



Activity Report

September 2018 – September 2021

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Executive Summary



My executive was elected to steer the mantle of leadership of this great Union in September 2018, for three years. Our three-year journey has been exciting and challenging. Thanks to teamwork and dedication, we registered a lot of successes. The successes came on the backdrop of a lot challenges, as well. Some surmountable. Others are a work-in-progress. This report is a chronicle of our journey.

During this period, we tried as much as possible and to the best of our abilities, to steer the GPU on the course mapped out by our founding fathers in 1978, when they came together to form the Gambia Press Union with a mission to safeguard the interest and welfare of journalists, promote freedom of expression and media independence, and enhance professionalism in the media. The execution of this mission is only possible with the support of partners and donors in the form of project funding. Thanks to the hard-working men and women at the Secretariat, I am happy to report that within three years of our leadership, we have implemented more than D60 million through 10 different projects all of which were designed to address the felt needs of the media. Three of these projects would continue to run even after the end of our tenure. The remaining projects have a cumulative value of more than D5 million, as opposed to D1 million that my executive inherited from one ongoing project at the time.

With more projects, more hands were needed for effective and timely implementation. Today, the staff strength at the GPU has increased 30% compared to three years before we assumed office.

But perhaps one of our biggest gains was ushering in a law that guarantees everyone, even beyond journalists, the right to have access to information. This law is a game-changer in the work of journalists, particularly investigative journalists. Credit also goes to my predecessors who initiated and began the journey to this all-important legislation.

Talking about investigative journalism, for the first time, a Gambian journalist was shortlisted for a West African journalism award in 2020. This feat could only be attributable to the first long-term investigative journalism training that the GPU organized to build and imbibe the culture of investigative journalism in The Gambia. This reporter, Kebba Ansu Manneh, was one of the budding 25 journalists that were prepared for this work and he is, no doubt, an epitome of the success of the training in 2019. Not just that reporter, for the first time, The Gambia has a special investigative media outlet, Malagen, trailing countries like Nigeria and Ghana. This platform was largely conceived at our investigative journalism training. And since the training, the entries for investigative journalism category of the GPU Excellence in Journalism Awards have been improving, both qualitatively and quantitatively, if the feedback of the judges is anything to go by.

We did not neglect the area of welfare as well. It was one area that the Union had not been doing so well, despite the increasing and uncompromising demands for improvements in conditions of service by our esteemed members. My executive made welfare of media workers one of our strategic priorities. We invested a significant amount of attention, resources and finances towards addressing this vexed issue. Through the collective bargaining agreement that we developed, the GPU would now negotiate for media workers to have comfort and improvement at work and in life. The document sets the conditions of service which defines employment, working condition and guaranteed minimum social benefits for journalists and media workers and it shall govern the working relationship within media establishments.

In terms of safety and security of journalists, this is still a work-in-progress. Journalists and media workers are still faced with an increasing amount of physical and verbal threat and assault for just doing their work. What makes this trend even more disturbing is that the perpetrators of these threats and assault are the very people we should run to whenever journalists are faced with such situation. But my executive has been leaving no stone unturned in addressing this existential issue. While the perpetrators are engaged on the gravity of their actions, journalists are also trained on how to maneuver certain situations through trainings on safety and risk assessment.

On membership, my executive knew from the onset that our strength as a Union depends on the strength of our membership based. Therefore, have devised persuasive but sometimes radical approaches to increasing the membership. It yielded the result. During my tenure, the GPU membership has increased by almost 30%. Almost 60% of journalists currently practicing in The Gambia are registered members of the Union. Even those who are not yet registered, the majority of them considered themselves as members, by default. This increased in membership is a vote of confidence in administration of the Union by the media fraternity. And for us, what is even gratifying is that most of these new members came from media sectors that had previously shown disinterest and indifference in the affairs of the GPU.

Over the last three years, the relationship between the GPU and the affiliates has not only been smoother and rewarding, it has been much close, albeit some challenges. We have commissioned the first ever affiliates support programme to the tune of D2 million. It was a manifestation of our commitment to supporting and strengthening the affiliates. This program is designed to strengthen the six formally registered affiliates on key areas such as policy formulation, organisational administration, financial management, fundraising, and communication and advocacy.

