



2023

ANNUAL REPORT

2023



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Executive Summary

Gambia Participates is delighted to present the Annual Report for the year 2023; reflecting a year of dynamic engagement, impactful initiatives, and strengthened partnerships. As a committed advocate for public accountability, civic participation and inclusive governance, our organization has continued to strive towards fostering positive change and empowering communities in The Gambia.

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 2023, Gambia Participates engaged 817 people in-person, covering the seven regions in the country including 72 satellite villages. A total of 214,045 were reached through social media. Gambia Participates facilitated discussions around the budget between 2 key ministries (Ministry of Health and Ministry of Agriculture) and citizens. This presented the government and the governed the opportunity to inform priorities in the national budget that will address the pressing socio-economic issues that citizens are faced with.

Since 2017, Gambia Participates have been advocating and working with both Parliament and the Ministry of Justice for the legislation of the Anti-Corruption Bill. This 2023 was a remarkable year as it saw the legislation of the Anti-Corruption law which has been in Parliament since December 2019. GP's work on the AC Bill in 2023 with the Ministry of Justice and Parliament immensely contributed to the legislation of the bill.

Gambia Participates equally conducted a systematic and comprehensive observation of the 2023 Mayoral and Chairmanship elections deploying the largest number of long and short terms observers across the country yet again. This year also presented us the opportunity to expand our election observation mission beyond The Gambia. We deployed a sizable team to observe the 2023 Nigeria and Sierra Leone elections.





A Word From The Executive Director

Dear Friends and Partners,

While The Gambia registered significant democratic progress, the country and its people continue to feel the absence of participatory democracy, right to freedom assembly and erratic public service delivery. We continue to witness amnesty and immunity enjoyed by public officials guilty of corruption. In addition to our existing laws that criminalize official corruption and the negligence of a public authority exercising public law function, the legislation of the Anti-Corruption Act, 2023 is an added advantage that will advance horizontal accountability.

As an organization, we have been and we will continue to be, the voice of anti-public sector corruption and accountability.

The year 2023 was a remarkable one for our organization. As an organization, we continued to play a vital role in advancing the agenda of good governance, transparency, and accountability in The Gambia. We conducted various research, advocacy, and civic education activities on constitutional, anti-corruption, fiscal transparency, and election issues. We also engaged with various stakeholders, including the government, Parliament, media, civil society, and communities to promote dialogue, collaboration, and participation. We also monitored and observed the electoral processes both in and out of The Gambia, and provided independent and impartial reports and recommendations.

We are proud of our achievements and impact in 2023, but we are also aware of the challenges and opportunities ahead. The Gambia is still undergoing a complex and delicate transition, which requires sustained efforts and support from all actors. We are determined today than before to continue our work and contribute to the development and democratization of our country.

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to our donors, partners, staff, volunteers, and supporters, who have made our work possible and successful. We look forward to working with you in 2024 and beyond.

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,

Strengthen oversight: We work with civil society organizations and public oversight institutions to advocate, monitor and ensure there is fiscal discipline and accountability in the management of our limited public resources **Promote dialogue:** We bridge the gap between citizens and decision-makers, fostering open dialogue and collaborative solutions to pressing national issues.

Build capacity: We provide training and resources to civil society organizations, public officials and media, enabling them to champion citizen rights and contribute effectively to development processes. We also provide technical assistance and capacity building to Parliamentarians to exercise their oversight functions on the government strategically.

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 future.

2023 *IN NUMBERS*

06
Projects

817
*In-Person Engagement
with Citizens*

58
Parliamentarians

04
Government Ministries

68%
Youth

15
*National Assembly
support staff*

214,045
*Social Media
Reaches*

07
*Regions
Covered*

72
*Satellite
Communities*

05
*government
officials*

08
*Local Government
Agencies*

03
Publications

Areas of Intervention and Projects

In 2023, Gambia Participates undertook significant projects and interventions to strengthening democracy in The Gambia. conducting various activities and initiatives, all with a common goal of advancing good governance.

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.



ANTI-CORRUPTION



FISCAL TRANSPARENCY



ELECTION

A close-up photograph of a woman, likely from Gambia, wearing a vibrant orange and black patterned headwrap. She is looking upwards and to the right with a focused expression, and her right hand is raised with the index finger pointing, suggesting she is participating in a public event or voting. She is wearing a silver bangle on her right wrist and a beaded necklace. The background is a solid blue color.

Fiscal Transparency

In any democratic state, it is essential to enhance the openness, clarity, and accessibility of government's financial information, policies and decision-making processes. This involves providing comprehensive, accurate, timely and understandable information on government revenues, expenditures, fiscal and monetary policies to the public and other stakeholders. Gambia Participates partners with multiple stakeholders to improve fiscal transparency, public participation and accountability.

Parliamentary Oversight Assessment Tool

Parliamentary oversight is the process by which the parliament monitors and holds the executive branch of government accountable for its actions, policies, and spending on behalf of the people. It is one of the core functions of parliament, along with law-making and representation. Parliamentary oversight can help ensure transparency, efficiency, and effectiveness of government operations and protect citizens' rights and interests.

Gambia Participates conducted a parliamentary oversight assessment under the implementation of a parliamentary oversight assessment tool, developed by Transparency International under the EU-funded Strengthening Accountability Networks among Civil Society projects.

The report provides a summary of key findings from recent assessment of the strength of oversight mandate, practice, and impact of the parliament in The Gambia.

The strength of oversight mandate, practice, and impact was assessed across the following six pillars:

- Oversight as a priority for parliament
- Oversight powers and tools of parliament
- Oversight opportunities for opposition and independent MPs
- Financial oversight
- Post-legislative scrutiny
- Relations with other actors to conduct oversight

Evidence was collected through a combination of desk research as well as expert and key informant interviews and focus groups.

Download!



Assessing Public Participation in Budget Processes

The Assessment Tool on Public Participation in Budget Processes assesses the extent to which a public institution provides, or is ready to provide, opportunities for meaningful public participation in the budget cycle. The Assessment Tool is designed as a questionnaire comprising 46 different indicators, arranged around eight key pillars. These pillars are divided across two parts—Part A which assesses the readiness of an institution to facilitate a participatory process or mechanism, and Part B which assesses the nature, depth, and quality of the participatory process or mechanism in practice.

As such, participation readiness considers budget transparency, political will, legal mandates, operational frameworks and civic space. Participation in practice is assessed in terms of the participatory process, outreach & awareness, inclusion & access and accountability.

A public institution may be assessed under each part independently to yield separate scores for 'participation readiness' and 'participation' in practice which, taken together, provide a holistic measure of the 'state of participation' at the assessed public institution.

The Assessment Tool is premised on the rationale that an understanding of the operating context, along with a thorough diagnosis of gaps in existing participatory processes or mechanisms, can contribute to strengthening meaningful public participation in budget processes. The tool has thus been primarily developed for Transparency International chapters to assess the state of public participation in budget processes, and then use the assessment findings to advocate for or help improve such participation at public institutions in their own national or local contexts. Gambia Participates using this tool kit conducted an assessment on the Kanifing Municipal Council's state on public participation in budget processes, revealing key findings and offering recommendations.



Identification and Mapping of Civil Society Organizations to Facilitate Greater Understanding of the Work of NAO

The National Audit Office (NAO) with support from Gambia Participates through its FT project, funded by the US Embassy Banjul hosted a one-day engagement with civil society on Tuesday, May 30, 2023, at the Senegambia Beach Hotel. This engagement was geared towards identifying and mapping civil society organizations in The Gambia to have continuous engagement and collaboration for a greater understanding of the audit reports and the work of the NAO in general.

The event was attended by 32 prominent civil society organizations and individuals, out of whom, 21 were male and 11 were female.



