

ELECTIONS WATCH  
THE GAMBIA

# NEWSLETTER

4th Edition

January 2023

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# FOREWORD

## *From EWC Coordinator*

Dear Readers,

It is my singular honor to bring you greetings from The Election Watch Committee (EWC) Secretariat and welcome you to the 4th edition of our newsletter.

The publication updates project beneficiaries, stakeholders, and the public at large on the latest developments as they unfold in The Election Watch project.


The EWC is a partnership of 3 youth-led organizations with different expertise and background – Peace Ambassadors – The Gambia (PAG), ACTIVISTA and the National Youth Parliament (NYP) – collaborating to observe the electoral processes in The Gambia. This Committee is the decision-making body on all matters relating to the Elections Watch Project.

With PAG serving as the Secretariat of the Committee, The Elections Watch Project is being financed with assistance from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and technical support from the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI).

The past 3 months have been very successful and, as a project, we have managed to implement a good number of activities that are very important to the realization of the project's output.

In this edition, you will find interesting stories of our important engagements, including an Electoral Reform Retreat where we Identified and categorized electoral reform priorities based on thematic issues and devising mechanisms to achieving them. The EWC as well conducted a stakeholder analysis to identify potential partners and champions within government ministries, the legislature, and international partners to engage as we advocate for these reforms and identify various advocacy and coalition-building strategies.

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Our regional debriefing session across all seven regions of the country to enabled us to consolidate and strengthen our network. They helped the secretariat and leadership to better understand how well the internal structures functioned during the observation periods, and how they can be improved in future elections.

During the period under review, we have extended invitations to two organizations as part of efforts to promote inclusion and participation. The inclusion of these marginalized groups seeks to make the Committee more representative and responsive to the needs of these marginalized groups in the electoral processes.

As 2022 draws closer to its end, we are proud of the achievements we have registered so far and verily, the roles our donors and other stakeholders played in these strides are of paramount importance.

I finally wish to thank the member organizations of EWC for their unflinching demonstration of commitment and dedication to the ideals of the group. This is a testament to our shared vision of better Gambia.

Happy reading as we all work to advance the democracy of The Gambia!

Mr. Yankuba Manjang  
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Election Watch Committee (EWC)

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# Fostering Inclusion, 2 organizations to join EWC

As part of efforts to promote inclusion and participation, the Elections Watch Committee (EWC) invite women and persons living with disability (PWDs) focused organizations. The decision was reached at the Committee's meeting with the National Democratic Institute (NDI) in Bakau on the 9th August 2022.

Proposed by NDI, the inclusion of these marginalized groups seeks to make the Committee more representative and responsive to the needs of these marginalized groups the electoral processes. The meeting proposed to invite Think Young Women and The Gambia Federation of the Disabled (GFD) to the Committee, both of whom have had working relationships with the EWC. The existing members of the Committee are Peace Ambassadors -The Gambia, ACTIVISTA and National Youth Parliament (NYP).

The inclusion of these groups in the Committee will significantly bridge the gap in EWC's activities in terms of women and PWDs participation. The Committee members welcomed the suggestion and assured the NDI of its commitment to operationalize the suggestion by reaching out to the recommended organizations.

In order to promote cooperation and partnership among member organizations of the Committee, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was drafted and will be validated at the upcoming EWC retreat.

## EWC Invites Think Young Women

At a courtesy visit on the 17th of August 2022, the EWC held talks with Think Young Women (TYW) and extended an invitation for the women-focused organization to join the EWC.

Held at the TYW office in Westfield, the meeting provided an opportunity for the invitee to learn more about the EWC's background and progresses registered since inception.

Mr. Juju Jallow, Program Manager of PAG spoke at length about the need to have such an organization in the Committee as it will enhance their all-inclusive efforts systematically observing the electoral processes. He added that even though there is no member organization focused on the marginalized groups, they have always strived to include women and PWDs in the planning and execution of EWC activities.



He said the Committee members are Peace Ambassadors –The Gambia, Activista and National Youth Parliament (NYP).

