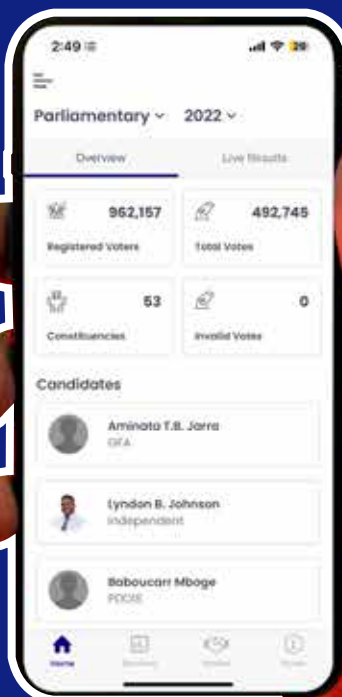
Gambia Participates with funding from National Endowment for Democracy (NED) from the 18- 21st of March and the 1st of April 2022 respectively conducted a rigorous 4-day country wide voter sensitization on the relevance of parliamentary elections, the role and responsibilities of a parliamentarian, their mandate, and their limitations as far as the executions of their functions are concerned. The engagement equally reflected on the citizens' right to fully exercise their franchise as is a constitutional right and mandate to elect a leadership that can serve the needs and aspirations of citizens.

The team engaged constituents of Jarra Region on the 18th of March, 2022, South on 19th March 2022, Region- North on 20th March, 2022, Region on the 21st of March, Kombo South, West Coast 2022 respectively engaging a participants, 178 of whom were reaching a total number of 25 within the villages engaged.

The National Endowment for supported the recruitment of 50 observers out of the 343 deployed data entry clerks. These observers were trained by GP's team to effectively observe and report during the parliamentary elections.

Jappineh in the Lower River Dalaba Central River Region- Panchang in Central River Njaba Kunda in North Bank 2022 and Jambanjelly in Region on April 1st, total number of 348 male and 170 female satellite regions

Democracy short-term and 16



In addition, Gambia Participates on the 8th and the 9th of March, 2022 conducted a Plus Code collection training for 20 and 33 of its selected Constituency Supervisors (CS) respectively, who were assigned the added task of collecting Plus Codes for the 700 polling stations across the country to build a dataset of said stations to be used in the Marble election mobile application to aid in polling station navigation from within the application. The decision to retain said supervisors stemmed from the understanding that they were familiar with the election process, and through their observation and reporting the various places polling stations were located. Moreover, the existing familiarity between the CS and IEC personnel whom they could engage if any questions about the location of polling stations were also considered. The training sessions were part of a general refresher training, which was conducted across two days, and involved CS being taken through the processes and procedures of election observation and the essential considerations to be made going into the 2022 Parliamentary election. This set the tone for the introduction of the essence of the polling station mapping exercise.



Observers collected 677 plus codes out of the 731 plus codes from polling stations which were equally verified. The remaining 54 plus codes could not be collected by observers due to technical issues beyond their control.

Gambia Participates in fulfilling its goal of consistently providing a platform to serve as a hub for election information once again on April 9th, 2022, for the Parliamentary Elections made election information available on Marble. A team of 3 data entry clerks were deployed to collect and enter election results as reported by the IEC at their office in Bakau during election night and through to the morning of the 10th of April 2022. The application featured all the 247 candidates vying for positions in the fifty-three constituencies across the country, and the 49,2745 total counted votes – excluding the invalid votes.

Since the tabling of the Elections Bill 2020 at the National Assembly, two important elections have been conducted in The Gambia under the existing Elections Act, which requires a lot of amendments, thus the introduction of the Elections Bill 2020. There is need for the legislation of the Elections Bill 2020 by the 6th Legislature before the local government elections which is scheduled to take place on May 13th, 2023. The 2023 local government election is the best opportunity for The Gambia to start its electoral reform process. During the 2021-2022 elections, political parties and election observation groups all stressed the need for electoral reform.

In this regard, Gambia Participates with support from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) on October 26th, 2022, convened a multi-stakeholder dialogue on electoral reforms at the Sir Dawda Kairaba Jawara International Conference Center. This stakeholder dialogue included political parties, the Independent Electoral Commission, National Assembly Members, and Civil Society Organizations who discussed the necessary changes in the Elections Bill 2020 and how these stakeholders can work with Parliamentarians to legislate the bill before the 2023 local government elections.

With support from the National Endowment for Democracy, Gambia Participates facilitated 12 weekly radio programs that ran for a 1 month commencing from the 29th of October 2022 all the way to the 4th of December 2022 to specifically discuss the 2020 elections bill. The purpose of the radio program was to sensitize citizens on the weaknesses of the current laws governing elections and the new election bill that could improve election transparency, impartiality, and credibility. The radio program was also used as a platform to intensify the advocacy for the passing of the election Bill. The discussions were centered around the advantages of having new electoral laws that will be commensurate with the current realities. Some of the areas during the discussions were term limits, equal representation in parliament, a level playing field for each political party, and the constitution. Other areas of discussion during the radio programs also included the role of parliament in ensuring the bill is enacted, creating more space for women to be part of the decision-making process (Quota System), boundary demarcation and equal representation, the role of the media in the electoral reform, reforms on internal party democracy, enhancing youth political participation through an affirmative legal framework, term-limit and its importance in our electoral process and political party financing.