Like I said earlier, the successes of the last three years were registered on the backdrop of a lot of challenges. Given the ever-increasing demand of our members for more trainings and more service provision, funding has been a key challenge. Even though the hardworking staff of the Secretariat raised a lot of millions, it was not enough to take care of all the needs.

The other key challenge is commitment of members. Commitment to the Union is measured by how much members participate in periodic general membership meetings and payment of membership dues. Both have been abysmally low. And this is a big concern going forward. The next executive has to make sure they devise measures to circumvent this challenge.

The other bottleneck is the poor reception of media chiefs on the collective bargaining agreement. And the fact that the success of that agreement largely depends on their buy-in kind of frustrate the process somehow.

However, the struggle for the betterment of the Gambian media continues.

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President

1. State of the Gambia Media



While media freedoms and the working environment for journalists across the world generally declined, there were glimmers of hope in The Gambia over the last three years. The Gambia has moved from 122nd position out of 180 countries it occupied in the 2018 World Press Freedom Ranking by Reporters Without Borders to 85th position in the 2021 ranking. That speaks of the level of progress on the state of the media in the country. The space for media freedoms and freedom of expression has further expanded in the last three years.

There are more media houses in the country than ever before and this means more people have access to the media to express their opinions. And according to the latest AfroBarometre survey, ‘most Gambians support media freedom’.

For the first time since the country’s independence in 1965, the government granted a subsidy to the media to help them through a financial and operational difficulties resulting from the coronavirus pandemic which badly battered the media.

Emerging from long and painful years of repression, The Gambia media is experiencing an unprecedented opportunity for freedom and growth. There is a cause for optimism. The emerging media boom after the dictatorship points towards an era of liberal press and more objective editorial content. Journalists are shaking off decades of political influence while efforts are advanced to break free from institutional and legal controls which have stifled press freedom in The Gambia.

More and more new media outlets have been created, and journalists increasingly shaking off decades of political influence while efforts are advanced to break free from institutional and legal controls which have stifled press freedom in The Gambia.

Print Media Sector: The number of weekly and daily print media outlets has increased. There are two new entrants on the newsstands – New Gambia and The Progress. The birth of these newspapers increased the number of newspapers in circulation currently to seven. There of course are challenges. The outlets are struggling financially. Newspaper access is low. There's undue tax burden. Plus, the lack of skills in business management media outlets have weak management structures and tools.

Broadcast Media Sector: All the main television stations in the country are now on satellite. There are six of them now. The number of radio stations has also increased significantly. About 30 are currently in operation. More than 10 were issued with licenced but not yet fully operational. There are all indications that the space continues to expand as more people and entities are waiting for the lifting of the current moratorium on the issuance of radio licenses imposed by the Ministry of Information and Communication Infrastructure to put in their application. The broadcast outfits are however faced with capacity challenges attributable to lack of content generation capacity. Other challenges include sustainability as advertising revenues are low.

All indications are that the space will be expanded as more licenses are under review for radio and television outfits. The broadcast outfits are however faced with capacity challenges attributable to lack of content generation capacity. Other challenges include sustainability as advertising revenues are low. Concerns also include a lack of transparency in the digitisation process which may have a lasting impact on broadcasting.

Online/Digital Media Sector: This space continued to increase exponentially over the past three years. There are at least online television and a myriad of online newspapers and blogs. The challenge remains poor internet connectivity and low internet penetration rate. The new media sub-sector is gradually gaining momentum. Eye Africa TV, which used to be only new media outfit with a local office, is now joined by a number of web-based media outfits that have identifiable reporters and offices. The credibility of new media services is apparently improving as they produce more relevant and editorially verified content. The challenge remains poor internet connectivity and low internet penetration rate.

Training Institutions: The classroom (high school) to newsroom syndrome which for the longest time has been the key hallmark of the Gambian media is gradually changing. The School of Journalism and Digital Media of the University of The Gambia and the Media Academy for Journalism and Communication continue to graduate home-grown degree and advance diploma holders in journalism, respectively. Private institutions such as Stratford College, IPAM and

Insight Training Centre also continue to provide training on mass communication. These can augur well for the media as more and more competent and professional hands join the media sector.