Public Participation in the Budget Cycle “Know Your Budget”- Open Budget Dialogue

Though citizen participation in the budget process is limited, and when government engages citizens, only a selected few from the communities are invited and citizens do have limited opportunity to present their request to be addressed by the budget. A basic understanding of the national budget by citizens is key to asking the right and relevant questions but is also a key ingredient of budget transparency and accountability. To stir up public interest in budget participation and accountability on the national budget, Gambia Participates under this project, facilitated a total of 5 intense budget discussions in the WCR, LRR, NBR, CRR, and URR regions of The Gambia between key budget sectors (Ministry of Agriculture and Health) and the citizens from the 16th to the 19th of June 2023. The engagement saw the presence of influential youth, women, and community leaders from a total of 63 satellite villages that participated in this activity. During this activity, Gambia Participates directly engaged a total of 249 participants 139 of whom were male and 110 females with 72.29% of the total participants being youths.

The objective of this engagement was to create a platform between the citizens and the government to have participatory but an Open Budget Dialogue with budget planners. Through this engagement, budget planners from the ministries were able to listen in and note the key development areas and services that are of utmost priority to citizens of each region. The engagement also covered a bit on the budget cycle, the budget formulation process, the various existing programs of the sectors, budget bilateral, and subsequently budget implementation, monitoring, and reporting.

During the first part of the meeting, citizens were informed in their preferred language on the budget process and various programs identified by sector experts from the Ministry of Health and Agriculture. The second part of the engagement was an open budget dialogue where the citizens were given the opportunity to raise pertinent health and agriculture issues faced by their communities, that should be considered in the 2024 budget. The ministerial representatives addressed relevant issues raised by the community members and as well collect inputs from citizens to consider in the subsequent budget. Where there was conflict of prioritise during the engagement, participants vote to select the 3 most urgent priority to be considered in the 2024 budget.



MA NYAN
(GONYAN (NBR))

Training of FPAC and PEC Members of the National Assembly on SOE Budget Oversight

On the 24th of June 2023, Gambia Participates partnered with the national assembly FPAC and PEC members on SOE's budget oversight. The objective of the training was to enhance the legislative and functional capacity of the National Assembly's Finance and Public Accounts Committee as well as Public Enterprises Committee with respect to effective SOE budget and Audited Financial Statement Oversight.

The training included, among other things, best practices on SOE transparency that FPAC and PEC could utilize to ensure that budgets and financial performance reports of public enterprises are made available on time for both legislative and public scrutiny. The goal of Gambia Participates for facilitating this workshop is to help reinforce transparency and accountability among state enterprises to reduce revenue shortfalls, increase productivity and enhance delivery of quality products and services for the citizenry. The training was attended by 19 participants.





***OPEN PLATFORM
FOR CITIZEN
PARTICIPATION***

Budget Tracking and Reporting Training for Civil Society and Journalists

The media and civil society organizations are crucial watchdog and a distinct hallmark of democratic governance ensuring that governments are held to account and are compliant with financial transparency, accountability, to ensure the budget justice and development is felt by the citizenry. The work of civil society and media influences and strengthens democratic principles, fosters public trust, and contributes to the overall socio-economic development of the country. For civil society organizations and concerned journalists to engage in effective budget tracking and reporting, there is need to build their capacities to understand the budget necessities, the tracking tools and how the information can be used to direct government attention and inform policy reforms. Journalists and CSO practitioners need to be equipped with the different strategies to track, evidence collection tools and how to report on government budget spending.

Under policy objective 3 of the Strengthening and Sustaining Fiscal Transparency and Accountability in The Gambia project (SFTA), Gambia Participates on September 26th and 27th supported 41 civil society organizations practitioners and journalists to increase their capacities on evidence-based budget tracking and reporting of government spending.

The overall objective of the training was to increase the knowledge and capacity of journalists and civil society to understand the budget which will stir their interest around government spending and how it impacts the lives of the vulnerable and marginalized communities. The training exposed participants to the intricacies of tracking budget allocations and expenditure patterns for different sectors to help them track, make adequate research, and formulate advocacy to not only augment public participation in the budget process, but also to raise citizen's awareness, interest, and oversight in the implementation of the national budget.



KMC Participatory Budgeting Dialogue

Anchored on the spirit of advancing and strengthening fiscal transparency, Gambia Participates supported the Kanifing Municipal Council (KMC) in facilitating budget discussions in different communities under the purview of the council on the techniques of participating in the budget processes as constituents. The dialogue was sequel to the impact result of the support accorded to the Council in the simplification and publication of their annual budgets for the first time, through collaboration in an MOU with Gambia Participates.

The budget dialogue held on November 24th – 25th 2023 focused on community problem diagnosis using the Venn diagrams approach, a visually intuitive approach instrumental in helping community members and duty bearers comprehend the interconnectedness of various components to understand community development. Through this engagement, community members were exposed to resource mapping, problem identification (Community Needs), Problem Prioritization and Ranking and Problem Analysis, respectively. Community members ranked their problem in order of priority and feasibility. The engagement was facilitated by KMC trained participatory budgeting officer and GP's Economist.

The engagement with constituents were held in Talinding North and South Ward as part of the Council reaching a total number of 101 participants; 61 female and 40 males.



Community Radio Programs on NAO's Mandate

The National Audit office is one of the key public institutions that exercises government oversight. It has been mandated by the constitution of The Gambia to audit all government accounts and provide audit reports and recommendations at the end of each fiscal year. The NAO has a vast mandate to institute audit exercises on any government Ministry, Department and Agency accounts or funds expended by government at any material time when it deems necessary pursuant to section 14(d) of the National Audit Act 2015. It is known for producing independent and strong audit reports.

Over the years, the National Audit Office has produced strong and independent audit reports on government financial audits, performance audits and compliance audits which revealed key findings and progressive recommendations. Despite the conduct of the audit processes and the subsequent provision of audit opinions, there has been a decline in strategic communication between the National Audit Office and the public on the mandate of the NAO and the relevance of the audit opinion emanating from the office of the Auditor General. There are challenges for the public to understand the core mandates of the National Audit Office and its challenges in publishing audit reports on time.

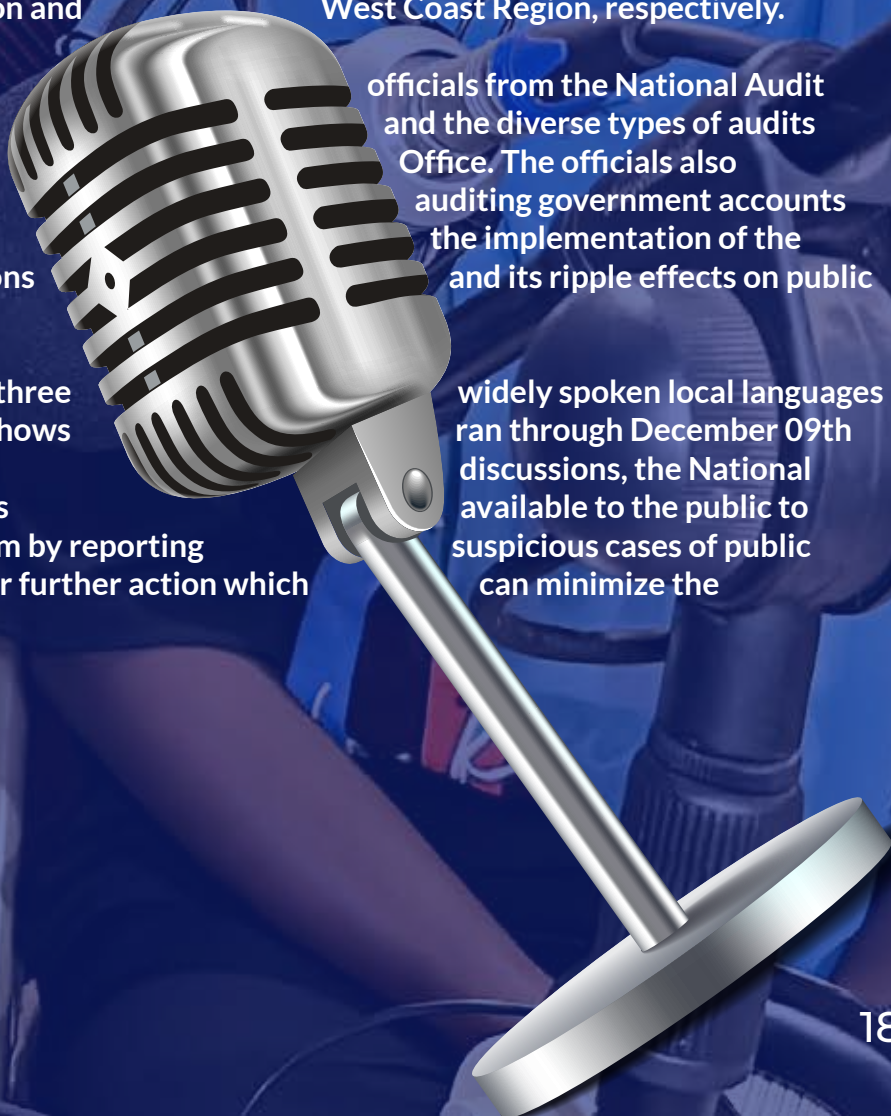
Encouraging direct citizen participation into the audit processes is one of the tenets of fiscal transparency and accountability thus the need for the creation of a communication platform where the NAO will sensitize the public on its role and mandate in the fiscal space that could stir up citizens understanding and participation in the process. To this effect, Gambia Participates under policy objective 1 of the Strengthening and Sustaining Fiscal Transparency and Accountability in The Gambia (SFTA) project facilitated 11 community radio talk shows in North Bank Region, Lower River Region, Central River Region, Upper River Region and West Coast Region, respectively.

