



PEACE AMBASSADORS - THE GAMBIA

THE ELECTION WATCH

PEACE AMBASSADORS - THE GAMBIA

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Fair and Credible Elections

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YOUR VOICE.
YOUR FUTURE.

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 Peace Ambassadors - The Gambia

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Foreword by the Executive Secretary, Yankuba Manjang



Picture: The Executive Secretary of PAG, Mr. Yankuba Manjang.

Greetings from Peace Ambassadors - The Gambia (PAG)! I write, in my capacity as Executive Secretary, to welcome you to the maiden edition of The Election Watch Newsletter. This marks the beginning of periodic publications we intend to bring in keeping you abreast with our Election Watch project and other important official engagements this reputable institution continues to embark on.

Peace Ambassadors - The Gambia (PAG) is an international youth organization operating in The Gambia since 2001. The organization has functioning chapters in all the administrative regions of The Gambia and in Senegal and Guinea Bissau.

PAG has over the years carved a niche for itself as a reputable stakeholder in the electoral process of the country, having been

accredited by the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) to officially observe presidential, parliamentary as well as local Government elections in The Gambia.

As a result of our remarkable track record and experience in electoral process observations, we have earned ourselves an authoritative voice that continues to provide a watchdog role in promoting transparency, credibility and fairness in elections.

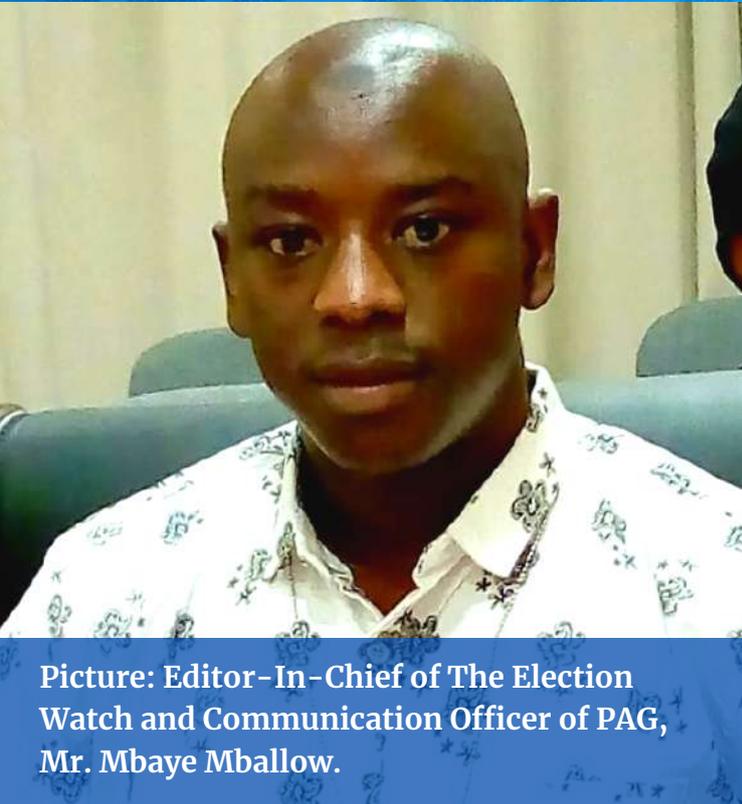
I commend the PAG observer teams which continue to play an essential role in strengthening the country's political system by enhancing the credibility and legitimacy of elections, thereby helping to promote peacebuilding among politicians and reduce electoral violence.

This election cycle, Peace Ambassadors for the first time in The Gambia - through partnership and funding from the National Democratic Institute-The Gambia (NDI) - has significantly expanded its election observation efforts in systematic long-term observation covering the entire election calendar.

I wish to thank the NDI for this valuable collaboration and for their keen interest in consolidating democracy and good governance in The Gambia.

Finally, I wish to express gratitude to the PAG Communications Unit under the dynamic leadership of Mbaye Mballow for its commitment and professionalism in producing such an interesting newsletter.
Happy reading!

Letter from the Editor-In-Chief, Mbaye Mballow



Picture: Editor-In-Chief of The Election Watch and Communication Officer of PAG, Mr. Mbaye Mballow.

