



## **GAMBIA PARTICIPATES PRE-ELECTION OBSERVATION REPORT ON THE 2023 MAYORAL/CHAIRMANSHIP ELECTION**

**REPORTING PERIOD- May 05 – 18, 2023**

**May 19, 2023**

### **I. Introduction**

To effectively observe the general political environment leading up to May 20, 2023, Mayoral and Chairmanship election, Gambia Participates recruited, trained, and deployed 53 long-term observers (LTOs). This project aims to systematically observe and gather factual and verifiable information on the general political environment, the conduct of political parties and independent candidates as well as early signs of conflict and politically motivated violence. Gambia Participates observers use a standardized checklist to report on the happenings in their assigned areas on a weekly basis. The 53 LTOs covered all the Regions and 53 Constituencies in The Gambia.

While candidates were embarking on a countrywide political campaign to influence voters, Gambia Participates were in all 53 constituencies observing the political activities. This report contains key findings from observers monitoring the general political environment, campaign activities of political parties, the preparedness of the IEC, voter education initiatives, the participation of marginalised groups such as women, youth and persons with disabilities, use/non-use of state resources and critical incidents such as **violence, hate speech and vote buying**. Gambia Participates' observation mission aims to ensure a peaceful, credible and transparent electoral process, through providing impartial observation reports proffering recommendations where necessary for good governance and promotion of democratic elections in The Gambia.

This report contains key findings of the observation period covering two reporting periods, May 05 to May 11 for Period 1 and May 12 to May 18 for Period II. It is based on reports received from 53 Constituencies.

### **II. Detailed Findings**

#### **The General Environment**

In the first reporting period, covering May 5 to May 10, 96% of Gambia Participates' observers noted that the general environment was calm and orderly. Consistent with the reports from the first reporting period, Gambia Participates also observed that the general electoral environment was calm and orderly in the second reporting period covering May 11 to May 18 as reported by 98% of observers.

Although, **4%** of the LTOs witnessed disorder at the IEC regional offices in the Lower River Region, West Coast Region, North Bank Region and Kanifing during the first reporting period.

- In the first reporting period, 45% of the observers witnessed the presence of other domestic observers mainly from civil society. Peace Ambassadors and CSOs coalition

on elections increased their engagements in the electoral process in the second reporting period.

- 47% of Gambia Participates' LTOs witnessed the presence of security forces during the observation period, mainly officials from the Gambia Police Intervention Unit (PIU). 36% of these LTOs noted the presence of between 1-10 security personnel in their area of observation, and 9% of LTOs observed the presence of between 11-20 security personnel in their area of observation. The presence of security personnel increased in the second reporting period (May 12-18) as 55% of observers witnessed the presence of Gambia Police, and 4% witnessed the presence of ECOWAS Soldiers. The conduct of the security personnel were generally orderly and respected professional standards.

### **IEC's Preparatory Activities**

Gambia Participates observers witnessed or heard of electoral preparatory activities conducted by the IEC. The LTOs visited IEC regional offices to assess the commission's preparatory activities, all of IEC's 7 regional offices were accessible to Gambia Participates' Constituency Supervisors to observe the preparation of the IEC in the regions.

- 11 LTOs noted that the IEC had commenced the dispatch of election materials to its regional offices ahead of the May 20<sup>th</sup> Mayoral/Chairmanship election. For this reporting period, 9 sighted IEC posters, 7 sighted voters registers, 5 sighted voting procedure guidelines, drums, marble trays and bags containing the marble trays, respectively. In the second reporting period (May 12-18), 12 more observers reported the dispatch of electoral materials in their constituencies, all 12 observers' IEC posters, 8 sighted bags containing the marble trays, and 7 observers sighted voter registers, voting procedures, drums, and marble trays in the constituencies.
- Observers also noted the commencement of training for ad hoc staff as observed in Banjul Central, Banjul North, Banjul South, Basse, Central Baddibu, Jarra West, Sanneh Mentereng and Serekunda West Constituencies.
- Observers reported the presence of party agents at the IEC regional offices with 84% of observers witnessing the presence of APRC party agents, and 8% observing the presence of NPP and UDP party agents, respectively.