The radio discussions consisted of Office who explained the audit process conducted by the National Audit highlighted the challenges in the timely and the evasive lack of political will in Auditor General's audit recommendations finance management.

The discussions were also translated in three (Wolof, Fula and Mandinka). The radio shows to December 14th, 2023. During these Audit Office also reiterated mechanisms participate and support its audit program by reporting finance misappropriation to the NAO for further action which mismanagement of public funds.

officials from the National Audit and the diverse types of audits Office. The officials also auditing government accounts the implementation of the and its ripple effects on public

widely spoken local languages ran through December 09th discussions, the National available to the public to suspicious cases of public can minimize the



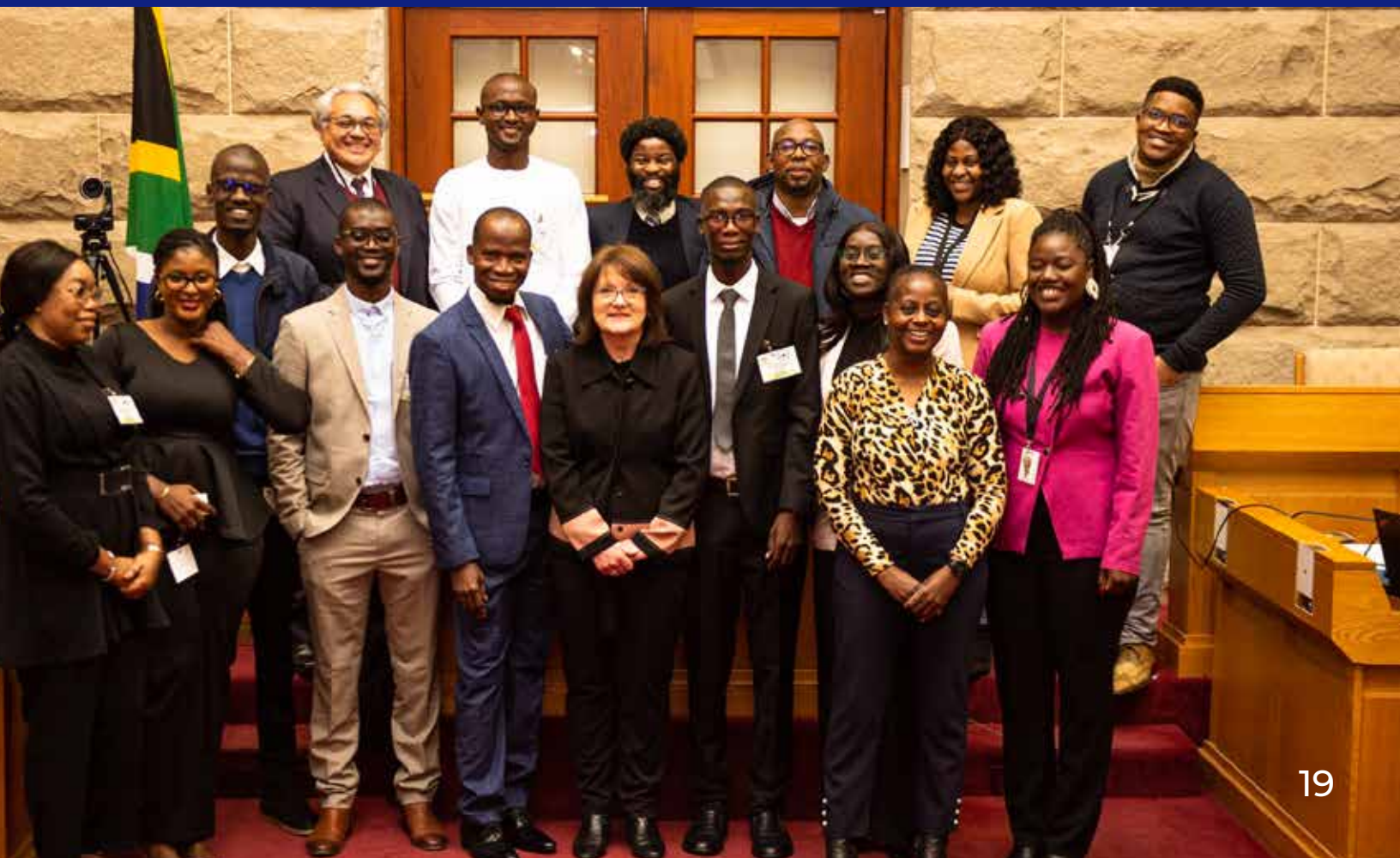
Case Study Visit to the South African Parliamentary Budget Office

The benchmarking visit to the South Africa Parliament Budget Office was a valuable learning experience for The Gambia PBO that took place from 11-14 September 2023. The project supported 5 delegations from the National Assembly which comprised of the Budget Officer, Principal Finance Officer, Principal Committee Clerk, Research Officer, headed by the Deputy Clerk of Legal & Procedural Matters, and 3 staff from Gambia Participates.

During the benchmark visit, the SA PBO took the delegation through the following thematic areas; Overview of the South Africa Budget process, Overview of the SAPBO, SA PBO's work on policy implementation and economic analysis, Interaction with the standing committee on appropriations, Interaction with the National Treasury, SAPBO work on public finance, Research process and budget analysis, Public participation in the budget process and Interaction with the Financial and Fiscal Commission.

This benchmark visit improved the knowledge of the Gambia's PBO on best practices in budget analysis, forecasting and economic modelling. It also increased their understanding on how to assist lawmakers by offering research services, policy briefs and budgetary analysis to help them make informed decisions. The operational best practices of the South Africa PBO, including their organizational structure, staffing and resource allocation offered insights into optimizing The Gambia PBO's operations for greater efficiency and effectiveness.

The knowledge gained from this visit will contribute to the growth and effectiveness of the newly established Gambia PBO in fulfilling its crucial role in supporting transparent and accountable budget processes in The Gambia.