I bring you greetings from the Editorial Team of The Election Watch newsletter. It is my pleasure to present the 1st edition of this fascinating piece of work. The publication is a result of a combination of PAG's commitment, teamwork, and ardent desire to continuously communicate our messages and programmes to the people we serve.

In this edition, we packaged a variety of stories aimed at keeping you abreast with the incredible works we are doing at PAG and other important articles that will - in no small measure - empower the electorate and prepare them to make informed choices in the coming presidential, legislative and local government elections. These include a step-by-step explanation of voting and counting procedures.

You will find details of the stakeholders

meeting we successfully convened, and report of the political party congresses our team observed. These reports are further strengthened by recommendations we outlined for future references.

Another interesting story is the success story of Babucarr Sanneh, a virtually impaired youngster who recounted how his trainings and engagements at PAG changed his perspective on nurturing peace and resolving conflicts. This story epitomizes hundreds of others who have and continue to benefit from PAG's life-changing programmes.

Our Editorial column focusses on the need for young people to rise and take active roles in the political infrastructure. For a country that has over 60% of youthful population, it is disheartening to see that this demographic is not adequately represented in decision making tables that matter most.

Communications and public relations are critical pillars of PAG. The secretariat holds them in the highest regard, and this has been manifested by their level of support and dedication in seeing The Election Watch newsletter idea materialize to fruition.

Finally, I wish to extend gratitude to my Editorial Team members for their sacrifice, dedication, and inputs in this maiden edition.

While wishing you a happy reading, thank you for investing your time with us!

Editorial: The Need for Youth Participation in Politics



Picture: PAC's Mr. Fabakary Kalleh talking to young people at the Gambia College.

Despite making up more than half of the country's population, young people in The Gambia have not yet taken their rightful role in politics and governance.

The youth are not adequately represented in political institutions and processes such as the parliament, political parties and elections. The situation is even more undesirable for both young women as well as persons with disabilities.

For political systems to be representative, the youth should be actively involved. They are disengaged from political processes and many of them have little or no voice or influence in political decisions that affect their lives.

It is essential that young people are engaged in formal political processes and have a say in high-level politics. Inclusive political participation is not only a fundamental political and democratic right but also is crucial to building peaceful societies and

developing policies that respond to the specific needs of younger generations.

For young people to be adequately represented in political institutions, processes, and decision-making, and in particular in the coming presidential, legislative and local government elections, they must know their rights and be given the necessary knowledge and capacity to participate in meaningful ways at all levels.

Over the past years, PAG has implemented a series of activities aimed at promoting young people's participation in politics and its decision-making processes. However, despite these gains, there is a dire need to break the obstacles to participation in these processes that young people encounter.

As the country prepares for the presidential election on the 4th December 2021, the importance of their active and meaningful participation in the democratic practices and processes cannot be overemphasized.

Peace Ambassadors Held Stakeholders Dialogue on Elections



Picture: Participants at the stakeholders dialogue.

In partnership with the National Democratic Institute-The Gambia (NDI), Peace Ambassadors – The Gambia (PAG) held a stockholders' dialogue on elections at the Paradise Suites Hotel on the 24th February 2021.

The Gambia goes to polls to elect a President on the 4th December 2021 and as the day clocks nearer, engaging relevant stakeholders is sacrosanct in enhancing the credibility and fairness of the electoral process.

The event was chaired by Momodou Juju Jallow, the Program Manager of PAG.

The Resident Program Director of the National Democratic Institute (NDI), Raymond Esebagdon, gave a background of the project and the felt-need to partner with PAG on The Election Watch project.

He highlighted the importance of the event as it will provide the platform for participants to discuss and come up with recommendations that will support a smooth electoral process.

The Deputy Executive Director of the National Youth Council (NYC), Mr. Pa-Malick Ceesay, presented on the importance of youth participation and involvement in elections and elections related issues.

The President of PAG, Bubacarr Sambou, presented the situational analysis on the political situation and issues relating to the elections. These updates include voter registration process, electoral reform bill, constitutional reform process, political party congresses, and citizen participation in the elections.

