



**Support to the Electoral cycle and Democratic  
process in The Gambia 2020-2021**

## Background

Since 2018, Gambia has embarked on several overlapping governance reform initiatives relating to the electoral process and transitional justice mechanisms (i.e., Truth and Reconciliation and Reparation Commission, the National Human Rights Commission, the Constitutional Review Commission), including the Security Sector Reform. Whilst the Gambia's transition continues to make steady progress, it is also facing significant challenges, including uncertainty regarding the constitutional and electoral legal framework in the lead up to National Assembly Elections scheduled for April 2022. Given that the 2021 political landscape was dramatically different from the earlier electoral cycle with 18 registered political parties, coupled with high expectations around the elections, resulted in heightened scrutiny of the process from all stakeholders.

Upon the request of the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC), the United Nations Electoral Assistance Division and UNDP deployed a Needs Assessment Mission (NAM) to The Gambia on 13-20 September 2019, and a formulation mission was deployed in February 2020 to develop a project of electoral assistance in support to the 2020-2023 electoral cycle. The NAM recommendations highlighted support focusing on; i) the electoral reform, ii) capacity building, iii) dialogue and conflict prevention, iv) inclusivity and transparency of the electoral process and an

electoral assistance project was established to support the process.

The overall project goal is to strengthen Gambia's key democratic institutions and processes through functional and inclusive electoral processes that will ensure the peaceful conduct of the 2021-2023 multi-tier elections and demonstrate heightened legitimacy and institutionalization of the multiparty system. The project has 5 outputs, 15 sub-outputs, and 31 activities to be implemented within 36 months (2020-2022). The 5 thematic outputs are centred around:



IEC Chairman with UNDP RR at one of the elections steering committee meeting

1. Transparency is enhanced throughout the electoral process.
2. Inclusive participation is supported to strengthen the elections credibility throughout the political process.
3. Accountability is enhanced throughout the electoral process.
4. Capacity of electoral stakeholders is strengthened; and

- Dialogue and coordination mechanisms of conflict prevention of election-related violence are implemented throughout the electoral cycle.

### Presidential Elections 2021

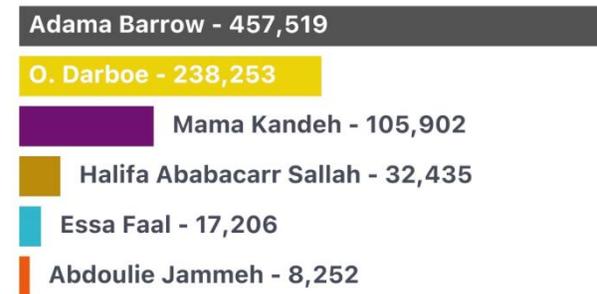


### Voting Drums: Presidential Elections 2021

On 8 September 2021, the IEC issued a press release formally announcing that the election to the office of the President of The Republic of Gambia will be conducted on Saturday 4 December 2021. A total of 26 presidential aspirants collected nomination papers from the IEC HQ, and 23 candidates submitted their nomination papers to the IEC, indicative of the strength of the political and democratic transformation of The Gambia. After the nomination scrutiny, the IEC accepted the nomination of Six candidates.

The Presidential Election held 4 December 2021 was marked by a high level of voter turnout of 89.34%, a significant jump compared to 59% voter

turnout recorded during the 2016 Presidential election, indicating a high level of interest in the political process and reflective of the consolidation of the democratic transition process in The Gambia.



### Results of the 2021 presidential election in The Gambia

On 5 December 2021, the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) released the presidential election results. It declared incumbent president Adama Barrow, from the ruling National People's Party (NPP), as the winner (securing 53.23% of the valid votes cast). Mr Ousainou Darboe from the United Democratic Party (UDP) came second (27.72% of the votes), while Mr Mammah Kandeh of the Gambia Democratic Congress (GDC), came third (12.32%)

4 December Presidential election was deemed free, fair, and successful by observation missions. Both National and International observation missions

commended the IEC for conducting the election despite the difficulties imposed by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The observation missions commended The Gambia for holding a peaceful, credible, and transparent election and the security personnel for maintaining peace during the elections period.