The radio programs targeted profile speakers which included Parliamentarians, Lawyers, Civil Society Advocates, and Media Practitioners. In the last 30 minutes of the program, listeners were given the opportunity to make their input on the program and ask questions/comments on the election bill and election-related matters. The radio program was held at a Q-radio station that has a land coverage of at least 80% of the country. A total of 70 listeners called to give their contributions and 100% of the total number of people that called in supported the need for not just electoral reforms but constitutional reforms as well.



A total of 886,578 registered voters there was a total of 302,528 votes cast in the previous Local Government elections which is often low as compared to other elections. With a drastic reduction of voter turnout of 33.4% in the 2018 Local Government elections as compared to the 2016 Presidential and 2017 Parliamentary elections as well as the need to encourage increased citizen participation, Gambia Participates developed billboards ahead of the 2023 Local Government elections to increase understanding on the importance of elections and easy access to electoral information. The billboards contained key simplified election information stationed at key locations within urban Gambia to raise awareness on the importance of elections in general, specifically Local Government elections.

Literacy is higher within the Greater Banjul Area (GBA), thus the reason the billboards have been stationed within the (GBA). The messages contained on the Billboards were specifically to serve as a reminder of civic duty on Local Government elections and the need for mass participation.





OTHER PROJECTS

Food Aid Research

At the peak of the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, businesses wind down to an interim halt affecting the lives and livelihoods of populations and the global economic outlook of countries around the world. To curb the abrupt upsurge of the pandemic, countries began taking interim measures as a mechanism to contain the rapid spread of the virus. The growing situation has forced many countries to divert and expend resources meant for other purposes to control the spread of the virus.

As the coronavirus continued to persist, with the Gambia registering its first reported case in March 2020, daily businesses came to a standstill, forcing the government of the Gambia to introduce curfews to limit the movement of people to neutralize the effect of the spread of the pandemic. Consequently, the government of the Gambia lined up a series of COVID-19 emergency response mechanisms to serve as a buffer to the pandemic.

Owing to the limitation interim halt in businesses affecting the source of earnings and livelihood of Gambians who were in dire need of daily sustenance, the government of the Gambia created D734m to support these needy families through the provision of food and basic commodities, which was subjected to a 24hrs bidding process. Additionally, the government equally reallocated D500m of the 2020 approved budget to the Ministry of Health and other MDAs to implement the government's containment and prevention measures. Similarly, the government reallocated the budget on debt repayments to fund the food relief package.

In light of this, Gambia Participates in March embarked on a rigorous 10-day data collection exercise in 1174 households across all seven (7) regions of the country to ascertain the credibility of the distribution of the 734m food relief package allocated to citizens in 2020 to counteract the economic gaps created as a result of the restriction of movement and daily activities. The conclusion of the research unraveled interesting findings. In disseminating the findings, in 2022, three (3) community engagements, two (3) television programs and four (4) radio programs were organized to get more citizens to comprehend the investigations made and the findings of the report.



The dissemination of the Food Aid findings was conducted in three communities; Sotokoi Weriko (North Bank Region), Bunyadu Foni Brefet (West Coast Region), and Bundung (Kanifing Municipality) on September 16th, 19th and October 15th respectively. Participants during the community engagement were taken through the content of the findings. They were taken through the process of the allocation of funds earmarked for the purchase of the previously distributed food items meant to offset the adverse effects of the outbreak of the pandemic on the socio-economic lives of citizens. 150 people were engaged during the community engagements.

Four Radio programs were conducted on West Coast Radio 92.1 FM focusing on the Investigation of the Covid-19 Food Aid Distribution by the Gambia Government published by Gambia Participates (GP) on 31st June 2021. All four radio programs feature two panelists and a moderator. In all the radio programs gender balance was observed by ensuring that one of the two panelists invited was a woman. All programs were held on Mondays and Fridays from 4 to 5 pm between 14th October to 24th October 2022.

Two Television programs were conducted, one with QTV and the other with Eye Africa TV, both TV programs focused on the Investigation of the COVID-19 Food Aid Distribution by the Gambia Government published by Gambia Participates (GP) on 31st June 2021. All the two television programs featured two panelists and a moderator. The first television had Omar Bah an investigative journalist and Fanta Sanneh Programs Assistant of Gambia Participates as a panelist and the second television program had Yusef Taylor editor in chief of Gainako online newspaper and Annetta BV Mahoney Programs Manager of Gambia Participates.