The TYW staff expressed delight over the invitation and assured the Committee of its interest to join the Committee. They described EWC as a ‘great initiative’ and suggested the development of an MOU to outline and promote the cooperation and partnership in achieving the ultimate objectives of the electoral initiative.

To deepen the participation and inclusion of marginalized groups in democratic processes, there is a need to involve organizations working on promoting their welfare as a robust democracy depends on the equal and active participation of all marginalized groups.

The meeting gave the EWC hope of a new beginning in terms of partnerships and synergies for increased outcome.

## EWC Updates IRI on Achievements and Challenges

The members of the Election Watch Committee (EWC), on the 19th August 2022, met with the Senior Program Associate of the International Republican Institute (IRI) and discussed the vital role it played in the 2020/2021 elections in The Gambia. The meeting, which was held at PAG office in Kanifing, also updated IRI on the involvement of the Committee in the elections and the successes and challenges faced during its entire observation.

EWC gave a background of how they started observing the elections in 2020 with the Niamina West By-elections to the National Assembly Elections in 2022. They highlighted that the EWC is the first citizen observer group that systematically observed elections in the country. The observations increased citizens’

confidence in the electoral system, ensuring there was transparency and credibility in elections.

Aside from the invaluable work they do under the EWC, the members executed separate election related activities during the period under review.

The NYP worked on voter sensitization prior to the voter registration, ACTIVISTA worked on the “Not too young to Run” campaign and other sensitization programs before the elections and PAG worked on massive sensitizations on the need for and importance of peaceful elections.

According to the EWC team, the establishment of the Committee to

observe the elections helped in giving them more coverage from across the country and the synergy ensured that there was no duplication of efforts.

Furthermore, the Committee discussed some of the challenges they faced during the observation, one of which was with the deployment of observers; this was mainly due to the fact that the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) was recruiting around the same time.

Another challenge faced was communicating with observers in the field due to poor network coverage in

some rural areas, which sometimes led to working overtime to get their reports and have complete data.

The EWC also shared its plans to continue its work on electoral reforms and advocacy to push for some changes in the electoral system before the upcoming local government elections in May 2023.

In conclusion, EWC team urged the donors to come together and work in coordination as this will help in ensuring no duplication of efforts.

## Taking stock of the past and looking ahead: NDI and EWC held Retreat

The National Democratic Institute (NDI) organized an Electoral Reform Retreat for the Elections Watch Committee (EWC) at the Tamala Beach Resort Hotel on the 21st – 23rd September 2022.

The 3-day retreat helped the EWC identify and categorize electoral reform priorities based on thematic issues and outline what would be needed to achieve them. The EWC conducted a stakeholder analysis and identified potential partners and influencers within government ministries, the legislature, and international partners to engage as

they advocate for these reforms and identify various advocacy and coalition-building strategies.

The EWC developed a draft roadmap outlining CSOs' priority for electoral reforms and an advocacy strategy to achieve the said reforms. The retreat was attended by the 3 EWC member organizations (PAG, NYP, and Activista), as well as 2 additional new members of the EWC (Think Young Women and The Gambia Federation for the Disabled).

In his welcoming remarks, Mr. Omar Danso, a representative of the EWC encouraged the participants to make the sessions as interactive as possible by engaging the facilitators and providing the EWC with any recommendation they think is necessary to push the electoral reform agenda of the EWC.

The Director of NDI, Mr. Artan Alijaj, gave an opening statement in which he emphasized the need to have these different CSOs coming together in identifying and developing this electoral reform roadmap to use in its electoral reform agenda. He added that the EWC should use this opportunity to learn the best experiences and practices from

other countries and apply them if they want to have a yielding result. He encouraged the EWC to make the best use of the opportunity by making it as resourceful as possible.

Mr. Yankuba Manjang made a presentation of the background, composition and work of the EWC. He noted that the EWC's observation goes as far back as

November 2020, when the group observed the Naimina West by-elections to May 2022. Mr. Manjang presented the recommendations the Committee gathered during its observation which manifested the need for electoral reforms.