2. Media Reforms

Despite the progress, Reporters Without Borders still categorized the media situation in the country as ‘problematic’. One of the reasons the country is still stuck in this situation is because of the unfriendly environment and legislations against the media.

The long-awaited major reforms of the repressive media laws in The Gambia continues to drag, four years on. The Media Law Review Committee’s final report submitted to the Ministry of Information and Communications in May 2018 recommended for the review and amendment of the following legislations:

- I. Information and Communications Act of 2009
- II. Criminal Code of 1933
- III. Indemnity Act of 2001
- IV. GRTS Act of 2004
- V. Telegraph Stations Act of 1990
- VI. Officials Secrets Act of 1922
- VII. Newspaper and Broadcasting Stations Act of 1944

All these laws are recommended for review because they have problematic and disturbing provisions that are not in line with international norms, standards and democracy.

Four years on, none of these laws have been successfully amended. A number of Bills seeking to repeal the laws have been in parliament, gathering dust while no concrete steps have been taken by the government towards repealing or amending the rest of the anti-free press laws.

More than two years after the new government assumed office, The Gambia remains a legal minefield for press freedom and freedom of expression. There is abysmal lack of policy to cater for the important and urgent needs of a media environment that is experiencing an emerging boom after the dictatorship. The standards for regulation are at variance with the Gambia’s obligation under international law.

i. Access to Information

Despite the stagnation in the review of media-related laws, The Gambia has made the single biggest advancement in right to information since independence – putting in place a legislation on access to information.

After five years of an unprecedented CSO-led right-to-know campaign, the National Assembly of The Gambia on July 1, 2021, voted to pass into law the Access of Information Bill. And the president, Adama Barrow, signed the bill into law on 1st July, this year. For the first time in the

history of The Gambia, the right of access to information is now legally recognized as a human right.

The law grants the citizens – and everyone - the legal right of access to information that the government and private entities keep for or on behalf of the public.

The world has come far in freedom of information terms. As of December 2019, about 120 countries have put in place legal guarantees for the right of access to information. About 90% of the world's population lives in countries where there is RTI law or policy.

The campaign was initiated by GPU and led by a consortium of civil society organisations under the leadership of TANGO – the umbrella body for NGOs. The CSOs found in the government a willing and ready partner. The financial and technical support from international partners was overwhelming.

The campaign ingrained ATI in the public consciousness and created a sense of joint ownership and shared purpose. For the first time in the history of the country, civil society organisations came under a single banner to push for the adoption of a legislative framework. The unity brought about within the civil society by the campaign is something to cherish and replicate.

Today, in pursuant of efforts to approach the ATI issue beyond its legal technicalities, the CSOs not only speak with one voice on the fundamentals of ATI, but they do so with authority and eloquence.

From the outset, the Gambia's Access to Information was not without international support. This came in the form of financial and technical assistance. The main part of the funding came from the United Nations Democracy Fund (UNDEF) through a two-year project implemented by the GPU. Other partners including the United Nations Development Program, the National Endowment for Democracy, and the British Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office were also key.

Technical support came in different forms and shapes from the Media Foundation for West Africa, Centre for Law and Democracy, Centre for Non-profit Law, Fesmedia, ARTICLE 19, Media Rights Agenda and Gambia Bar Association.

With the signing of the ATI bill into law, the collaboration with the Government and other partners will be strengthened to create the necessary structures and systems for the effective enforcement and implementation of the Act.

The CSO Coalition will continue to work with the Government to ensure the establishment of the requisite structures to make the ATI law functional.

The GPU has been in the forefront in mobilising funds to support the FOI process in The Gambia. At least five partner organisations have provided direct funding to this process, totaling an estimated US\$150,000.

ii. Compensation to the Hydera and Manneh families

In November 2018, the Government completed the payment of US\$100,000 compensation to the family of Daily Observer reporter, Chief Ebrima Manneh, who disappeared since 2006 and now confirmed dead. Earlier in June 2018, the government paid half of the US\$50,000 compensation to the family of a former GPU president Deyda Hydera, who co-founded *The Point* newspaper. This was in respect of an order of the Ecowas Court of Justice following a suit filed against the (former) government for failing to investigate the murder of Deyda and in the case of Manneh, for his enforced disappearance.