### **Voter Education Campaigns**

In the first reporting period (May 05 - 11), 60% of Gambia Participates' observers witnessed voter participation sensitization in their constituencies this increased to 73% of observers reporting voter education campaigns during the second reporting period (May 12-18), of which;

- In the first reporting period, 34% were exposed to voter education conducted by political parties, 30% were exposed to voter education conducted by the IEC, 15% were exposed to voter education conducted by CSOs and 4% heard of or witnessed voter education conducted by other stakeholders. The IEC increased its voter education efforts in the second reporting period (May 12-18) as reported by 45% of LTOs, 37%

observed voter education by political parties, 16% reported voter education by CSOs and 14% heard of or witnessed voter education conducted by other stakeholders.

- In addition, in the first reporting period, Gambia Participates observers attended or heard of voter education targeting special interest groups with 21% reporting voter education targeting youth and 11% reporting voter education targeting women and PWDs, respectively. Voter education efforts targeted at special interest groups increased greatly during the second reporting period (May 12-18) with 39% reporting voter education targeting youth and 35% reporting voter education targeting women and 20% reporting voter education targeting PWDs.
- While stakeholders deployed several methods to conduct voter education, during the first reporting period (May 05-11), 62% of observers reported that voter education was conducted via town halls, 17% of observers were exposed to voter education through the television, 6% of observers were exposed to voter education via WhatsApp platform, 21% were exposed to voter education via posters, 17% were exposed to voter education via billboards, 4% via IEC voter education, 6% through the Facebook platform and 8% reported that they witnessed voter education via the door to door engagements. Stakeholders conducted voter education more via town hall, television and billboard at 45%, 43% and 31% respectively, during the second reporting period (May 12-18).

### **Political Party Activities and Campaigns**

The political campaigns started on May 5<sup>th</sup> and ended on May 18<sup>th</sup>, 2023. physical political campaigning was witnessed during the observation period. Gambia Participates observers witnessed in-person campaigns by political parties and individual candidates. In the first reporting period (May 05-11) Political campaigns were mainly conducted through town halls (36%), rallies (53%), door-to-door (43%) and Car/Vehicle 55%. Political party campaigns intensified as reported in the second reporting period, through town halls (39%), rallies (61%), door-to-door (51%) and Car/Vehicle 65%. Specifically,

- In the first reporting period, observers witnessed or heard of campaigns by NPP at 87%, UDP at 85%, Independent at 38%, GDC at 19%, PDOIS, PPP and other parties at 9% and APRC at 6%. Five political parties actively engaged the political campaigns during the second reporting period (May 12-18), observers reported thus; NPP at 96%, UDP at 88%, Independent at 39%, GDC and PPP trailed at 12%, respectively.
- The most active party during the reporting period was NPP followed by UDP and Independent candidates.
- 98% of the observers witnessed or heard political campaigns on social media influencing voters to vote for their party/candidate. The vast majority of the observers heard or saw political campaigns on state-owned radio or television media giving coverage to all candidates during news hour and exclusive coverage for each candidate.

## **Abuse of State Resources/Abuse of Influence**

Gambia Participates observers witnessed instances of non-elected government officials (i.e. civil servants) and/or government employees using their influence to support or campaign for a particular party or candidate. Despite being prohibited by law, 36% of the observers witnessed the active participation of public servants in political campaigns during official working hours.

- In the first reporting period, 21% witnessed the active participation of ministers, 19% witnessed the participation of other government officials (including local government authorities) and 4% witnessed the participation of Permanent Secretaries in political campaigns during official working hours. In the second reporting period (May 12-18) 14% and 16% of observers witnessed the active participation of ministers and other government officials in political campaigns during official working hours.
- In the first reporting period, 25% of the LTOs witnessed the public servants engaged in open campaigns, 13% witnessed the public servants engaged in town halls and 15% witnessed the public servants campaign for candidates/parties during rallies. In the second reporting period, 16% witnessed the public servants engaged in open campaigns, 6% witnessed the public servants engaged in town halls and 14% witnessed the public servants campaign for candidates/parties during rallies.
- 28% of LTOs witnessed the use of public resources/properties during political activities. These were most prevalent in Banjul Central, Banjul South, Niamina Dankunku, Niamina West, Serekunda West, Kiang East, Central Baddibu, Illiasa, Lower Baddibu, Sabach Sanjal, Foni Bintang, Foni Jarrol, Kombo East, Kombo South and Kiang Central Constituencies. 34% of LTOs witnessed the use of state and local government-owned vehicles for political campaigns and 4% witnessed the use of state media for political campaigns. In the second reporting period (May 12-18) LTOs reported the abuse of state resources in Niani, Jarra West, Kiang East, Lower Baddibu, Brikama South, Foni Jarrol, Kombo South and Kiang Central Constituencies. 29% of LTOs witnessed the use of state-owned vehicles for political campaigns.

