

Critical Priority Gaps in funding for The Gambia's 2021-2023 Electoral Process

1. Introduction and context

Following the peaceful transfer of power in January 2017, the Government of The Gambia has made notable progress in key peacebuilding areas, laying the ground for democratic governance and durable peace. The 2021-2023 electoral cycle in The Gambia commences this year with the presidential election scheduled for 4 December 2021, to be followed by the legislative and local government elections on 22 April 2022 and 13 May 2023, respectively. As part of the electoral reform, the Ministry of Justice, the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) and other stakeholders tabled the draft 2020 election bill before the National Assembly on 22 March 2021. The 2021-2023 electoral calendar has been gazetted with the new dates for the voters' registration exercise from 29 May to 11 July. However, with eight months to the presidential election, the new constitution and the election bill that would have provided the legal framework for electoral administration have not been adopted.

Meanwhile, there are significant gaps in available funding for the electoral process. To mitigate this, the IEC is working on a disbursement plan to be submitted to the Ministry of Finance to address the shortage of funding for its operational activities, including the planned voters' registration exercise and the 4 December 2021 presidential election. The electoral assistance project, managed by UNDP, is also facing a critical funding gap to address emerging issues in the electoral process such as prevention of election related violence, enhancing judiciary capacity for election dispute resolution, securitization of the elections through the training of The Gambian Police Force, embedding human rights standards in the electoral process, issuance of identity cards to new voters etc. This coupled with the highly anticipated Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission (TRRC) report (expected by end of June 2021) could heighten tensions ahead of the 4 December presidential election. Whilst the IEC anticipates huge challenges in the conduct of the election if the constitution is adopted after the voters' registration exercise, it continues to reaffirm its commitment to a transparent and successful voters' registration and presidential election, and calls for support in addressing critical funding gaps.

This briefing paper clarifies the funding gap of **USD 1.8 million** in the operational activities of the IEC 2021 budget as well as the funding gap of **USD 1.5 million** in the UNDP 2021 annual work plan that focuses on the non-operational and critical priority initiatives of the UNDP electoral assistance project. Amidst these budgetary/funding gaps in both the IEC/Government budget and UNDP electoral assistance project, there exists no co-funding mechanism for these electoral activities.

2. Analysis of the IEC 2021 Budget – operational activities¹

In December 2020, the IEC submitted its 2021 operational budget of USD 4.8 million for voter registration to the National Assembly for approval. To date, USD 3.2 million has been approved, leaving a budget shortfall of USD 1.6 million intended for the procurement of bio-metric voters' registration kits. Following recent consultations held by UNDP and the EU with the Minister of Finance, he reiterated the Government commitment to disburse the approved funds once the detailed disbursement plan is submitted by the IEC.

Cumulatively, the IEC has received a total of USD 2 million out of the USD 3.2 million approved by the Government. This includes USD 1.4 million earmarked for purchasing the software for the bio-metric voters' registration kits, but does not cover the full amount. The ESI (selected company to supply the bio-metric voters' registration kits and software) was paid USD 1.5 million, representing 50% of its payment. The funding gap for the voters' registration budget amount to **USD 1.6 million**. This funding should be timely made available to procure generators needed to provide continued electricity to the voters' registration centers particularly in rural communities, printing of voters' registration forms and payment of outstanding balance for the procurement of the bio-metric kits.

In addition, the IEC's 2021 operational budget of USD 2.6 million for the holding of the presidential election, which was submitted to the National Assembly for approval, is also encumbered with a funding gap. Only USD 2.4 million was approved, leaving a funding gap of **USD 204,536** intended for the procurement of stationery and election materials and miscellaneous office expenses for the presidential election. The Ministry of Finance informed that they would support the IEC in the submission of a supplementary budget to access the required resources. Given the tight electoral calendar, there is a need to address the issue of access to adequate funding for the IEC to focus on the preparation of the elections.