Compensations were also paid to journalist Musa Saidykhan, a victim of torture to the tune of US\$200,000. The same is true for journalists Lamin Fatty, Fatou Jaw Manneh, Fatou Camara and Alhagie Jobe who are all victims of the applications of laws that contravened international standards on freedom of expression during the Jammeh regime.

iii. TRRC



The GPU has researched and documented all the crimes that were perpetrated against the media and journalists between 1994 and 2016. The former secretary general of the Union, Saikou

Jammeh, presented this document at the truth-seeking process by the Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission.

In the report, the GPU chronicled more than 140 incidents of arbitrary arrest and detention of media professionals. This involved more than 60 media professionals some of whom were arrested more than three times. There was three cases of alleged murder of journalists, more than two dozen cases of alleged torture, more than eighty cases of arbitrarily arrest and detention, more than ten cases of arbitrary closure of media businesses and more than four cases of destruction of properties through arson attacks and other violent forms of vandalism.

The GPU is awaiting TRRC report, particularly the recommendations regarding the media.

3. Institutional Development

Since 2018, the GPU has embarked upon series of programs and initiatives geared towards strengthening the capacity of the secretariat, affiliates and media outlets as part of broader efforts for the development of the media sector. The Secretariat has been strengthened both with policies and human resources. The affiliates are being supported with policies and capacity to put them in a better position to complement the efforts of the efforts of the GPU but also to serve their members well. Engagements for the benefit of the media houses also continued.

i. Secretariat:

The GPU secretariat, which is in charge of the day-to-day operations of the union continue to grow in both size and capacity. In the area of staffing, the union is undergoing transformation and stabilisation. Saikou Jammeh, who was the first appointed secretary general of the Union has resigned in January 2021, after serving his three months of notice. Mr Jammeh had served the GPU for five years as secretary general. His departure left a huge vacuum at the union. The board, which is responsible for the appointment of secretary general, eventually advertised the position. The vacancy announcement was published twice but no successful candidate could be identified. Little success was also made in the headhunting process, as well. As a stop gap measure, the program manager has been stepping up to fill the gap.

Meanwhile, there have been other resignations. The senior program officer, Haddija Jawara, who began working for the Union in 2013 as a teaching assistant posted to the GPU School of Journalism, now renamed the Media Academy for Journalism and Communication, resigned in October 2020. She was eventually replaced by Modou S Joof, a freelance journalist and a journalism trainer.

There have been at least four successive resignations and appointments of programme officers. Currently, no position is vacant at that level.

As the union continue to expand in its service delivery, there was the need to hire more hands. Therefore, a total of three programme assistants were appointed. Some of the positions are project based, the appointment ends with the completion of the project under which the position was hired.

There have been similar movements at the level of the board, too. The vice president, Mustapha K Darboe, resigned in August 2020, after serving the union for about one year in that capacity. Another board member, Fatou Sowe, also resigned. In line with the GPU constitution, an extra ordinary general meeting was organised in December 2020 to fill in the vacant positions. Muhammed S Bah was eventually elected as vice president. The other position remains vacant as no one showed interest.

For the first time, since formation, the GPU now has policies to guide its decision and actions, both secretariat issues and dealing with members. In line with the Union's strategic plan of strengthening the institutional capacity of the Secretariat to make it more accountable and transparent, the board has put in place two very important policies – Manual on Finance, Procurement and Anti-Corruption, and a Manual on Human Resources Management and Staff Performance Appraisal.

The human resources manual now serves as the primary policy on human resources management and development. It sets out the rules and regulations which need to be followed in order to help maintain a sound system for human resources and administration operations for the secretariat.

The Manual on Financial, Procurement and Anti-Corruption Internal Control Procedures sets out the rules and regulations which need to be followed in order to help maintain a sound system of financial, accounting and procurement operations for the secretariat.

There also a Policy on Rules of Procedure which basically governs and clarified the board relationship with the Secretariat and how the two organs relate.

In order to empower and encourage journalists to make more commitment towards the Union, the GPU has put in place a Legal Assistance Policy and Membership Welfare Policy.