RECOMMENDATIONS

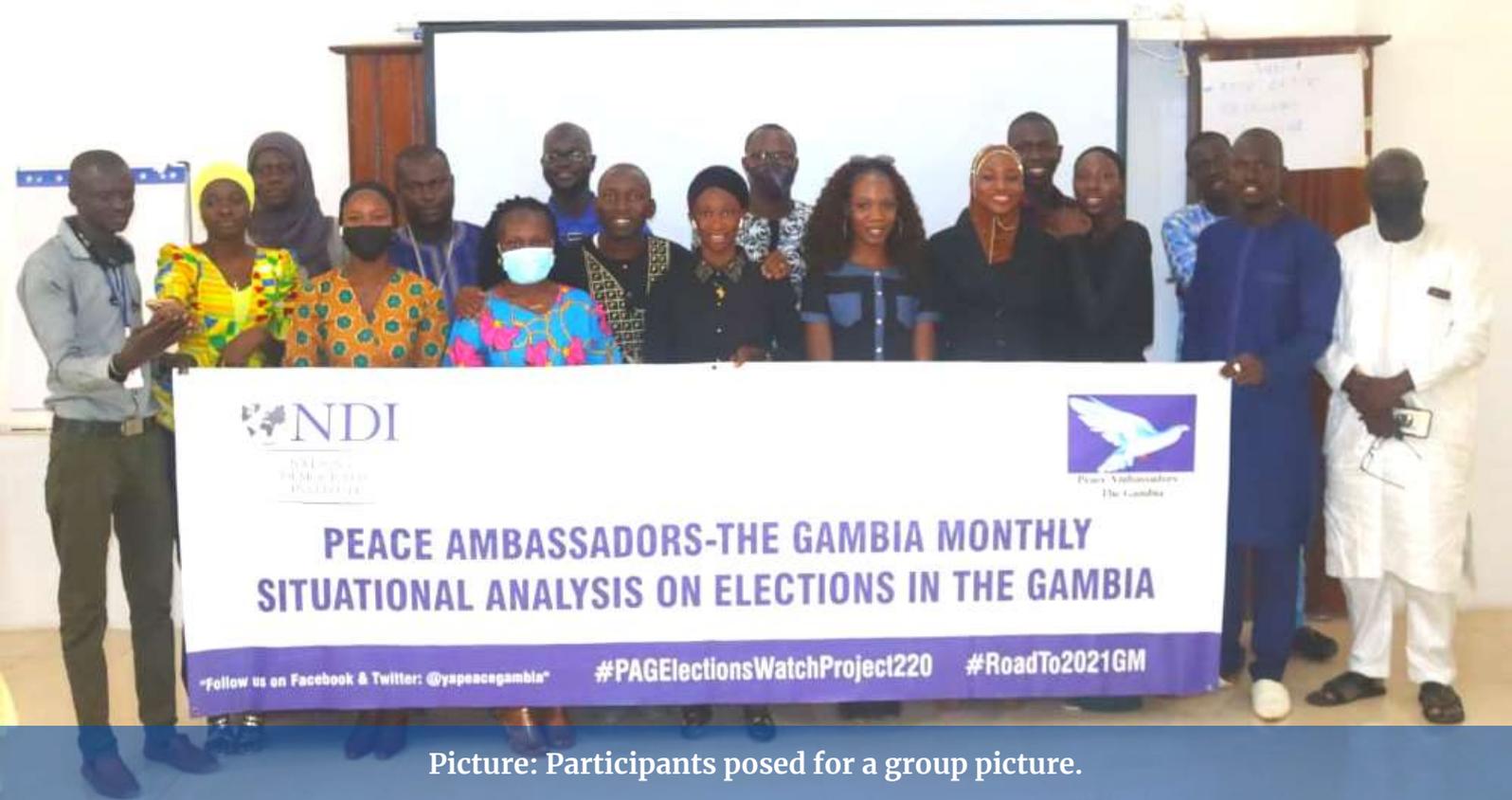
Civil Society

The Peace Ambassadors Monthly Dialogue on the Electoral and Political Processes is laudable and should be sustained to serve as platforms for regular information sharing and exchange of ideas among electoral stakeholders.