## **Critical Incidents**

Although the general environment was calm and orderly, a major critical incident was reported in Banjul Central where the GP long-term observer for that constituency was denied to observe the campaign of NPP and was also verbally attacked and threatened.

Observers witnessed vote buying in some parts of the country particularly in the Brikama North, Banjul Central and Kiang East constituencies.

## **III. Recommendations**

Based on its findings from its observation of the general political and electoral environment in all provinces, districts, and constituencies in this reporting period, Gambia Participates makes the following key recommendations to stakeholders:

### **The Independent Electoral Commission (IEC)**

1. **Ensure strict compliance with the campaign code of ethics;** The IEC must ensure political parties strictly adhere to the campaign code of ethics. The IEC should equally ensure that political parties adhere to campaign schedules as designed by the IEC.
2. **Publish Key Electoral Information:** The IEC should publish key electoral information early on their website including the list of all the polling stations and their polling streams alongside their polling codes in each constituency disaggregated by registered voters and gender to aid observers that are doing a proportional deployment.
3. **Establish Compliance Unit:** The IEC should consider establishing a compliance unit that will censor hate speech and other forms of inciting violence during political campaigns and hold parties/candidates accountable for their actions.
4. **Increase Voter Education on the Electoral Guidelines:** IEC should engage with political parties and other stakeholders to ensure a broad-based understanding of the Electoral Code of Conduct, as well as electoral guidelines. Furthermore, We call on the IEC to investigate all breaches of the Electoral Code of Conduct, including politically motivated violence, abuse of state resources for campaign purposes and inducements (handouts), all of which observers reported have occurred at various levels.

#### **To Security Agencies**

5. **Ensure a Level Playing Field for all:** The Security Agencies should ensure that they provide security to all political parties equitably and without fear or favour in the management of political activities and meetings.
6. **Provision of Security and Upholding Peace:** We call on the Gambian Police to swiftly investigate all instances of politically motivated violence, and to coordinate with the IEC in investigating any breaches of the Electoral Code of Conduct.

#### **To the Political Parties**

7. **Uphold the Electoral Code of Conduct:** Gambia Participates calls on parties, and particularly party leaders to uphold the Electoral Code of Conduct and lead by example and hold their party members accountable for any breaches.

#### **Civil Society Organisations**

8. **Increase Voter Education/Information:** As observers documented a relatively small amount of voter information/education during this observation period, CSOs should increase efforts in this regard and specifically increase their voter education and information campaigns targeted to the needs of women, youth, and persons with disabilities.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The process adopted in this pre-election report involves the deployment of 53 carefully recruited and trained long-term observers (LTOs) in every constituency of The Gambia to systematically observe and gather information concerning their respective environments as well as early warning signs of conflict and electoral violence. The observers are equipped with

a checklist to record the relevant information and provide verifiable findings. Observers report weekly on a standard set of questions based on events that are happening in their assigned constituencies.

The LTOs are expected to observe electoral activities relating to voter education, political campaign activities, activities of marginalized groups (youths, women and persons with disabilities) as well as election-related violence. The LTOs track the activities of the IEC, political parties, CSOs, women, youth, persons with disabilities, and other key electoral stakeholders.

All findings from the observers are transmitted to Gambia Participate via coded text messages. During the reporting period, the observers are also expected to report any critical incidents and early warning signs that occur within their constituencies, which are then verified and shared with the relevant stakeholders to potentially resolve issues.

Gambia Participates findings in the pre-election period are obtained from all Regions of the country but are not representative of the entire country. Unlike short-term observation methodology, which relies on sample-based observation, Gambia Participates uses a more traditional approach that investigates both qualitative and quantitative data through its long-term observers and triangulation of results through its networks with electoral stakeholders in any given Region or constituency. Gambia Participate, therefore, encourages users of this report to independently corroborate and respond appropriately to trends identified in this pre-election report.