The IEC was also applauded for its preparations for the presidential election, voter's registration exercise using biometric systems, candidate nomination, civic and voters' education, hitch-free campaigns, accreditation of observers, amongst others.

The statements also commended political parties and candidates for conducting their campaigns peacefully and orderly, re-emphasizing candidates' compliance with the campaign schedules. The professionalism demonstrated by The Gambia Police Force resulted in hitch-free campaigns. The overall compliance of all contesting candidates with the media rules issued by the IEC was also mentioned as commendable, as GRTS allocated to each of the six candidates' free airtime during the campaign period.

However, the observation missions also encouraged the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) to include the diaspora in the next presidential elections and to establish legal, communications and data units.

## **KEY ACHIEVEMENTS (JAN -DECEMBER 2021):**

### **1. Civic and Voters' Education ahead of the December 4<sup>th</sup> Presidential Elections.**

- a. The Electoral Assistance project supported the IEC in producing voter education materials and conducting voter education on Newspapers and TV channels. IEC Voter Education media messaging spanning 25 October - 4 December 2021 focused on candidate nomination, promoting peaceful campaigns and elections, and the importance of increased voter turnout during the Presidential election.
- b. The project also supported the IEC to produce 10,000 T-Shirts as advocacy materials voter registration exercise.
- c. IEC held 3 TV panel discussions on Gambia Radio and Television Services (GRTS), on 29 October 2021 to clarify the candidate nomination process, on 08 November 2021 to promote the need for peaceful campaigns and on 03 December 2021 to encourage voters to peacefully participate in the presidential election.

- d. The Electoral Assistance project also supported NCCE to conduct several Civic and Voter Education campaigns, including face-to-face community outreach in over 80 selected communities, broadcast of 4 TV talk-shows and aired 112 TV spots/jingle in 9 TV stations, and 1110 Radio spots/jingle in 21 Radio Stations (including private and community Radios) across the country. The NCCE also produced and distributed 1,000 posters/flyers, four billboards, and 15 banners installed in strategic locations that contained relevant messages that encouraged active participation in the election and promoted peace throughout the electoral process.
- e. The Electoral Assistance project supported National Youth Council to engage political parties' representatives, youth, women, and relevant stakeholders on the importance of peace during the presidential campaign and election period. Seven regional youth Bantaba's (Convergence) were held in all administrative regions, including nationwide caravans that sensitized youth on their role in politics and maintaining peace and stability during the electoral processes. CVE materials such as t-shirts, flyers, and posters were distributed during the caravan.

## 2. Capacity of electoral stakeholders strengthened



Refurbished IEC Regional Office in Basse, URR

- a. Rehabilitated 4 IEC Regional Offices that are equipped with office furniture and equipment. On 9th and 10th April / 5th and 6th May 2021, the Four fully functional Regional Office at Brikama, Kerewan, Mansakonko and Basse were handed over to the IEC.
- b. Procured and handed over to the IEC COVID 19 preventive materials, including 220 thermometers, 1,336 hand Sanitizers and 13, 500 facemasks in preparation for the voters' registration exercise.



UNDP RR at the handing over of refurbished IEC regional office in Basse

- c. To support GPF, the project initiated the Human Rights Due Diligence Policy assessment of the Gambian police force (GFP). The assessment was conducted to identify the potential reputational risks involved with supporting the GPF
- d. On 9 November 2021, a UN Standing Police Capacity Officer was deployed to the Gambia to support the electoral assistance project delivery on Electoral Security and enhance the Gambia Police Force preparedness to support the presidential election.

### **3. Transparency throughout the electoral process enhanced.**

Transparency of electoral operations and related decision-making remains a critical determinant of the level of trust the population will have in the electoral process.