It is important that civil society organizations (CSOs) have the capacity to engage the electoral stakeholders and be able to hold political leaders to account.

The Independent Electoral Commission

Inadequate timely communication by the IEC about all aspects of the electoral process is of huge concern to the electoral stakeholders. To enhance the effective engagement of stakeholders in the political processes, the IEC should strengthen its communications with the media, CSOs and the public in a more timely and transparent manner, as failure to do so may result in speculations, fake news and misinformation about the IEC and its activities.



Picture: Participants posed for a group picture.

Funding is crucial for the IEC to conduct its numerous constitutional and statutory assignments. Going into the 2021 election cycle, the IEC should be supported by Government and development partners to ensure that the Commission is adequately funded to execute its activities.

Political Leaderships

To reduce political tension in the country following a rejection of the new draft constitution; and the ongoing rhetoric by political actors, there is a need to invoke an inclusive national dialogue to resolve lingering political issues in addition to ongoing efforts.

The legal framework for the 2021 election remains unclear, and the delays in concluding the electoral reforms is a huge concern. To address this uncertainty, relevant government agencies notably the Ministry of Justice and the IEC should urgently engage the media and CSOs to shed light on the status of the Bill. The Electoral Reform Bill should be finalized no later than six months before the election in accordance with the ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance.

Citizens Participation

Civic education is presently inadequate. Efforts must be stepped up by the IEC, the political parties

and CSOs to sensitize the citizens about the electoral and political processes.

Youth Participation

Youth constitute over 50% of the Gambian population. Currently there is limited youth participation in the political process. Tailored programs and messages should be designed by the IEC, political parties, and civil society organizations to educate and mobilize the young people to participate in the voter registration process ahead of the 2021 election.

Participation of Persons with Disabilities (PWDs)

Persons with disabilities have continued to face challenges in the political process. There are about 110,000 PWDs in the country. However, little efforts have been made to integrate them into mainstream political activities. Going forward, PWDs should be encouraged to participate in electoral processes through capacity building, election observation and voting.

COVID - 19 Protocols

It was observed by election stakeholders that currently, many Gambians do not observe COVID-19 preventive measures. To contain the spread of COVID - 19, the government should ensure that policy and other safety precautionary measures already in place are effectively enforced to create a healthy and enabling environment for electoral engagements.

PEACE AMBASSADORS OBSERVES POLITICAL PARTY CONGRESSES



Picture: Delegates at one of the party congresses.

As The Gambia prepares for its presidential election on December 4, 2021, political parties in the country conducted their national congresses to elect leaders who will steer the affairs of their parties. These congresses were held in various locations across the country such as: People's Progressive Party (PPP) at Brikama Ba, Lower Fulladu West; Gambia Democratic Congress (GDC) at Farafenni, North Bank Region; People's Democratic Organization for Independence and Socialization (PDOIS) at Kairaba Beach Hotel and Gambia Action Party (GAP) at Coral Beach Hotel, Brufut in the West Coast Region.

During these observation missions between the 26th February – 7th March 2021, PAG deployed eight (8) of its members to oversee the entire congress proceedings and report on their observation findings. The following observations were made.

Observations

Firstly, all congresses, though held onsite, followed standard World Health Organization COVID - 19 protocols and regulations. Wearing of facemasks was made mandatory and those who flouted the rules were, at some point, denied entry into the hall. Hand sanitizers were provided.

However, no social distancing measures were properly observed.

Secondly, most of the political parties did not provide security for unforeseen circumstances. However, for the ones that had, were as a result of a violent protest which virtually brought their congresses to a halt.

Thirdly, the Independent Electoral Commission was noticeably absent in all but one political party's congress. The IEC needs to put more sensitization and training on congress proceedings and procedures to better equip party militants, delegates, aspirants, journalists and other stakeholders in the process.

In addition, the National Council for Civic Education (NCCE) too, should help political parties as well as the public in understanding regulations guiding elections. In short, political parties need to shy from hand raising voting to secret balloting when it comes to nominating their leaders.