3. Overview of 2020-2022 Electoral Assistance

Based on the recommendations of the UN Needs Assessment Mission conducted in September 2019, UNDP, in close coordination with the IEC and other relevant stakeholders, developed an Electoral Cycle Project that, among others, focused on training and capacity development for IEC and other relevant electoral stakeholders, support to local dialogue mechanisms and initiatives, and supporting the IEC outreach and external communication activities. The electoral assistance project, which was approved by the Government, is designed to support IEC non-operational activities to be implemented by UNDP during the electoral cycle.

The five key areas of priority interventions include strengthening transparency throughout the electoral process, strengthening inclusive participation and credibility of the electoral and

¹ Refer to Annex 1.0: IEC Budget and Funding Gap.

political process, enhancing accountability of the electoral process, strengthening the capacity of electoral stakeholders, and implementing mechanisms for early warning and early response to prevent election related violence throughout the electoral cycle. The project strategy seeks to forge complementarity with existing Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) interventions, such as strengthening political parties through the Inter-Party Committee (IPC) to facilitate inter party dialogue and build consensus on contentious electoral issues and processes; supporting an Infrastructure for Peace in furtherance of conflict prevention and the institutionalization of conflict resolution mechanisms; enabling increased women and youth participation in decision-making processes; and empowering young women and men to prevent and respond to incidences of hate speech.

The key results achieved in 2020-2021 under the election project include the establishment of operational governance mechanisms (i.e. Project Steering and Technical Committees) and rehabilitation and refurbishment of four IEC regional offices. In addition, the electoral assistance project has supported the IEC to initiate external consultations with various stakeholders (i.e. political parties, CSOs and the media) on the electoral process and to develop the 2021-2023 strategic plan of the CSO Coalition on Elections, and is deploying a Senior Electoral expert expected in post on April 25.

4. Critical priority areas and funding gap in the Election Process

The electoral process has some critical priority areas² which if not funded in a timely manner may compromise not only the quality of critical electoral activities, but the credibility of the elections and contribute to lack of confidence in the process and increased tensions. Several challenges are affecting the peaceful environment for the elections, which are taking place in a highly polarised political context. The absence of consensus on the constitutional review has resulted in heightened tensions among various stakeholders; growing frustration among the youth whose employment opportunities and living conditions have been negatively affected by COVID-19; and delays in the implementation of the SSR and transitional justice have added to the preoccupations. These factors have created an atmosphere of uncertainty that may trigger violence during the election cycle requiring continued mediation efforts to ensure an inclusive and peaceful electoral process.

To support national efforts to ensure peaceful elections, it will be crucial to support electoral security through the training of The Gambia Police Force, electoral dispute mechanisms (including support to the judiciary), issuance and access to ID cards for first time voters, diaspora voting, human rights aspects of the preparation and holding of the polls, and participation of women, youth, and people living with disabilities to ensure an inclusive, transparent, and credible peaceful electoral process. The IEC has underlined the need for

² Refer to Annex 2.0: Funding Gap under the UNDP Electoral Assistance Project.

greater support on communication specifically, including handling misinformation and fake news in social media. A communication strategy including frequent briefing sessions with press organs, in addition to the monthly ones with CSOs, media and political parties, is being formulated.

There is a funding shortfall of **USD 1.5 million**³ to address these critical priority areas, which would require the generous support of the international community. The UNDP electoral assistance project is under a basket fund modality and resources mobilized will be prioritized and sequenced in accordance with the decisions of the Project Steering Committee and informed by the deliberations of the Technical Committee; all providing a highly consultative and consensus-building approach that affords a strong commitment to risk management and flexibility in adjusting to changing realities.

In addition to the funding gap of the critical priority areas, there are also emerging priority initiatives which were not included or costed in the electoral assistance project. Meanwhile, the IEC in consultation with stakeholders is mobilizing efforts to access the resource requirements for the civic and voters' education during the presidential election, issuance and access to ID cards for first time voters', diaspora voting and management of the accreditation of election observation. As for out of country/diaspora voting, the IEC is to submit detailed budget estimates when the requirements⁴ are determined.