Sophie Manneh, Ass. Programs Officer, NYP presenting on behalf of her group, on the reform priorities and roadmap. This took place on the 11th September, 2022, at the Tamala Beach Resort.

The Consultant from Ghana, Dr. Kojo Asante, shared his Ghanaian experience on the subject matter, as they have worked on similar reforms in the past. He led the sessions and helped in identifying and categorizing priorities for the Committee to take up in its bid to advocate for electoral reforms. These include the identification of the various stakeholders the EWC can work with to achieve its reform goals and the ones that will try to block them in this work. "Knowing how to work with both the partners and the potential blockers will help in achieving the EWC's work goals. This will be achieved by closely working with both parties," Dr. Ashanti advised. An as output of the retreat, the EWC developed and validated a roadmap and reform priority which will guide its work to achieve the reform priorities that were developed. The roadmap will be

used throughout the project to help in ensuring the work of the EWC is much easier and achievable.

The retreat ended with remarks from Mr. Artan Alijaj, Director of NDI, who encouraged the EWC to use the documents validated to execute its work and also continue to learn from other regional experiences. He noted that these best practices would help the EWC in both its structures and its work, and in maintaining the high standard the EWC has set for itself over the years.

As a closing remark, Mr. Yankuba Manjang thanked the NDI team for creating such an opportunity for the EWC to learn from other countries' best practices. He commended Dr. Ashanti for the great sessions and assured him that the EWC will use all the knowledge gained to achieve its reform goals.



Yankuba Manjang, Executive Director PAG, presenting on the overview of the EWC Election Observation Program, on the 9th September, 2022 at the Tamala Beach Hotel.



One of the sessions, facilitated by Aisha Tambajang, program officer NDI at the retreat on the 10th September, 2022 at the Tamala Beach Hotel.



Dr. Kojo Ashanti presenting on validating the identified reform priorities, on the 10th September, 2022 at the Tamala Beach Resort.



# PAG holds talks with National Democratic Institute

Peace Ambassadors - The Gambia received officials of the National Democratic Institute (NDI) at its office in Kanifing on the 20th of September 2022.

The meeting was aimed at updating NDI on PAG's Election Watch Project and further discussed areas of cooperation. The meeting, chaired by Ms. Aisha Tambajang, briefed NDI about the organization's existing capacity gaps and how NDI can further strengthen the competence of the organization.

In his remarks, the Executive Secretary of PAG, Mr. Yankuba Manjang, welcomed NDI, highlighting that both organizations have a cordial working relationship.

He said during the initial stages of the Election Watch Project in 2020, PAG did the observations solely on their own starting from the Naimina West By-election, political party congresses, national voter registration exercise, and the presidential candidate nomination and campaign periods. He added that shortly before the 2021 Presidential Election, NYP and Activista were engaged to become members of the Election Watch Committee (EWC). He cited the many successes the EWC registered

during their observation of the Presidential, National Assembly, and Local Government By-Elections.

Mr. Manjang briefed the meeting on the upcoming Regional Debriefing Sessions to be held in all 7 Regions of the country. This activity, he went on, is meant to interact with observers to find ways in which the EWC will consolidate and strengthen its network. He added that the sessions would help the secretariat and leadership to better understand how well their internal structures functioned during the observation periods, and how they can improve in future elections.

He informed the NDI that the Regional Debriefing Sessions will be followed by a retreat of the EWC. In addition, Mr. Manjang requested NDI to support in building the capacity of PAG staff, particularly on communications, finance, and programmes.

Furthermore, Ms. Tambajang recommended that there should be a meeting with the focal persons of the EWC partners to discuss, review and have a common agenda considering the Committee and its activities.



Participants of the Debriefing Sessions of West Coast Region at the Gambia College on the 27th September, 2022.

After the successful observation of the presidential and parliamentary elections respectively, the EWC leadership embarked on a nationwide debriefing with its regional election observation teams. The Debriefing conducted from the 21st to the 28th of September 2022, the tour helped the secretariat and leadership to better understand how well their internal structures functioned during the observation periods, and how they can improve in future elections.