Finally, only about 15% of women, persons with disabilities and youth hold party leadership positions. This limits the interest and participation of these marginalized groups in the administration of political parties.



Picture: Delegates at one of the party congresses.

Recommendations

Firstly, provide enough voter sensitization on electoral processes and procedures. This will help

political parties and the public in understanding the guiding principles for a proper conduct of free and fair elections.

Secondly, more security needs to be provided to mitigate anticipated conflicts which may lead to potential violence.

Thirdly, women, persons with disabilities and youth participation in politics need to be emphasized and enhanced through recognition.

Finally, for a peaceful election, we urge all media houses to be reporting fact-checked stories. This will help for better understanding and avoid worst-case scenarios in the country.

PAG Executive Secretary says The Election Watch Project Promotes Fair and Credible Elections



Picture: PAG Executive Secretary, Mr. Yankuba Manjang.

The Executive Secretary of Peace Ambassadors – The Gambia (PAG), Mr. Yankuba Manjang, has said that The Election Watch Project of his organization is going far enough in promoting credibility and fairness of the presidential election scheduled for 4th December 2021.

The Executive Secretary said the project seeks to facilitate a well-coordinated and organized mechanism of observation of the 2021 election process and reforms in The Gambia.

“PAG seeks to increase citizens’ participation in the 2021 electoral process, thereby promoting a transparent and accountable democratic system in The Gambia. This would promote credible elections and boost citizens’ confidence in the electoral process through coordinated citizens’ oversight on elections and political processes in The Gambia,” he noted.

Since the start of the project, Mr. Manjang said they have conducted series of activities including observation of political party congresses, several monthly stakeholder dialogues, radio programs, training and deployment of observers during the

voter registration exercise, amongst others.

The Executive Secretary said citizens' participation as observers and monitors in the electoral cycle is of utmost importance as it will improve the public confidence in the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) and the whole electoral cycle. As such, he went on, it is the people's collective responsibility to work together and advance the democracy of The Gambia.

He added that the activities implemented thus far are very successful as some of the recommendations generated from these activities - like the IEC to update the public about their progress and activities - are being acted upon.

"Thus far, the observation of the electoral process has been electric, this allowed us to observe political party congresses and scrutinize party policies, programs and as well the way they (political parties) elect their party leaders," Mr. Manjang said.

The upcoming activities of PAG includes monitoring the Draft Election Reform Bill, the CSO Monthly Coordinating and Situational Analysis Meetings, Training of Trainers and Development of Voters Registration Observation Checklist and as well Observation of the Voter Registration Process.

Mr. Manjang admonished political parties to monitor the IEC Voter Registration Exercise and as well encourage their supporters to register during the exercise. He enjoined them to encourage their party supporters to stop spreading false information, hate speech and violent actions.

He said their mission is to work with young people, communities and other development partners in achieving and sustaining peace, stability and development in The Gambia and beyond.

Apart from The Election Watch Project, the Executive Secretary said PAG is implementing a UNFPA funded project through the UN Peacebuilding Fund meant to empower communities, young people and returnees to build social responsibility and be provided with alternative informed choices in dealing with violence.

Peace Ambassadors - The Gambia (PAG) is a voluntary non-profit peace education and advocacy organization with full operational presence in The Gambia, Senegal and Guinea Bissau since inception in 2001. Peace Education and Conflict Resolution have served as the basis of the organization's existence.

Over the years, PAG has incorporated other core issues such as youth empowerment, civic education and election monitoring and observation. These core fundamental issues are made possible through capacity building and awareness creation.

PAG TRAINS LEGACY UNIVERSITY STUDENTS ON PEACE AND LEADERSHIP

Peace Ambassadors -The Gambia (PAG) held a 3-day training of Legacy University students at the university campus in Sukuta from the 18th - 20th March 2021.

Legacy University is a private bilingual university par excellence, accredited to operate as a higher educational institution by the Government of The Gambia. It is a comprehensive educational institution focused on teaching, learning, research and community service.

However, this training came in the wake of the courtesy visit to PAG by the reputable learning center's Law Students' Association on the 10th March 2021.