Strengthening and Sustaining Fiscal Transparency and Accountability (SFTA)

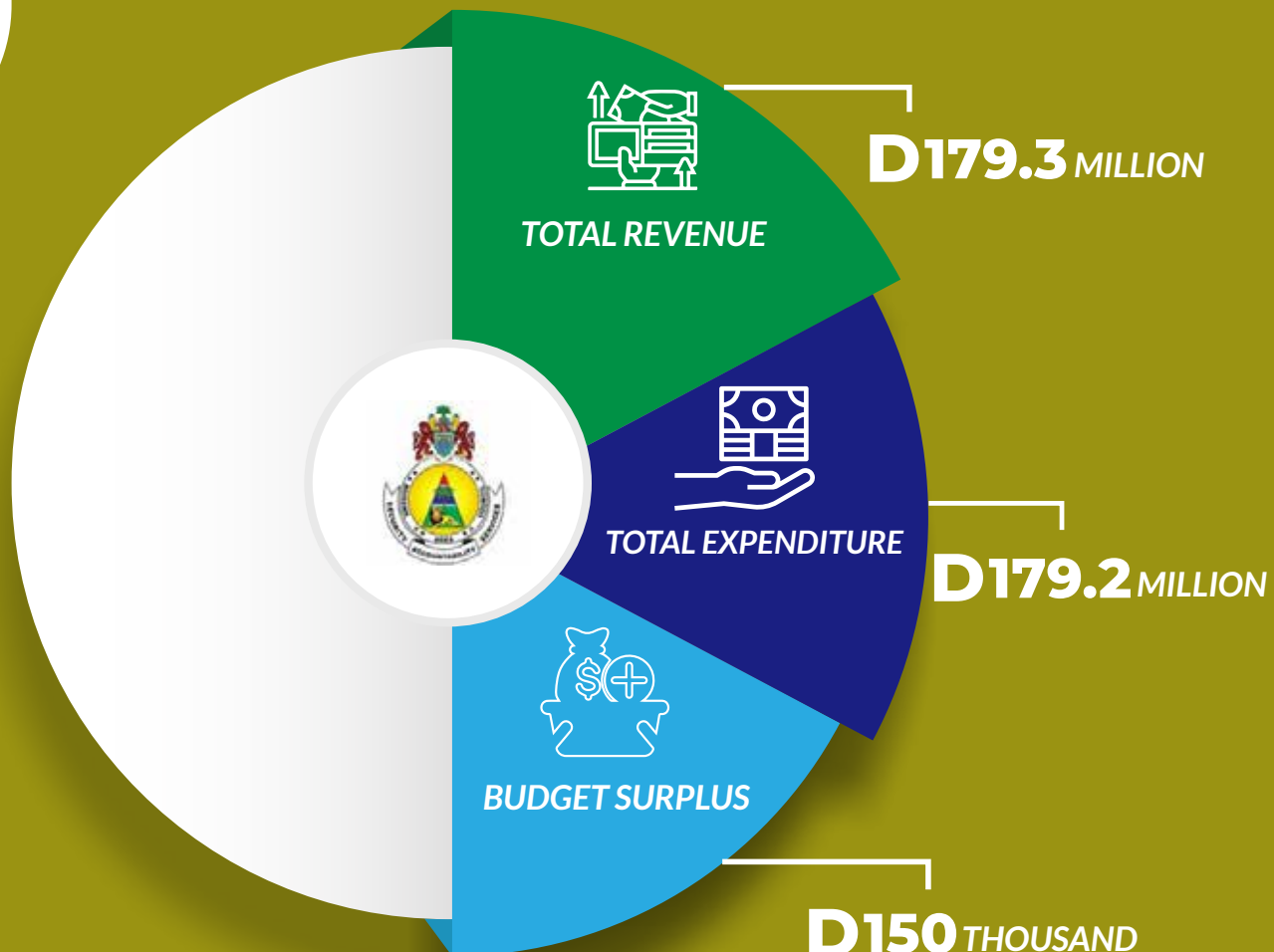
Over the years, the absence of fiscal documents and fiscal accountability paved the way for corruption to thrive in the public sector. Strengthening and Sustaining Fiscal Transparency and Accountability is a project that seeks to improve fiscal transparency, public participation, and budget oversight by supporting key government offices effectively implement their mandates.



Citizens Budget 2023

The citizen's budget is a simplified, interactive version of the enacted budget designed to enhance public understanding of government development priorities, revenues and expenditures. To make this information accessible, Gambia Participates in partnership with the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs and funded by the US Embassy-Banjul, developed a citizen-friendly version of the 2023 Executive Budget Proposal. 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. This initiative aimed to empower citizens with the knowledge needed to engage with policymakers, advocate for their interests and participate in decision-making processes that impact their lives. The citizen's version of the Executive Budget Proposal was endorsed and published by the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs.

BRIKAMA AREA COUNCIL 2023 BUDGET OVERVIEW



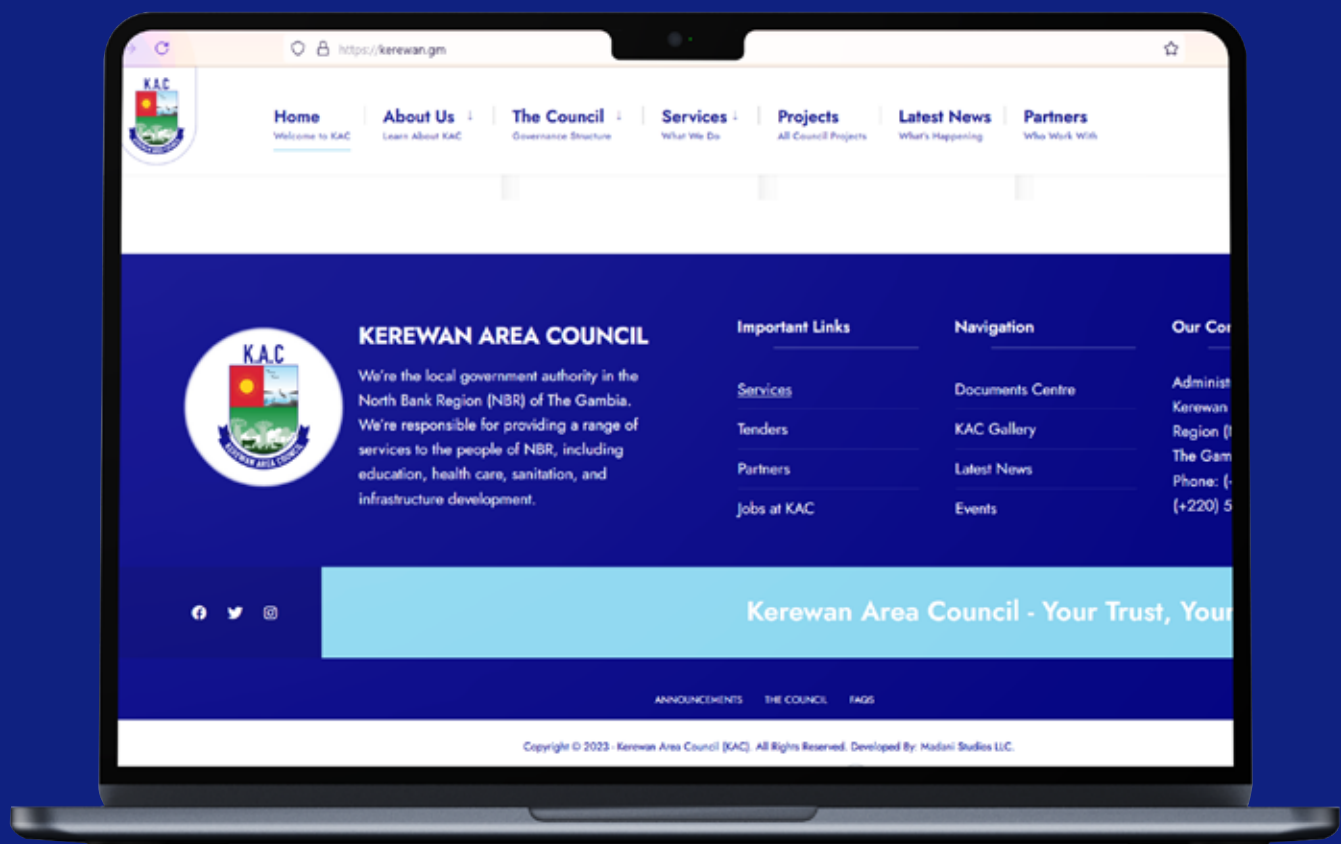
Development of Local Government Websites

Gambia Participates through the SFTA project initiative is developing websites for 5 local area councils across The Gambia namely (Brikama, Kerewan, Basse, Kuntaur and Jangjangbureh Area Councils) respectively. This initiative aims to enhance transparency, accountability, and citizen engagement at the local level by providing accessible online platforms for information sharing and communication between councils and the communities they serve.