The sessions were held in North Bank Region (NBR); at Farafenni, Upper River Region (URR); at Basse, Central River Region (CRR); at Janjangbureh, Lower River Region (LRR); at Soma, West Coast Region (WCR); at Brikama, Kanifing Municipality (KM), Kanifing and Banjul respectively.

Mr. Momodou Juju Jallow, the Program

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Manager of Peace Ambassadors – The Gambia (PAG) commenced the session with a brief Introduction of the Elections Watch Committee, highlighting its rationale, membership and past records. He noted that the members of EWC are Peace Ambassadors – The Gambia (PAG), ACTIVISTA and the National Youth Parliament (NYP), adding that the Committee is the decision-making body on all matters relating to the Elections Watch Project while PAG serves as the Secretariat of the Committee. The Elections Watch Project, he noted, is being financed with assistance from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and technical support from the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI).

Mr. Jallow said the EWC in its observation efforts seeks to promote youth participation in the electoral cycle as well as to facilitate a well-coordinated and organized observations.

of the electoral reform and election process. "The EWC promotes a transparent and accountable electoral process in The Gambia by promoting and fostering peace and stability before, during, and after elections," he said.



Mr. Omar Danso, National Coordinator of ACTIVISTA elaborated on the purpose of the debriefing sessions saying they are meant consolidate the gains and strengthen Committee. furthermore, Mr. Danso spoke at length about the importance of the initiative, noting that the lessons learned will be used to enhance the quality of EWC's work, particularly in its decentralization strides.

Ms. Ndegen Jobe, Deputy Speaker of the National Youth Parliament (NYP), led the discussions as per respective Talking Points designed to make the sessions interactive and resourceful.



Burama Federa, an observer from the West Coast, sharing his experience of the entire observation process at the Gambia College.



Participants concentrated on the presentations of the Debriefing Sessions at the NYC youth lab in KM

# EWC Members, NDI held Coordination Meeting

Member organizations of the Election Watch Committee (EWC) and the National Democratic Institute (NDI), on the 30th of September 2022, held a coordination meeting at the PAG Secretariat.

This meeting discussed and finalized on the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to foster cooperation amongst members. Participants deliberated on the upcoming EWC Retreat and way forward from the regional debriefing sessions.



Group photo of the EWC members working on editing and finalizing the MOU, at the PAG secretariat.

Mr. Yankuba Manjang, Executive Secretary of PAG delivered a presentation of the draft MOU which was subjected to comments and validation. The MOU outlines, amongst others, the governance, authority, and communications of the EWC.

Furthermore, members discussed the preparation of the EWC strategic planning retreat which is aimed at developing 4-year strategic plan for EWC. The convergence is scheduled for 12th - 15th October 2022.



The EWC team discussing on the Retreat Preparations; discussing possible venues and the agenda

# PAG, ACTIVISTA & NYP Signed MOU to Promote Cooperation on EWC

At a ceremony held at PAG in Kanifing, the members of the Election Watch Committee (EWC) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to foster coordination and cooperation on the Election Watch Project (EWP). The signatories of the MOU are members of EWC are Peace Ambassadors - The Gambia (PAG), ACTIVISTA and the National Youth Parliament (NYP) Held on the 25th of October 2022, the MOU is expected to strengthen the already-existing relationships of the member organizations on the election project and other development aspirations as well.

"This will help in ensuring there is equal representation and participation of all 3 members, in all the Committee's activities. Although there was already a working relationship that existed among the organizations which kept us working efficiently over the years, it is necessary to have this binding document as it will help in holding all members accountable to their actions," said Mr. Yankuba Manjang, the Executive Director of PAG.

The MOU outlines the governance and management of the EWC.



From Right: Omar Cham (Speaker, National Youth Parliament), Omar Danso (National Coordinator, ACTIVISTA The Gambia) and Yankuba Manjang (Executive Director, Peace Ambassadors - The Gambia) signing the EWC MOU.



From Left: Yankuba Manjang (Executive Director, Peace Ambassadors - The Gambia), Omar Danso (National Coordinator, ACTIVISTA The Gambia) and Omar Cham (Speaker, National Youth Parliament) with signed copies of the MOU.