Approximately, twenty (20) participants comprising Law, Nursing, and Education student leaders took part in this intensive training which equipped the student leaders with the requisite knowledge, skills and much needed attitude to cordially work with the rest of the student body.

During the days of interaction, various topics, which included the following, were treated.

Peace and Conflict by Amadou Jallow, Communication by Mbaye Mballow, Peace Building by Fabakary Kalleh, Leadership by Bubacarr Sambou, and Gender-Based Violence by Yankuba Manjang.



Picture: Trainees on Peace and Leadership at Legacy University

Peace Ambassadors Peace Talks at The Gambia College



Picture: Participants of the peace talks at Gambia College

In its continuous efforts to promote peace and shun instability, Peace Ambassadors - The Gambia organized a dialogue with Gambia College students at the school's main hall in Brikama, on the 18th March, 2021.

Held under the topic 'Using our diversities as a means for a peaceful coexistence', the convergence was attended by 112 people, most of whom are students residing in the college dormitory.

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With such peace education, PAG hopes that the Gambia College will not only graduate teachers but also high-spirited peace advocates who will positively shape social values and attitudes in promoting sustainable peace among students and in communities they live and serve. The event is also aimed at improving cooperation among college students and decreasing misunderstanding and violence.

Modou Cham, in his delivery on ‘Sustainable Peace’, emphasized the need for peace through tolerance, understanding and forgiveness. He urged the participants to use their diversities to make peace with each other and support the continuous existence of the already existing peace among them.

“Peace is everybody’s concern and we must do our individual and collective efforts to have a peaceful coexistence at all times,” he said, citing various examples of war torn zones and their negative consequences on the people’s lives and livelihood.

Cham, with strong emotions, reiterated the need for

understanding and mending our differences.

In addition, Amadou Jallow, a faculty member and former vice chairperson, West Coast Zone, echoed similar sentiments, with focus on the Ambassadors Peer Peace Motivation (APPM) of the College Chapter. He, in clear words, told the audience the importance of the club, how to become a member with explanation of the underlying benefits which includes routine capacity building training, exposure and interaction to learn positively with the broader membership of the organization.

Bubacarr Sambou, the President of PAG, expressed gratitude to the college students and urged for understanding, tolerance, forgiveness and patience which he said are the fundamental tools for helping us in building better relationships at all times.

He added that the Gambia College is a preparatory center for people to take responsibilities of other people in helping them become better aware of themselves and others around them.

PAG held Ambassadors Peer Peace Motivation Training



Picture: Participants at the Peer Peace Motivation Training.

In welcoming its new members onboard, Peace Ambassadors – The Gambia (PAG) held Ambassadors Peer Peace Motivation (APPM) induction training for its new intake. The day-long training, held on the 20th March 2021, brought together sixty-eight (68) participants.

The orientation was centered on Peace and conflict, the APPM Concept, Dealing with Diversity and Emotions, and Communication. The Facilitators for this were; Modou Cham, Muhammed Fofana, Fatoumatta J. Jallow and Fabakary Kalleh.

IEC Sets Date for General Voter Registration



Picture: The Chairman of the IEC, Mr. Alieu Momarr Njai.

The Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) has announced Saturday 29th May 2021 as the new date to commence the general registration of voters for the upcoming election.

The IEC Chairman made this announcement on Monday 22nd March 2021, adding that the 44-day long exercise is expected to end on Sunday, 11th July 2021.

Following the postponement of the general voter registration initially scheduled for 14th January 2021, the IEC stated that they were grappling with logistical challenges in relation to the procurement of materials and equipment needed for the successful conduct of the registration.

The release stated the documents one needs to acquire the new voter's card are a Birth Certificate, National Identity Card, or Attestation from a Chief or Alkali. For one to register, the individual should attain eighteen years of age or older at the time of voting in December.

Joseph Colley Is New IEC Vice Chairman



Picture: IEC Vice Chairman, Mr. Joseph Colley.

In March, Mr. Joseph Colley was appointed as the new Vice Chairman of the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC).

Mr. Colley's appointment came after 20 years of service at the IEC, starting as a junior officer and rising through the ranks of his last appointment as the Director of Training and Communication of the IEC, and now Vice-Chairman.