Each website is tailored to the specific needs and priorities of its respective area council, offering a user-friendly interface with features such as:

- **Council Information:** Comprehensive profiles of the local area council, including its structure, mandate, and key personnel, to provide citizens with a better understanding of the council's role and responsibilities.
- **News and Updates:** Regular updates on council activities, projects, and events to keep citizens informed about developments in their communities.
- **Publications and Reports:** Access to official documents, reports, and publications produced by the council, including budgets, strategic plans, and annual reports, to promote transparency and accountability.
- **Interactive Features:** Interactive features such as feedback forms, suggestion boxes, and community forums to facilitate two-way communication between citizens and the council, allowing citizens to provide input, express concerns, and engage in dialogue with local authorities.

These websites serve as valuable platforms for promoting transparency, fostering citizen engagement, and strengthening local democracy. By providing citizens with easy access to information and opportunities to engage with their local councils, we aim to promote greater accountability, responsiveness, and inclusivity in local governance across The Gambia.



ANTI-CORRUPTION



Strengthening Accountability Networks Among Civil Society (SANCUS)

Strengthening Accountability Networks among Civil Society (SANCUS) is a global project coordinated by Transparency International that aims to empower citizens and civil society to demand for public accountability in the government (vertical accountability) and as well advocate for horizontal accountability (government oversight institutions holding public institutions accountable).

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.



Vertical And Horizontal Accountability Efforts Discourse in The Gambia

Synergizing both vertical and horizontal mechanisms and efforts in enhancing and sustaining accountability fundamentally created an avenue where public institutions uphold checks and balances on one another and further breeds an environment that exhibits the culture of transparency. It also creates an avenue for civic participation and reaffirms citizens' trust in public institutions. The SANCUS project is designed to foster vertical and horizontal accountability through advocacy, research, and government-citizen engagement.

Horizontal and Vertical accountability mechanisms are marred by significant institutional challenges, communication and coordination breach between government, other state institutions and between public sector and civil society organizations. This hurdle creates barriers on effort in deterring and sanctioning corruption and corrupt acts. While there is a steady growth in relation to efforts of horizontal accountability (government) and growing diagonal accountability (CSO and Media), there are persistent challenges in government accountability in The Gambia.

In this light, Gambia Participates on Friday, September 22nd, 2023, convened a day -long intensive session with government, legislators, civil society, and media practitioners to discuss the country's accountability efforts and the steps taken up by respective accountability institutions in enhancing transparency and accountability. Panel discussions and audience engagements were conducted to understand the country's institutional challenges in addressing horizontal accountability. This engagement was attended by 38 participants, including national assembly members, civil society practitioners and media houses. 15 of the participants were female and 23 were male.



The Historic Legislation of The Gambia Anti-Corruption Bill

On June 28, 2012, The Gambia National Assembly passed The Gambia Anti-Corruption Commission Act, 2012. For more than a decade, the act that provides for the establishment of the Anti-Corruption Commission was never implemented. The 2012 act lacks many provisions that strengthen the fight against public sector corruption. In response to this, The Gambia government tabled The Gambia Anti-Corruption Bill to expressly repeal the 2012 act. The 2019 AC Bill is an advanced, detailed and a more standard anti-corruption text compared to the 2012 law.

Gambia Participates have strongly advocated for the new anti-corruption law. In addition, GP has been supporting the National Assembly in reviewing the provisions of the bill since February 2020.

In 2023, following a prolonged delay in the legislation of the AC Bill and the significant amount of time spent at the National Assembly in reviewing clauses of the bill which was progressing at a rather slow pace. Gambia Participates intervened by organizing a closed-door clause-by-clause review and consideration exercise between Parliamentarians and the AC Bill drafters at the Ministry of Justice on July 24, 2023.

Before July 24, 2023, Parliamentarians were only able to consider 23% of the clauses in the bill (i.e. 21/88 clauses) in 3 years. During the review exercise, 38 clauses were reviewed in one sitting in which 37 Parliamentarians participated, 5 Parliamentary support staff and 3 drafters from the Ministry of Justice.

The Anti-Corruption Bill made significant progress in September 2023, during the third ordinary session of the national assembly. On December 21, 2023, during the fourth ordinary session, the bill was passed unanimously by members of parliament.

At Gambia Participates, we believe and practice consistent policy advocacy. Although this comes along with significant challenges and limited resources, it is too difficult to continue pushing, but as a result-oriented organization, we are determined and united by our collective zeal to achieve change.

Peer Learning In Kigali (Rwanda)

The peer learning exchange between Gambia Participates and TI-Rwanda aimed to facilitate knowledge sharing, exchange of best practices, and collaboration on anti-corruption initiatives. The goal was to strengthen the capacity of both organizations in their efforts to combat corruption and promote transparency and accountability in their respective countries. The GP delegation visited key institutions in Rwanda, including the Office of the Ombudsman, the Rwanda Investigation Bureau (RIB), and the Rwandan Parliament, specifically the African Parliamentarians Network against Corruption (APNAC) - Rwanda chapter

Key Discussion Areas:

Overview of Anti-Corruption Strategies: Both organizations shared insights into their anti-corruption strategies, highlighting key initiatives, challenges faced, and lessons learned. Gambia Participates presented its approach to promoting transparency and accountability through citizen engagement, while TI-Rwanda shared its experiences with advocacy, research, and policy reform.

Community Engagement Models: Participants discussed different models of community engagement in anti-corruption efforts, including awareness campaigns, citizen monitoring initiatives, and participatory budgeting processes. They explored successful strategies for mobilizing and empowering citizens to hold their governments accountable.

Use of Technology: The role of technology in anti-corruption efforts was a key topic of discussion. Participants shared experiences with using digital platforms and social media to promote transparency, report corruption, and facilitate citizen engagement. They discussed the benefits and challenges of integrating technology into their initiatives.

Advocacy and Policy Reform: Both organizations shared experiences with advocacy and policy reform efforts aimed at combating corruption. They discussed successful advocacy campaigns, coalition-building strategies, and engagement with government institutions to promote legislative reforms and institutional changes.

Monitoring and Evaluation: Participants exchanged insights into monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for anti-corruption initiatives. They discussed the importance of data collection, impact assessment, and feedback mechanisms in measuring the effectiveness of their interventions and informing future strategies.



Development of GamLeaks Platform

Gambia Participates through the technical support of TI-S has developed a digital whistleblowing tool called Gamleaks. The Gamleaks is a digital platform where citizens can anonymously report corruption and corruption-related cases. With the Gamleaks platform citizens including whistle-blowers can now securely report corrupt acts on public financial management and other topics. GP is currently devising better strategies to popularize the platform including social media ads to attract potential whistle-blowers to use the platform. GP anticipates reaching out to at least 30,000 people through popularizing the platform. The Gamleaks platforms is currently live and running and individuals can now report on cases related to corruption anonymously.