# EWC Retreat: Building on the Gains and Planning for the Future

The Election Watch Committee held its strategic retreat at Sindola Hotel in Foni on the 26th to 28th October 2022.

The convergence availed member organizations the unique opportunity to strengthen EWC's internal structure and planning processes. Participants also deliberated on the information collected during the regional debrief sessions to adjust its governing structure and adopt more rigorous election observation methods in the future.

The sustainability and upcoming electoral process observations of the Committee took center stage during discussions as plans are underway to build on the existing strategic plan that goes through 2022 and develop of a new three-year plan.

The event was graced by the 3 EWC member organizations (PAG, NYP, and Activista), as well as 3 prospect members of the EWC (Think Young Women (TYW), Beakanyang and The Gambia Federation for the Disabled (GFD)).

Mr. Omar Danso, member of the EWC, presented the successes EWC registered over the period of the observation exercise. He said the EWC exposed so many youths to the

electoral processes and increased their active participation in the decision-making process. As a result of EWC's strides, there was an increased trust and confidence in the electoral system as it promoted transparency and accountability in the electoral process for credibility and fairness.

During the period under the review, Mr. Danso noted that the EWC trained and deployed more than 400 hundred observers in both the Presidential and National Assembly Elections. Despite the numerous successes the EWC had achieved, he noted that there is still much to be done to better the work of the Committee and its observation activities.

Mr. Fabakary Kalleh, Head of Crisis Management Team of PAG, presented on 'Monitoring and Mitigating Electoral Violence during Pre and Post Elections period to Promote Electoral Integrity'. He stated that election disputes are more intensified and manifested on the E-Day itself and that manifestations of conflict before election should be monitored.

Moving on, he said sources and

causes of electoral disputes are numerous and they have a great impact on election disputes. He recommended that there should be an institution that will follow up the implementation of observer reports after the election.

The 'Importance of Coalition and Team Building in the Context of Building a Consortium' was presented by Mr. Alagie Nyang. He elaborated on the importance of coalition and team building as it relates to EWC, noting that it is only through such synergies that observation activities can be successfully executed.

On 'Promoting Social Media monitoring and Online Engagement for Citizens Participation in the Electoral Process, Mr. Famara Fofana, a communication specialist, stressed that majority of election manipulation are usually done on social media and the number is significantly rising globally. He advised the EWC to develop a communication strategy to guide the Committee's internal and external communications. Mr. Famara said EWC should strengthen its social media monitoring, particularly in information exchange, rapid response and fact checking areas. He asked EWC to leverage on social media sharing, likes, retweets and analytics to curb electoral violence on social media.

Mr. Pa Makan Khan, the Communications Director of Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) presented on the 'Importance of Citizen Observation in Promoting

Peaceful and Credible Elections and Understanding the Electoral Calendar'. He said the IEC is mandated by law to preside over national elections and all election-related exercises. And as per law, he added, the electoral calendar should be prepared a year before the election. Mr. Khan emphasized the important role observers play in serving as watchdogs in promoting accountability and transparency.

He noted: "In as much as observers play a crucial role in elections, they should not interfere with the process, violate the secrecy of the processes, or try to influence the choice of voters."











## ABOUT THE ELECTIONS WATCH COMMITTEE

The Elections Watch Committee (EWC) is a partnership of 3 youth-led organizations with different expertise and background – Peace Ambassadors – The Gambia (PAG), ACTIVISTA and the National Youth Parliament (NYP) – collaborating to observe the electoral processes in The Gambia. This Committee is the decision-making body on all matters relating to the Elections Watch Project. PAG serves as the Secretariat of the Committee. The Elections Watch Project is being financed with assistance from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and technical support from the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI).

The EWC in its observation efforts seek to promote youth participation in the electoral cycle as well as to facilitate a well-coordinated and organized observation of the electoral reform and election process. The EWC promotes a transparent and accountable electoral process in The Gambia by promoting and fostering peace and stability before, during and after elections.

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