He was appointed by President Barrow in consultation with the Judicial Service Commission as a commission member and vice chairman of the IEC.

During his swearing in ceremony, Mr. Colley thanked President Barrow for the trust bestowed on him and pledged to perform as expected to maintain the integrity of the electoral commission.

“Being elevated from the secretariat to the Commission has caused me to reaffirm my unwavering commitment and courage to ensure the creation of a more level playing field in the political arena as the electoral laws of The Gambia have called for,” said Colley.

He added that election is the business of all; and implored all political parties and the stakeholders to support the Commission in making The Gambia’s electoral process the most peaceful, trusted and acceptable.

While congratulating the new electoral

commissioner, President Barrow pledged his government’s commitment to a free and fair election, stating, “As a government, the political will is 100 percent that we conduct free and fair elections.”

Mr. Colley replaced Malleh Sallah, who resigned from the commission in June last year.

In accordance with Section 42 subsection 3 of the Constitution of The Gambia, the members of the Commission shall be appointed by the President in consultation with the Judicial Service Commission and the Public Service Commission.

Babucarr’s Story: ‘How Peace Ambassadors Improved my Peace and Conflict Resolution Skills’



Picture: Babucarr Sanneh, Member of Peace Ambassadors - The Gambia.

I got involved with Peace Ambassadors - The Gambia in 2018 through Alpha B. Bah, a friend, who introduced me to the activities of the organization and then asked me to join their recruitment camp. At camp I did learn broadly Peace and Conflict, the difference between Conflict and Violence as well Conflict Resolution Techniques.

I also joined the organization in their International Youth Summer School (IYSS) at Dakar, Senegal. The IYSS was a remarkable experience sharing camp with people from 3 different countries namely The Gambia, Senegal and Guinea Bissau. It was a great experience as I met and interacted with diverse people from different countries and people with different cultural backgrounds. We were able to share cultures, learn from each other and communicate through social activities during the 10-day long convergence.

I graduated in September 2018 where I was certified as a Member of Peace Ambassadors after going through the recruitment camp and attending their training.