Both TV programs observed gender balance by ensuring that one of the two panelists invited was a woman. All TV programs commenced with a detailed background of the Covid-19 Food Aid Distribution Investigation report. The manner of how the food items, the cause, the transportation, and distribution were spelled out explicitly by panelists to get viewers to recall the initial cause for the food aid package by the Government. Detailed details of what the report entailed, the motive, and how the investigation was done as well as the results of the investigation were also made known to the viewers.



Select Highlight

On Monday November 14, 2022, after tabling the 2023 Executive Budget Proposal by the Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs at the National Assembly, the Speaker of the National Assembly Fabakary Tombong Jatta (FTJ) at the end of the session made a remark on the GP supported budget retreat stating: “I want to announce for the general information of members that the pre-budget training retreat is scheduled for the period today the 14-16 November 2022 at the Ocean Bay Hotel in Cape Point Bakau. Accordingly, all Honorable Member are urged to immediately proceed to the hotel as the retreat commences immediately. The office of the clerk (in collaboration with GP) has sought the services of various experts and technicians on budget analysis and training to help honorable members on their scrutiny role on the budget. Therefore, honorable members, it is importantly that we all attend this important retreat to enable us thoroughly to scrutinize and digest this very important document”



The retreat was opened in a high-level panel in which the Speaker of the National Assembly, Fabakary Tombong Jatta, US Ambassador to the Gambia, Ambassador Sharon L. Cromer, Founder and Executive Director of Gambia Participates, Marr Nyang and the Clerk of the National Assembly Modou Ceesay speaking on the significance of legislature in scrutinizing the budget to make informed decisions that will impact on the lives of Gambians. After a thorough look at the 2023 Executive Budget Proposal with the assistance and guidance of national budget experts, at the 3-day retreat facilitated by Gambia Participates (GP), members of the National Assembly (NA) together with the staff of Finance and Public Accounts Committee (FPAC) of the National Assembly came up with recommendations to make certain changes in the said budget proposal in order to address the most urgent needs of the fragile economy so as to strengthen it and bring about sustainable economic growth and development in the country. These changes were to reduce the proposed spending on certain budget lines, especially on Personal Emoluments (PE), and to augment spending on key areas such as education, agriculture, health, and youth and women empowerment. Most of the changes proposed were captured in the 2023 enacted national budget.

ADOPTED RECOMMENDATIONS RAISED DURING THE BUDGET DEBATE AT THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

4 out of the 53 duly nominated parliamentarians raised the issue of furniture and fitting during the budget debate which was discussed at the budget retreat

The Finance and Public Accounts Committee (FPAC) report adopted that the budget of the Ministry of Education be approved as submitted

The FPAC's report highlighted the allocation of an extra D150m to be diverted to the Ministry of Agriculture to increase productivity of the agricultural sector

5 of the parliamentarians refute the establishment of the 3 new proposed embassies, as agreed during the retreat that it will increase recurrent expenditure and it is not a strategic decision

3 of the parliamentarians raised the issue of the constitutional timeline, section 152(1A) of the 1997 constitution, which provides for the National Assembly to approve the budget within 14 days to be amended for the parliamentarians to have ample time to be able to effectively scrutinise the budget, a suggestion made during the retreat.

4 of the parliamentarians remarked on the need to significantly reduce allocations on various allowances citing them to be unnecessary.

5 parliamentarians raised the issue of rents and rates budget allocations should be looked at in the long-term

FPAC of the National Assembly detected high inflation in the salaries of the National Assembly which was later reduced to the 30% increment.

Challenges:

Underfunding



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CONCLUSION

Gambia Participates 2022 Annual Report reflects a year of significant achievements and impactful initiatives in the pursuit of fostering civic engagement, transparency, and community empowerment. Throughout the year, our organization has tirelessly worked towards building bridges between citizens and government entities, laying the groundwork for a more participatory and accountable society.

The key highlights of the year include successful capacity-building programs, the establishment of accountability networks, and the implementation of innovative digital platforms to enhance information accessibility. The commitment of citizens and the collaborative spirit between communities and government officials have been instrumental in creating a culture of open dialogue and shared responsibility.

Despite the successes, challenges were acknowledged, underscoring the ongoing need for adaptive strategies in communication and sustained government collaboration. The lessons learned from these challenges will undoubtedly inform future initiatives, ensuring a more nuanced and effective approach to community engagement.

Looking forward, Gambia Participates remains dedicated to its mission of promoting good governance and citizen-led initiatives. The organization is poised to leverage the insights gained in 2022, with a focus on sustainability, adaptive technology integration, and continued advocacy for policies that institutionalize civic engagement practices.

As we conclude this annual report, we express gratitude to our partners, stakeholders, and the resilient communities that have actively participated in and supported our initiatives. The collective efforts of all involved have paved the way for a more informed, engaged, and empowered Gambian society. Gambia Participates remains committed to building on these foundations and looks ahead to a future marked by even greater strides in fostering civic participation and transparency.