Investigative Journalism

Gambia Participates collaborated with a renowned investigative journalist 'Malagen' to produce an investigative corruption story in the rosewood industry. Malagen unveils a story on how the governments of the Gambia and Senegal have made a potential loss of over D300 million from the export of confiscated timber. Senegal and The Gambia jointly seized a substantial quantity of rosewood in 2017-2018. A bilateral decision was made in 2019 to allow dealers to export the confiscated timber for a fee of \$4500 per 20-foot container. The fees collected from the penalty payments accrued an extra-budgetary revenue of D199.2m from the sale of 1177 containers. There however remains a question, is that all?

**Inside Rosewood Smuggling:
Senegal and Gambia
potentially robbed of over D300m
in 'blood timber' export in 2019**

Mustapha K Darboe
Investigative Journalist

Marr Nyang
Gambia Participates

Omar Malmo Sambou
Environmentalist

**JOIN
MALAGEN AND GAMBIA PARTICIPATES
ON X (TWITTER) SPACE**

15th, December
Friday 5: 30pm

join through this link: <https://twitter.com/i/spaces/1mrGmyOrAQnGy>

GAMBIA
PARTICIPATES

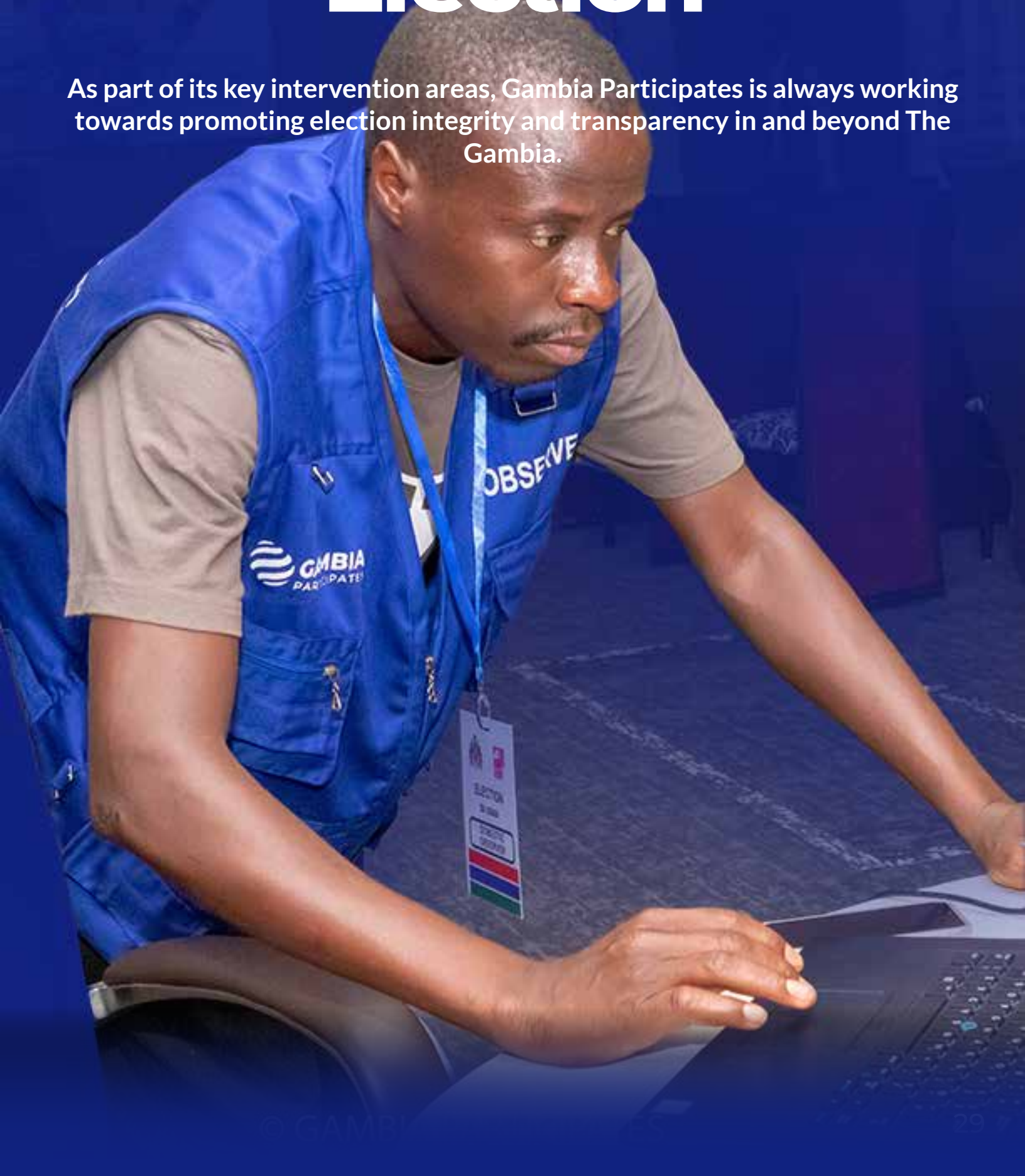
TRANSPARENCY
INTERNATIONAL

EU

Malagen
INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM

Election

As part of its key intervention areas, Gambia Participates is always working towards promoting election integrity and transparency in and beyond The Gambia.



WE FOLLOW-UP TO THE LATTER



Comprehensive and Systematic Observation of the 2023 Mayoral Elections

Gambia Participates with funding from the International Republic Institute (IRI) conducted a long-term and short-term election observation of the 2023 Mayoral/Chairmanship Local Government Elections in The Gambia. Since credible elections require credible election monitoring from pre, during, and post-election activities. Gambia Participates enhanced from previous elections its existing robust, technical, and sophisticated observation system using contemporary approaches and technology to monitor the 2023 Local Government elections.

Gambia Participates deployed 53 trained and accredited long-term observers in all 53 constituencies of the country to observe the pre-election period including the nomination process and 153 trained short-term observers to monitor and observe the election day processes from opening, set-up, voting, closing, and counting of results in 153 polling stations across the 7 regions of the country for the Mayoral/Chairmanship Local Government Elections.

Gambia Participates shared all reports of the different periods to all relevant stakeholders and was in constant engagement with media houses both local and international to disseminate report findings. A fully equipped and functional data center was set up and was open on election day to stakeholders working on the electoral process, high profile individuals both from the Diplomatic mission, UN agencies, and media houses passed by to understand how the data center was operated. Though there were constraints and minor hitches, the project was a tremendous success with Gambia Participates once again deploying the highest numbers of domestic observers and being able to deliver key election report findings and recommendations readily made available to the different stakeholders.



Observation of the Nigeria 2023 Presidential Elections

On the 25th of February 2023, Nigeria, Africa's largest democracy with 93 million voters, went to the polls to elect a new president and members of the National Assembly. Marking the country's seventh presidential elections held since its return to democracy in 1999, and the end of President Muhammadu Buhari's two terms (2015- 2019 & 2019-2023), in accordance with the "Nigeria's Constitution of 1999 with Amendments through 2011".

With the focus to enhance transparency and accountability in the public sector, which includes election observation. Gambia Participates observed the 2023 Nigeria Presidential elections through YIAGA Africa Initiative, funded by the National Endowment for Democracy (NED).

During the observation mission, the team visited various civil society organizations' situation rooms which includes Connected Development (CODE), Kimpact Development Initiative (KDI) and Center for Democracy and Development (CDD). In addition to that, the team have attended series of press releases made by International Observer Groups such as the IRI/NDI mission and the European Union (EU).

The mission aimed to assess the transparency, credibility, and fairness of the electoral process in the 2023 Nigeria Presidential elections. Through YIAGA Africa, Gambia Participates was in Abuja, Nigeria from February 20 to March 1, after the final presidential results have been announced.



Observation of the Sierra Leone 2023

General Election Observation

On Saturday, 24th June 2023, Sierra Leone went to the polls to elect a new president, members of parliament mayors/chairpersons and councilors. The country has had a history of political instability, including a decade-long civil war that ended in 2002. Since then, Sierra Leone has held several democratic elections, with the most recent being in 2023. Marking the country's fifth elections since the end of the civil war.