The Legal Assistance Policy is intended to guide and facilitate the Union's provision of effective and timely legal assistance, advice and representation for journalists. It is also meant to provide basic legal training, knowledge and insights on aspects of law relating to the work of journalists.

The Membership Welfare Policy establishes a framework for the provision of services and access to facilities and amenities offered by the Union to its members. The policy outlines a range of direct and tangible benefits for union members. It also sets rules and standards for service delivery in a manner that is efficient and equitable.

The two policies serve as tools guiding the Union's actions and engagement towards its members and the services it offers.

ii. Media Regulation:

In pursuant of our mandate to providing professional standards for the media industry, the GPU has had many initiatives aimed at promoting the freedom and responsibility of the media.

Code of Conduct for Media Practitioners: The Code of Conduct for Journalists, now renamed the Cherno Jallow Charter of Ethics for Journalists, has been reviewed, revised and adopted. The code which first came into effect in 2016 is now named after a veteran journalist who has earned the nickname Ethics for his insistence on ethical journalism. The revised code is based on global standards of journalism, taking into account local context with regards to legal, economic,

political, technological and socio-cultural realities. The Code was updated to address new reality in journalism while strengthening good, old beliefs. The revision process was led by Code of Conduct Committee, a media stakeholder group comprising publishers, regulators, editors, academics and civil society. This updated version contains specific rules on reporting migration, elections, and crime and courts. Online journalism and broadcast journalism are distinctly catered for. The previous version contains only three sections: General Principles, Children's Reporting Guidelines and Gender-based Reporting Guidelines.

Over 500 copies were printed and distributed to journalists across the country.

iii. Printing Press

The printing press was not operational for the past three years. The problem that this board inherited the machine with were further compounded in the course of looking for the right technical expertise and funds to fully set it up. The rent of the premises it was occupying along Garba Jahumba Road in Bakau was renewed twice from the secretariats coffers while the machine continued to bring no revenue. Eventually, the GPU sought technical evaluation of the operational viability of the machine and the advice was getting the printing press back into proper state for any business would cost almost the same as getting a similar smaller machine. Therefore, with the rent expiration of the rent for second year, we eventually removed the machine and placed it at the GPU secretariat where it is right now. The secretariat had tried to engage the Network of Newspaper Publishers to decide the fate of the machine finally. The network has so far not been available.

iv. Credit Union Facility:

The GPU has done rigorous consultations for the setting of a credit union facility for media practitioners. The credit union aims to provide improved savings platform and access to micro-credit facility for media practitioners with a view to improving their living and working conditions. The setting up of credit union was unduly delayed. And even when it took off, not more than 25 people sign up. A minimum of 100 members is required for the formal registration of a credit union. And the few people that were saving, mainly GPU and MAJAC staff, also started to withdraw their balance. As a result, the credit union is right now in comma. It would need serious revitalization and membership mobilisation to bring it back.

v. Plot of Land for GPU:

Securing a plot of land has been the priority of the GPU and has been engaging the Department of Physical Planning and the Ministry of Lands for the past three years on this issue. After more than three years of engagements, the Physical Planning Department has finally allocated a plot of land to the GPU, located at Cape Point. We are now awaiting the approval of the Minister of Lands which involves other processes and commitments.

vi. Affiliates



Affiliates project launching

Over the course of the past three years, the GPU continued to work with its six formally registered affiliates: the Young Journalists Association of The Gambia, Women Journalists Association of The Gambia, the Sports Journalists Association of The Gambia, Network of Agricultural Communicators, Network of Community Radios Association, and the Network of Human Rights Journalists Association. In a bid to support the development of these associations, the GPU has a special component for them in the Civil Society Fund of Denmark-funded project that was launched in June 2019.

As part of this project, the six formally registered affiliates were to be strengthened on key areas such as policy formulation, organisational administration, financial management, fundraising, communication and advocacy.

A total of sum of D2 million under the project has been set aside for them. Out of this, D900,000 is for the affiliates to send their members to MAJaC for training. Each of them would have D150,000 from the D900,000. There is another D900,000 for affiliates to implement their own activities. Like the other one, each of them will also have D150,000 from this amount.