Transparency was enhanced through:

- a. Strengthened the IEC institutional strategic communication and IT equipment (14 laptop computers, 14 laser jet printers and 14 internet routers).
- b. In partnership with IFES, supported the IEC to convene four consultative forums with political parties, CSO' and the media, which increased understanding of every stage of the electoral process in The Gambia.
- c. The governance mechanism of the project was also used to manage and guide the

project decision-making process. Five (5) Project Steering Committee Meetings and four (4) Project Technical Committee meetings were held and co-chaired by the IEC Chairman and UNDP Resident Representative. For example, at the 3rd Project Steering Committee meeting on 26 May 2021, the IEC introduced and demonstrated the Bio-Metric Voter's Registration (BVR) Kits. The demonstration concluded with a mock biometric registration and produced a Bio-Metric Voter's Registration card.

### **4. Accountability enhanced throughout the electoral process.**

- a. During the voter registration period, the Electoral Assistance project supported the establishment of 10 Revising Courts, each headed by a 1<sup>st</sup> class magistrate, including support to the Judiciary related to IT and communication equipment, online library access to electoral dispute jurisprudence within commonwealth countries.

### **5. Civic and Voters' Education ahead of the Voter Registration period.**

As a result of UNDP support:

- a. NCCE utilized a variety of civic education methods to educate citizens.
  - From 10 May - 12 June 2021, media engagements on the voter's registration

exercise were held 13 weekly TV talk-shows, 12 weekly Radio talk shows, and 700 spots/jingles aired in six TV channels

- Face-to-face sensitization held in over 40 communities in the URR and CRR
- 40 community sensitizations in NBR, LRR and WCR.



CVE Activities supported by the Project

b. Women's Bureau engaged

- 300 women leaders, 50 in each of the 6 Local Government areas, and shared information on women's participation in the VR exercise.
- Organized 10 district sensitization forums targeted at 500 women and community leaders to stimulate women's political participation in the VR exercise.

c. National Youth Council

- Organized a nationwide youth caravan engagement and community Bantabas encouraging young people to register. The NYC is also utilized social media platforms

and messaging Apps to mobilize young people toward mass voters' registration.



Youth caravan encouraging young people to vote through art

- d. CSO Coalition on Election organized eight regional caravan and town hall meetings targeted at 400 citizens to increase awareness of voters' education and promote civic rights and responsibilities.

### **Moving Forward**

UNDP Electoral Assistance will continue to support the IEC and other electoral stakeholders to prepare for and conduct the National Assembly Election scheduled for April 2022. Some key activities planned for 2022 includes

1. Support IEC to conduct a lesson learned Conference after the 2021 Presidential Elections
2. Support IEC to rehabilitate 2 Regional Offices in Janjanbureh and Kanifing.
3. Continue support to IEC institutional communication through the consultative Forum to update electoral stakeholders (i.e.,

political parties, CSO's and the Media) on the electoral process.

4. Support IEC to develop and operationalize the Results Management System
5. Support stakeholders to strengthen inclusive participation in the electoral process through Civic and Voter Education Activities
6. Peace campaigns supported and deployed throughout the electoral phases
7. Support to Police on electoral security.
8. Support Coordination and information sharing in the monitoring of election-related risks of violence by establishing an early warning and early response system

#### **Status of Project Resource Mobilization.**

UNDP Electoral Assistance project is challenged with a huge funding gap. The project resource requirements are estimated at US\$ 4,586,700. UNDP, under its regular TRAC resource, has in 2020 allocated (\$ 244,135) and in 2021 allocated USD 470,000), which leaves the resource gap at

US\$ 3,872,565. Amidst this funding constraint, the project received \$60,000 from UN EAD/DPPA XB resources to engage Civic and Voters Education activities to enhance participation of women in politics and decision-making and enhance youth political participation.

The project has submitted a proposal to the Italian Embassy to the tune of US\$ 92,996.64 (79791.11 (EUR), which was approved in December 2021. The Italian proposals contain outputs and activities aimed at mitigating the risks of electoral violence through early warning and early response mechanisms.

Meanwhile, the project has submitted a funding proposal to Japan JSB Winter FY 2021 to the tune of US\$ 1,148,322.42 for the 2022 programmatic year. The project has also submitted funding proposals to the German Embassy to the tune of US\$ 122,504.55 (106,823.96 (EUR) for the 2021/2022 programmatic year. It is not clear whether the funding will be provided.