

## **Pre-Election Statement: Gambia Participates Election Observation Mission for the 2025 Massembeh Councillorship By-Elections**

### **Introduction**

On February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2025, voters of Massembeh Ward in the Lower River Region (LRR) will head to the polls in a by-election to elect a new ward councillor. This election comes after the unfortunate passing of Councillor Bakary Korita of Massembeh Ward, who passed away on November 12, 2024. The late Councillor Korita was re-elected Councillor of Massembeh ward under UDP ticket in the 2023 Councillor Elections, having received 550 (31%) of votes against Lamin Jarjue of NPP, who received 433 (25%) of the total votes casted.

As per section 23 of the Local Government Act, 2002, a by-election should be conducted within two months “*where an elected member of a Council ceases to hold office.*”<sup>1</sup>

Massembeh Ward is home to **1,753 registered voters**, of whom **51%** are female and **49%** are male. There are **Four (4) polling stations (Massembeh, Kolor, Jomari and, Toranka Bantang)** in Massembeh ward. Following the candidate nomination process held by the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) between February 5<sup>th</sup> - February 8<sup>th</sup>, 2025, at the IEC Mansakonko Election Office, two candidates (one from UDP and one from NPP) submitted their nominations which were accepted by the IEC. The nominated candidates are:

- **Mr. Lamin Jarjue** – National People’s Party (NPP)
- **Mr. Bakary Jarjue** – United Democratic Party (UDP)

This by-election is more than just a local contest, it is a test of political strength and grassroots mobilization for both major parties in The Gambia. With heightened political interest in the region, the election outcome could signal broader political shifts ahead of future national elections in the Mansakonko region.

### **The Importance of this By-Election**

While ward councillors serve at community level, their impact on governance is direct and far-reaching. They participate in the legislation of by-laws, design of council’s budget, represent community concerns, and as well ensure accountability in the council, making them crucial representatives of the people. The candidate elected in this by-election will be responsible for channelling community needs to the regional and national levels, ensuring that Massembeh ward gets the necessary attention, support and resources it needs. Each vote in this election carries immense significance, as it will determine the leader who will champion the interests of the ward for the remainder of the term.

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<sup>1</sup> Local Government Act, 2002 s 23

## **Election Preparedness and the Role of Gambia Participates**

As The Gambia's largest non-partisan and independent citizen observer movement, Gambia Participates is committed to ensuring a transparent, credible, and inclusive electoral process.

While the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) has assured the public of its readiness, experience has shown that even well-prepared electoral bodies can encounter challenges in the electoral cycle and election day itself. Issues such as late deployment of materials, inconsistent application of electoral laws, election-related violence, and vote-buying have been observed in past elections, with little accountability. To prevent such occurrences, Gambia Participates urges the IEC to remain proactive, transparent, and responsive throughout the process.

As an election observation mission, Gambia Participates will provide accurate updates on the electoral process, monitoring key areas including:

1. Opening of polling stations and commencement of voting
2. Voter turnout and participation levels
3. Adherence to electoral procedures and laws
4. Incidents of irregularities, including voter intimidation or electoral malpractice
5. The counting and declaration of results, and
6. Critical Incidents

To achieve this, Gambia Participates will deploy a short-term election observation mission across **all four polling stations** in Massembeh ward as roving observers. Using a standard checklist, our observers will provide real-time reports to ensure that voters, political parties, and stakeholders receive accurate and unbiased information about the election's conduct.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

As election day draws closer, Gambia Participates calls on all key actors to play their part in ensuring a credible and peaceful election:

1. **IEC** must ensure the timely deployment of election materials and personnel, maintain open communication with stakeholders, and act swiftly to address any arising challenges.
2. **Security agencies** must be adequately deployed across polling stations and remain professional, neutral, and vigilant. Security forces should ensure a peaceful environment and protect the rights of voters, observers, and the media. The professional deployment and conduct of security personnel is key to maintaining calm and order.

3. **Political parties, candidates, and supporters** must commit to peaceful participation, avoid provocative rhetoric, and reject any form of vote-buying or electoral malpractice. Vote buying is an election offence which is punishable under the laws of The Gambia. The integrity of this election depends on fair play from all actors. Voters in Massembeh ward are encouraged to turn out and exercise their democratic right to vote and remain peaceful and vigilant throughout the process. Their voices matter, and their votes will determine the leadership of their community.

### **Gambia Participates' Commitment to Democracy**

Elections are the cornerstone of democracy, and their credibility must be safeguarded at all costs. As a non-partisan, independent observation mission, Gambia Participates remains devoted to ensuring that the will of the people is reflected in the outcome of the elections. We will continue to monitor and report on the electoral process in Massembeh ward, ensuring transparency, accountability, and fairness every step of the way.

Thank you, and may The Gambia continue to uphold democracy.

**Marr Nyang**



**Executive Director**

Gambia Participates

Head of the 2025 Massembeh By-election Observation Mission