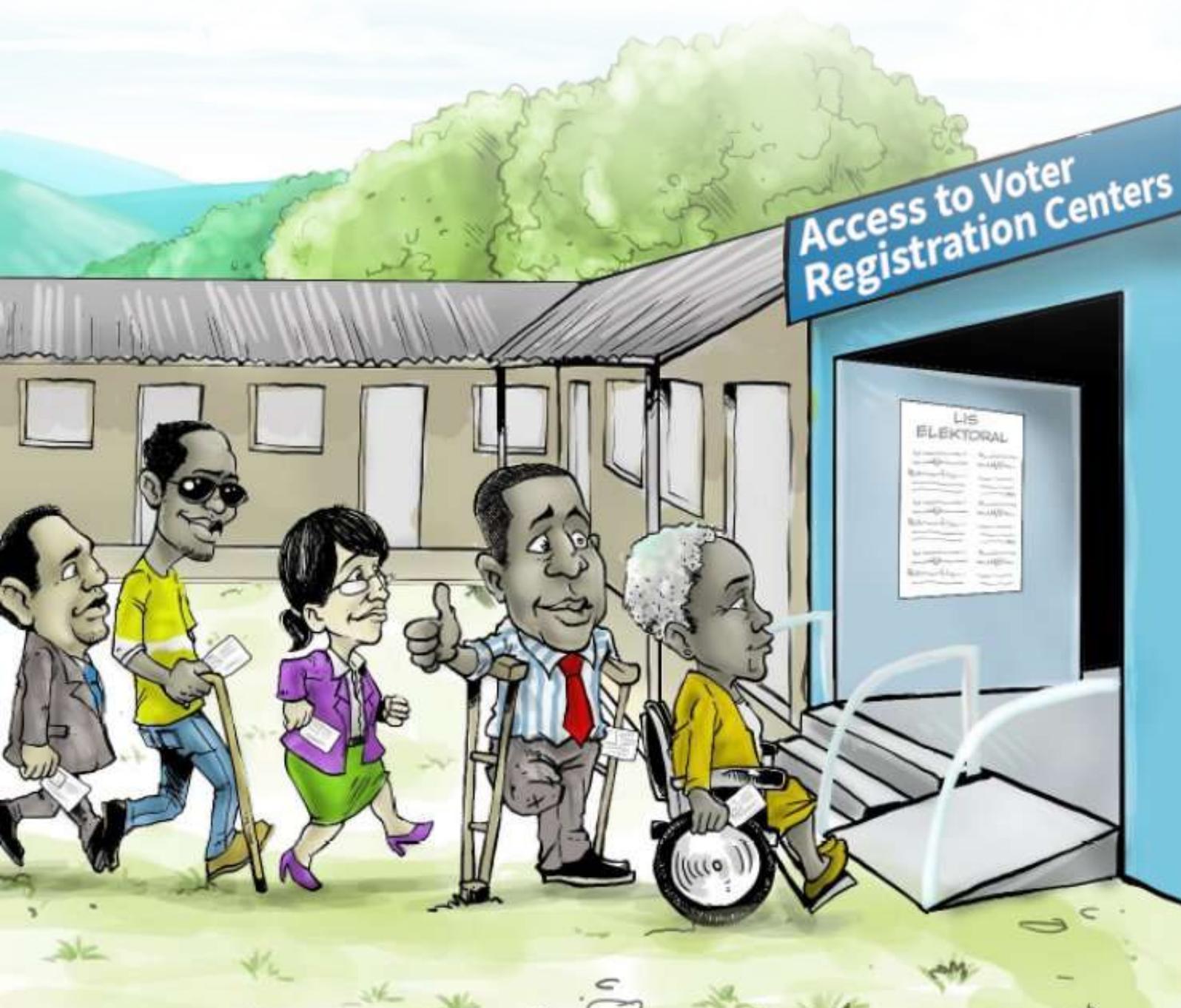
I also did a leadership training with the organization in April 2019 at Basse where we learned extensively about leadership such as Organizational Structures, Effective Communication Qualities of Leaders, and other very important modules. We did some outdoor activities that gave us a deeper understanding of leadership and how to become responsible leaders.

Through my membership at Peace Ambassadors, I co-founded the Ambassadors Peer Peace Motivation (APPM) Club in Abuko Lower Basic School where we educate students on peace and conflict resolutions and related matters. As of now, over a hundred students have passed through the club.

Through the training I went through with Peace Ambassadors, I learned a lot. The training has changed my perception on resolving conflicts and how to manage my anger. Furthermore, my leadership skills have significantly improved.

By Babucarr Sanneh.

Babucarr is a Member of Peace Ambassadors and the National Coordinator of The Legacy. He is a qualified teacher and currently studying Diplomacy and International Relations at Management Development Institute (MDI).



Meet The PAG Team



Yankuba Manjang
Executive Secretary



Momodou Juju Jallow
Program Manager



Mbaye Mballow
Communication Officer



Awa Saily Khan
Program Assistant



Lagamy Gumaneh
Social Media
Coordinator & Content
Developer



Yankuba Bojang
Logistics Officer



Fatou Ceesay
A + Coordinator



Fatoumatta A. Cham
Admin. and Finance
Officer



Awa Colley
Program Officer



ABOUT PAG

Peace Ambassadors-The Gambia (PAG) is a voluntary non-profit peace education and advocacy organization operating in The Gambia, Senegal and Guinea Bissau since its inception in 2001. Peace Education and Conflict Resolution has ever served as the basis of the organization's existence, however, we incorporate other core issues such as youth empowerment, civic education and Election Monitoring and Observation. These core fundamental issues are made possible through capacity building and awareness creation. Peace Ambassadors - The Gambia has therefore since 2006 monitored every election held in The Gambia from Presidential, Parliamentary and Local Government Elections as well as some by-elections. The organization also conducts voter education to ensure the public is educated on the conduct of the elections in all aspects. This is the organization's commitment to ensure peace and stability in the country.

Motto

Give Peace A Chance

Mission

To work with young people, communities and other development partners to achieve and sustain peace, stability and development in The Gambia and beyond.

Vision

A society where peace, stability and sustainable development prevail.



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