5. Impact of funding gap on Voters' Registration and Presidential Election activities

The planned voter registration and the 4 December 2021 presidential election requires a timely disbursement of resources to ensure that the necessary training of IEC staff is provided, and voters' education and sensitization adequately organized in partnership with CSOs. Moreover, the IEC intends to initiate the accreditation of observation organizations (mainly local observers) for the voters' registration process.

Many national stakeholders believe that the current voters' register in The Gambia is obsolete and that demographic changes will disenfranchise a majority of voters without a new voters' register. Also, if auxiliary voters' registration staff are not properly trained, this can undermine the quality of the voters' register and increase the likelihood of agitation amongst political parties that may trigger tensions. The absence of a comprehensive civic and voter education may also impact on the registration exercise and can affect citizens' turn out for the registration exercise. In the view of some national actors, these interconnected impacts can undermine and compromise the acceptance of results and integrity of the presidential election.

³ Refer to Annex 2.0: Funding Gap under the UNDP Electoral Assistance Project.

⁴ i.e. estimated size of the diaspora, locations, process details, development of procedures, training materials for diaspora voting as well as registration of diaspora voting.

6. Contact details

For those who have questions or wish to follow up with support for the critical priority areas of the electoral process, please contact the following focal points: Abdoul Wahab Ba, interim Peace and Development Advisor (abdoul.wahab.ba@one.un.org), Santhosh Cherooli Parambil, Chief Technical Advisor (santhosh.cp@undp.org), Patrick Mc Carthy, incoming Peace and Development Advisor (mccarthy@un.org).

Annex 1.0: IEC Budget and Funding Gap

Programme	Budgeted (USD)	Approved (USD)	Fund released to the IEC (USD)	Balance of Approved funds (USD)	Funding Gap (USD)	Total resource gap 290421 (USD)
Voters' Registration*	4,860,763.66	3,257,082.84	2,051,282.05	1,205,800.79	1,603,680.82	2,809,481.61
Presidential Election**	2,627,104.44	2,422,567.95	0	2,422,567.95	204,536.49	2,627,104.44
Total	7,487,867.10	5,679,650.79			1,808,217.31	5,436,586.05

* For the Voters' Registration, out of the USD 4,860,763.66 budgeted, the National Assembly approved USD 3,257,082.84 and the disbursement of USD 2,051,282.05 has been made. The pending disbursement equals to USD 1,205,800.79 and the gap of funding between the amount budgeted by IEC and the amount approved by the National Assembly is USD 1,603,680.82.

** For the Presidential Election, out of the USD 2,627,104.44 amount budgeted by the IEC, USD 2,422,567.95 is approved by the National Assembly and expected to be released. The gap of funding between the amount budgeted by the IEC and the amount approved by the National Assembly is USD 204,536.49

Annex 2.0: Funding Gap under the UNDP Electoral Assistance Project

2021 Critical Priority Areas	2021 Resource Requirement (in USD)	2021 Funding Gap (in USD)
Strengthened transparency in the electoral process. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Strengthening IEC strategic communication ▪ Establishment of a media and civic education center ▪ Upgrading IEC and National Assembly websites ▪ Social media training ▪ Support political debates in the lead to the 4 Dec. 2021 Presidential Election. 	365,000	365,000
Inclusion and participation of Women, Youth, and PWD's in the electoral process.	130,000	130,000
Early warnings and response to electoral violence, enhanced through the	450,000	450,000

operationalization of the election situation Rooms.		
Electoral security (Training of Gambia Police Force).	40,000	40,000
Human rights aspects of the preparation and holding of the polls.	40,000	40,000
Electoral Disputes Resolution Mechanisms (including support to the judiciary).	110,000	60,000
Project Management – Technical assistance and Monitoring and Evaluation.	389,880	389,880
Total	1,524,880	1,474,880