Also, as part of the project, each of the affiliates is to send in an intern to the GPU secretariat for two months and the person will receive allowance each month. So far, four of the six have successfully completed their internship. Already, one of the interns was eventually offered appointment at the secretariat as a program assistant. Efforts to get the other two associations on the internship proved fruitless as they could not get to fulfil the internship requirements.

There have been some delays, however, in the full implementation of this program, the affiliates training at MAJAC was to be preceded by a capacity gap assessment of the six affiliates. This was initially delayed by the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. Eventually, MAJAC started the work but only three of the six were available for the assessment. A report on these three was produced. The funds for these three will be unlocked for them to begin their trainings at MAJAC. These is now scheduled for 2022, together with the affiliates project implementation.

The GPU is aware of the disarray nature of some the affiliates. By the GPU constitution, there is very little that the GPU can do about internal issues of affiliates. However, going forward the GPU would review its relations with affiliates like the Women Journalists Association of The Gambia and the Human Rights Journalists Association. These associations are not just uncooperative with the Union in so many issues, but also their internal governance and democratic issues leave a lot to be desired.

4. Capacity Development and Outreach Programmes

i. Public Sensitisation



The GPU continues to raise the awareness of the public on such crucial issues as human rights, democracy, freedom of expression, access to information and journalism. Between 2018 to 2021, the Union has at least 25 public sensitisation programmes for a wide range of professionals, including journalists, securities, lawyers, university students, lawmakers, civil society actors, politicians and government officials. These programmes helped in increasing public understanding of media and freedom of expression rights issues as well as the relationship between the press and the public.

ii. Capacity Building



In line with its mandate of professionalizing the media, the GPU continues to provide short-term specialized training courses for journalists on a number of areas of specialisation. Between 2018 and 2021, the Union organised an estimated 50 capacity building programmes, catering for all categories of journalists – print, broadcast and online – in a number of areas, including election reporting, conflict sensitive reporting, local languages news translation and broadcasting, transitional justice, investigative journalism, court reporting, business journalism, and so on.

One of the most notable trainings organized was the one on financial management for the financial controllers in the newsroom. It was the first time for the GPU to organised such training because all efforts, in the past, were directed at staff in the editorial departments.

This training was conceived on the realisation that most of the financial controllers in the newsroom are not professional accountants. So, the training helped them to understand the basics of how they will manage the finances in the media.

In terms of participants selection, the GPU mainly used three methods: sending invitation to media houses to select participants, issuing training announcement for interested journalists to express interest, and the secretariat identifying participants, based on the theme of the training and the competence required to participate. However, the latter option is rarely used now.

In total, more than 400 journalists and media workers participated in at least one of the trainings.

5. Advocacy and Welfare



Journalists on peace walk

Commemorations: World Press Freedom Day, International Day for Universal Access to Information, and International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists

Commemoration of World Press Freedom Day – May 3rd - has become a regular feature on the GPU's annual calendar. Set aside by the United Nations General Assembly in December, 1993, the Day provides an opportunity for journalists, governments and press freedom advocates world over to evaluate and renew commitment towards press freedom. May 3rd also serves as a reminder to citizens of the importance of press freedom – that in dozens of countries around the world, Gambia included, publications are censored, fined, suspended and closed down, while journalists, editors and publishers are harassed, attacked, detained and even murdered.

Since this board came into being, they continued with the tradition of commemorating the day since 2018. Three successive commemorations were held, in different formats. The last two were mainly done through low-key symposiums and a press release due to Covid-19 induced restriction on gatherings.

For the first time in many years, the GPU commemorated the International Day for Universal Access to Information (IDUAI), also known as the International Right to Know Day, 28th September. Recognizing the significance of access to information, the 74th UN General Assembly proclaimed 28th September as the International Day for Universal Access to

Information at the UN level in October 2019. The day had been proclaimed by the UNESCO General Conference in 2015.

The GPU commemoration of the day largely supported advocacy initiatives and activities of the last three years that were largely focused on the promulgation of an access to information legislation for The Gambia. The commemorations were held in a form of a symposium between civil society and with the government to basically dialogue on the importance of access to information in promoting accountability and transparency and even good citizenship.