As the biggest election observation group in The Gambia, deploying the largest number of election observers during the 2021 Presidential elections, 2022 Parliamentary elections and 2023 Local Government elections; all of which were supported by the International Republican Institute, Gambia Participates observed elections in other African countries to learn various practices in different societies. Therefore, in 2023, Gambia Participates observed the general elections in Sierra Leone.

During the observation mission, Gambia Participates visited various civil society organization's situation rooms including, National Elections Watch (NEW), Independent Commission for Peace and National Cohesion (ICPNC) and Eminent Women Peace Mediators. In addition, the team met with The Carter Center, an international observation group and attended the press releases made by the Electoral Commission for Sierra Leone, National Elections Watch and the European Union election observation mission. On elections day, Gambia Participates visited and observed the voting process at 10 different polling centers.

The election observation mission aimed to assess the transparency and credibility of the 2023 Sierra Leone general elections. Gambia Participates with the International Republican Institute (IRI) was in Freetown, Sierra Leone from June 22nd to June 27th, 2023.



OTHER PROJECTS



Get Ready to Run

In a highly polarized political terrain where effective youth participation remains elusive, the inclusion of young people in politics and governance is fundamental to any thriving democracy. In any progressive nation, young people play a significant role in vibrant socio-economic and political advancement, in the absence of which the standard principles and values of inclusive democracy remain elusive. Over the years, Gambia has been transitioning into a democratic state and young people have taken gigantic steps towards national development. The youths have manifested a willingness to occupy public offices and take part in politics, transitional justice, and decision-making processes. They have actively participated in the political space which was manifested during the last presidential and parliamentary elections which registered a huge shift in the political discourse. Young people took up the responsibility to run and take over public offices and as well making up more than 50% of registered voters.

However, with 57% of the eligible voters constituting young people, the figures do not commensurate with the level of youth political participation. The number of youths duly casting their votes and running for public office continues to dwindle over time, largely owing to the polarization of the political space. The dominion of the political terrain by the older generation dims their motivation, killing potential prospects of contesting for elective and political offices. Despite the increased interest of youth in seeking political offices, the political terrain is marred by the challenge of incapacity to run successful campaigns thus limiting the prospects of young people's active participation and winning contested elective positions.

Due to the prevailing capacity gaps, attempts to run for elective offices proved a futile exercise due to structural and socio-economic barriers that young people are faced with. It is fundamental for young people to be part of the national decision-making process to mainstream the needs of young people in national policies and budget. The inclusion of young people in leadership roles will also bring more innovation to increase productivity and efficiency in public administration, as young people are quick to adapt to new environments and evolving technologies.

To this effect, Gambia Participates with funding from the US Embassy, Banjul conducted a two-days capacity building training for young political aspirants across the region. The main purpose of this training was to increase the interest of young aspiring politicians in contesting public offices through strengthened tailor-made capacity building of young people to run successful campaigns and so secure popular grassroots support. This would ignite their thirst and prepare them to smoothly navigate the political space. Participants were drawn across the country; the Greater Banjul area, Upper River Region, Lower River Region, Central River Region and North Bank Region respectively. A total of 49 participants, 29 male and 20 female.



Gambia Participates Years of Advocacy for the Legislation of The Gambia Anti-Corruption Bill, Achieved

In a historic move towards fostering transparency, accountability, and ethical governance, the National Assembly on December 21st, 2023, passed The Gambia Anti-Corruption Act, 2023. This monumental legislation signifies a resolute commitment from the government to uphold the principles of integrity and justice in our society. The Anti-Corruption Bill, having undergone rigorous scrutiny and comprehensive debate in Parliament, marks a turning point in Gambia's collective pursuit to address public sector corruption. Encompassing a range of measures designed to deter, detect, and penalize corrupt practices within both the public and private sector, the bill fortifies our legal arsenal against corruption.

Since 2017, Gambia Participates (GP) has been consistently advocating for the introduction of new and progressive anti-corruption legislation to repeal the Anti-Corruption Act, 2012 (2012 Act) which was legislated under the notorious Jammeh administration. While the objective of the Anti-Corruption Act, 2012, was to establish a strong anti-corruption body to deter, detect and sanction corruption, the Jammeh administration failed to enforce the law. And as a result, grave acts of corruption, amounting to almost a billion dollars, were unearthed by the Jammeh Commission and investigative journalists during the two decades of Jammeh in office.²

On December 2nd, 2019, the then Minister of Justice, Hon. Abubacarr Tambedou tabled the "Gambia Anti-Corruption Bill, 2019" (The Bill) to repeal the 2012 Act before the 5th Legislature of The Gambia. The Anti-Corruption Bill, 2019, provides for more progressive clauses, such as whistleblower protection, prevention of corruption in the private sector, etcetera, which were missing in the 2012 Act.

Sequel to the tabling of the bill in December 2019, GP swiftly hosted a review retreat exercise on the bill with Parliamentarians and other stakeholders from February 13th – 14th 2020. Thirty-five (35) points of recommendations and observations came out of the retreat, some of which were incorporated in the bill.

However, the progress of the Anti-Corruption Bill moved at a slower pace during the consideration stage of the bill in Parliament. As of June 2023, legislators were only able to debate 21 out of 88 clauses of the bill. In collaboration with the National Assembly and the Ministry of Justice, on July 24, 2023, GP facilitated a clause-by-clause workshop to review the Bill with 49 out of 58 parliamentarians. During this workshop, Parliamentarians reviewed 38 clauses in one sitting (from section 21 to section 59) with the guidance of experts from Gambia Participates and legislative drafters from the Ministry of Justice.

In the subsequent legislative session (3rd ordinary session of 2023), Parliamentarians considered all 88 clauses of the bill, and it was enacted on December 21st, 2023, during the 4th ordinary session. GP's facilitation of the clause-by-clause review exercise contributed immensely to the speedy legislation of the bill. It provided members of parliament extra hours and an opportunity out of parliament to seek clarification from the drafters (Ministry of Justice) and build consensus amongst them.