The dialogues borne fruit as The Gambia now joins the growing list of countries with an ATI law. It currently stands at 121 countries, globally. The Gambia became the last country in Anglophone West Africa with an access to information legislation.

In the coming years, the advocacy will focus on the full implementation of the legislation. The struggle continues in that front.

The GPU has also been commemorating the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists for the past three years. This day is globally commemorated on 2nd November every year since 2013. The day is set aside by United Nations for member states to do everything possible to prevent violence against journalists and media professionals, and investigate all accusations of violence swiftly, and to bring those responsible to justice.

One of such commemorations was held by the GPU and it was meant to take a deep reflection on the safety and security of journalists and media workers as they go about their constitutional duty of keeping the government accountable to the governed.

iii. National Excellence in Journalism Awards

The GPU National Excellence in Journalism Awards continued to grow bigger and better in the last three years. It is the highest national honour in journalism and celebrates high-impact stories in such areas as health, agriculture, business, human rights, children, women, among others. It also awards individuals and organisations that contribute to the freedom and development of the media.

Three award nights were held in the past three years. It was tough, coronavirus nearly made the last two impossible, but thanks to the perseverance of the organizing committee.

Every year, since inception of the award in 2016, GPU begins the organization of the award by forming an organizing committee which is tasked with the responsibility to coordinate the organisation, logistics and fundraising for the award.

Learning from the challenges in the formation of such committee, in 2020, the GPU established the committee with a three-year mandate. The 14 committee was chaired by veteran journalist Demba Ali Jawo. He eventually gave way to his vice president to be the chair, after successfully organising the 2020 edition. Jainaba Nyang, also a veteran broadcaster, who was the vice chair, is now the chairperson.

This committee is different from the Jury Panel which is responsible for adjudicating all award entries. It's a panel of five independent media experts appointed by the Awards Committee.

iv. Welfare



This is one area that the Union had not been doing so well, despite the increasing and uncompromising demands for improvements in conditions of service by our esteemed members. In the last three years, welfare of media workers was one of the strategic priorities.

The Union invested a significant amount of attention, resources and finances towards addressing this vexed issue. It began with a comprehensive research on the working condition of journalists. It was commissioned research to provide up-to-date and consistent information on the working conditions for journalists and media workers in The Gambia. It provides insight to

inform the GPU, education and training providers, employers and the Government on the development of the media industry in the Gambia.

The main data in this report is based on data produced by an on-line self-completion survey which has been made widely available to journalists and media workers across the Gambia.

This research outcome informed the development of a Collective Bargaining Agreement. Through this document, the GPU has now begun to negotiate for media workers to have comfort and improvement at work and in life.

The CBA sets the conditions of service which defines employment, working condition and guaranteed minimum social benefits for journalists and media workers and it shall govern the working relationship within media establishments.

The way the CBA works is that media chiefs have to sign up to the document to show their acceptance to go by the minimum standards set in the document. There have been several consultations and engagements with the media chiefs in the course of developing and finalizing the document.

However, there has been big resistance and reluctance on their part to sign up to the document. This is making its commencement and enforcement a bit difficult for the Union. The GPU is still trying to see how best to media chiefs sign the document without compromising the minimum standards as agreed to by our members.

6. Projects and Partners

During our tenure, the GPU's sources of funding have been diversified. Previously dependent mainly on single source of funding for most of its programmes and administrative support, the Union Executive has since expanded its network of partners while strengthening relationship with the existing partners. UNDEF, NED, IRI, Search for Common Ground, IMS, OSIWA, and OSF have all for the first time began to have relationship with the GPU.

1. UNDEF
2. IRI: 6 months
3. NED: 12 months
4. UNESCO-NATCOM: 12 months
5. BHC: 3 months (ongoing)
6. AFIC: 12 months (ongoing)
7. CISU: 27 months
8. UNDP: 3 months, 12 months
9. IFEX: 6 months, 9 months
10. KAS: 3 months

1. UNDEF



My executive inherited and continued the implementation of the United Nations Democracy Fund-funded project. The project was launched in June 2017 to the tune of US\$200,000 towards the promotion of an enabling environment for freedom of speech and media professionalism. Through this project, the GPU established the Media Council, started and supported the National Journalism Awards 2017 and 2018, developed and validated the Code of Conduct for Media Practitioners, and led the advocacy efforts for an access to information legislation in the country.