CHALLENGES

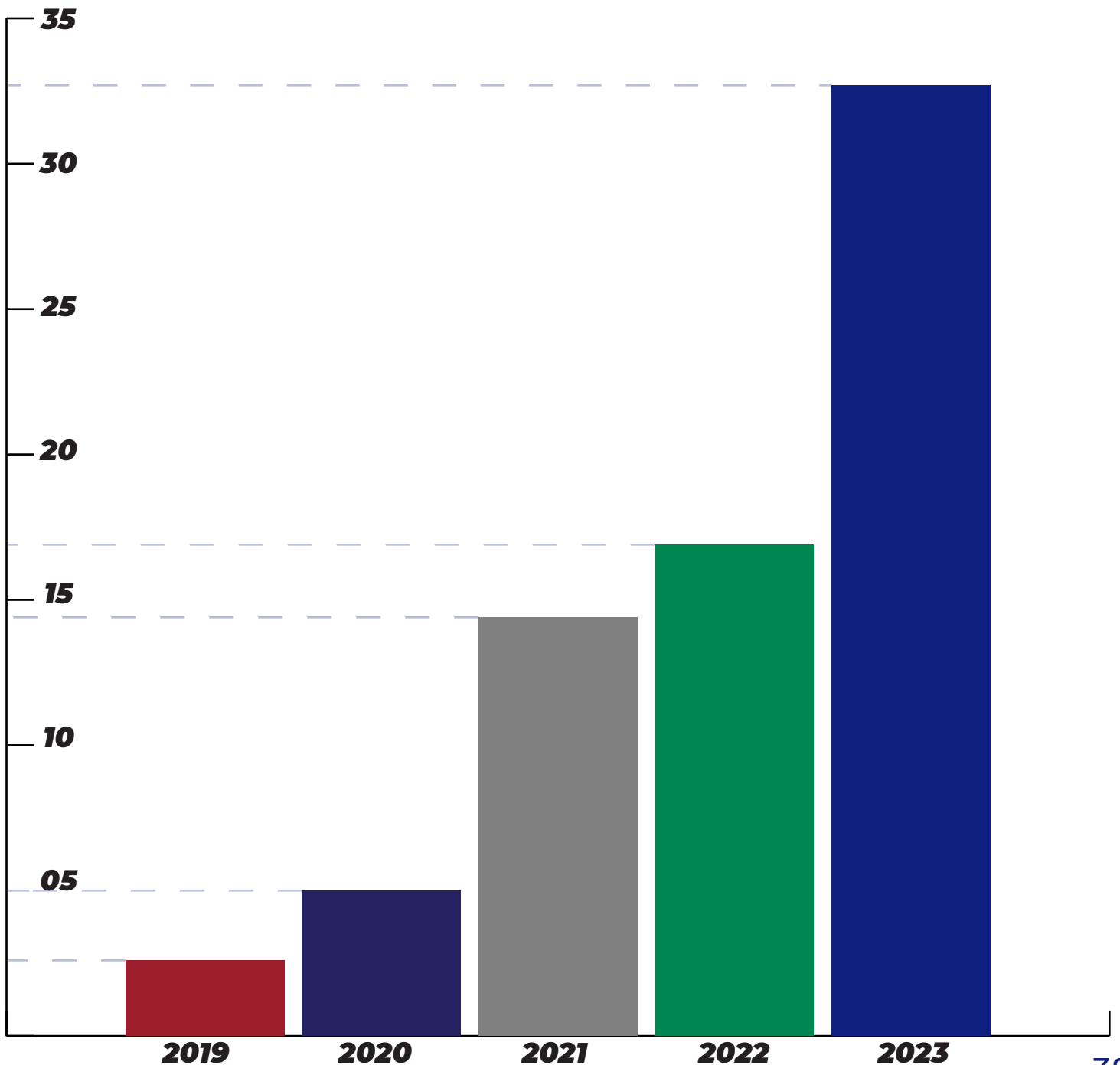


Underfunding

Financial Highlights

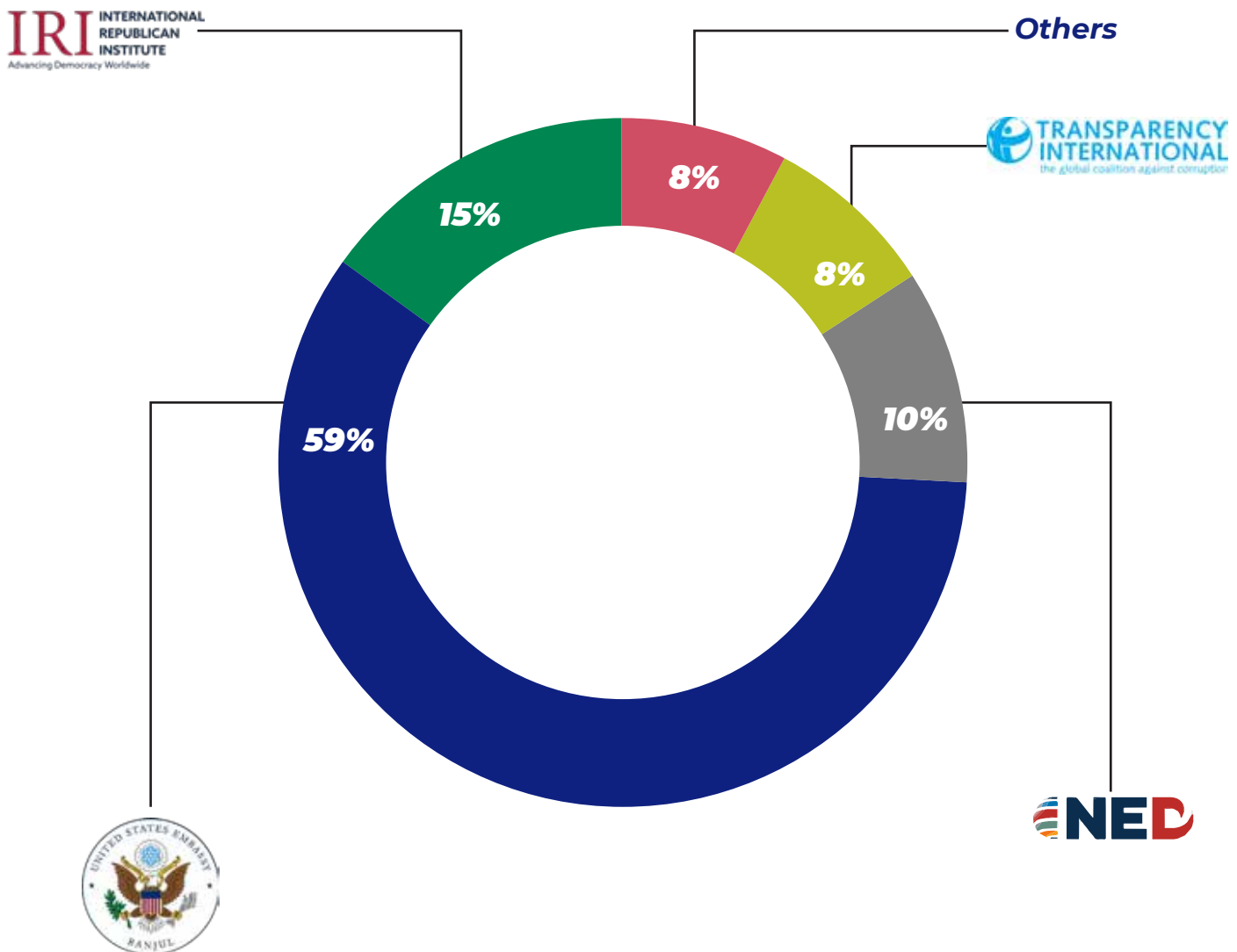
Gambia Participates achieved exceptional financial results this year, securing a record-breaking total funding of 32,711,020.31 Dalasi, which marks a staggering 93% increase compared to the previous year. This significant growth underscores our organization's expanding influence and support within our community and beyond. These achievements reflect our steadfast commitment to transparency, accountability, and advancing sustainable development across The Gambia. Below is a graph illustrating the annual revenue of the past four years, providing a visual comparison with the current year's financial performance.

GMD in 1,000,000s



Donors

Throughout the year, Gambia Participates received funding from our regular international partners and donors, including National Endowment for Democracy (NED), International Republican Institute (IRI), International Budget Partnership (IBP), US Embassy Banjul, Transparency International (TI), International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), Democracy International (DI), amongst other partners. The following chart illustrates the funding received from these donors for various projects throughout the year.



Conclusion

The Gambia Participates 2023 annual report highlights the achievements and challenges of the organization in promoting democratic governance, civic engagement, and electoral integrity in The Gambia. The report covers the activities and outcomes of the organization in various areas, such as pre-election observation, constitutional reform, anti-corruption, fiscal transparency, and civic education. The report also provides ways for improving the electoral process, strengthening the rule of law, and enhancing the participation of marginalized groups, such as women, youth, and persons with disabilities.

The report shows that Gambia Participates has made significant contributions to the development of democracy and good governance in The Gambia, especially in the passage of the Anti-Corruption Bill and the increase in budget oversight and public participation in the budget process. The report also reveals some of the challenges and gaps that Gambia Participates faced in implementing its activities and achieving its objectives. Some of these challenges include the lack of adequate funding and resources, the limited access to public information and data, the low level of awareness and interest among the citizens and the resistance of some political actors.

The report concludes by acknowledging the support and collaboration of various partners and stakeholders, such as the National Assembly, Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs, National Audit Office, the civil society, the media, the international community, and our supportive list of donors. The report also expresses the organization's commitment to continue its work in advancing democracy and good governance in The Gambia and to address the challenges and recommendations identified in the report.