The project was meant to create an enabling legal and policy environment for freedom of speech in The Gambia.

The project was closed after it was audited by Meridien Consulting in March 2021.

2. International Republican Institute (IRI)



The project funded by the International Republican Institute (IRI) was part of the Institute's global project on Strengthening Fiscal Transparency in The Gambia. The project was implemented from June to December 2019 at the tune of 33,400 dollars.

The objective was to make journalists understand the national budget processes to be able to increase public participation and interest in the process. It also trained them on the extractive industry reporting.

3. National Endowment for Democracy



It is a 12-month project to the tune of 42,200 dollars that seeks to strengthen the knowledge and expertise of wide range of local actors on issues of media freedoms, freedom of expression and freedom of information.

It also established a consultative process between the government and civil society towards the enactment of freedom of information law and constitutional protection of media and freedom of expression rights.

4. GPU GAMES



This project is funded by the Danish Civil Society Fund (CISU) of Denmark to the tune of about 20 million dalasi. It is a 28-month project implemented by GAMES and GPU.

The objective is to strengthen the media to play its ideal roles in The Gambia's fragile democracy development and the transitional justice process.

The project supports the GPU to focus on issues of welfare and safety, including issues of equal payment and sexual harassment.

The GPU is being supported to put in structures and procedures for effective and transparent operation.

It was launched in June 2019 and ending in December 2021. A no-cost extension has been applied because activities under the project are not completed.

5. UNDP



Community Radio project: The UNDP project to support the community radios was a six months project at the tune of 18,000 dollars.

It was jointly implemented by the Network of Community Radio Broadcasters entitled 'Sustainable community media for sustainable national development'.

The project aimed at promoting community media sustainability in The Gambia. It caters for capacity and institutional strengthening of practitioners and outlets as well as advocacy for policy and legal/regulatory reforms towards an independent, participatory and sustainable community media sub-sector.

ATI project: As part of the UNDP Peace Building Fund (PBF) Governance and Leadership Project implementation, the GPU undertook series of activities including production of IEC materials on ATI, and nationwide town hall sensitisations on access to information.

The idea was the success of an ATI legislation is not just in the quality of the legal instrument, but rather in people's understanding of the instrument and their knowledge of how to utilise it. Therefore, in 2021, the GPU seeks to continue consolidating its awareness creation initiatives around the law.

MCG: Six months project from UNDP through WANEP and given to Media Council of The Gambia to implement.

Collaboration with Peace Ambassadors of The Gambia and Beakanyang: In the spirit of civil society collaboration, the GPU has collaborated and did joint project implementation with Peace Ambassadors of The Gambia and Beakanyang and the University of The Gambia Students' Union. All these collaborative projects were funded by the UNDP.

The Peace Ambassadors project focused on Covid-19 and positive messaging.

The collaboration with UGTSU and Beakanyang focused on hate speech through which research on the hate speech ecosystem in The Gambia was conducted and a total of 100 journalists were sensitized on the subject matter.

6. OSF-MFWA



In January 2018, the Open Society Foundation, through the Media Foundation for West Africa, kick-started five-year core budget support of US\$150,000 to the GPU secretariat. Under this project, which came on the heels of the Comprehensive Media Sector Reforms Framework, MFWA makes an annual transfer of US\$27,000 to the GPU.

7. IFEX



It's a six-month project that seeks to encourage the government to pursue justice for crimes against journalists and put in place concrete measures to prevent further violation of press freedom.

The project cost is 14,904 US dollars and would last for 6 months with the objective of encourage the government to pursue justice for crimes against journalists and put in place concrete measures to prevent further violation of press freedom.

The project would provide evidence and contextual narration of impunity for the over hundred incidents of crimes against journalists and media houses.

The project would bring into public focus and mobilise support for justice for attacks on press freedom and freedom of expression.

Knowing the full scale of abuses meted out on journalists and media houses, and aware of how impunity can affect democracy and public life could heighten government's attention to bring to justice perpetrators of these crimes while ensuring that victims have access to appropriate remedies.

Nine months: This new IFEX project is designed to address safety of journalists during the forthcoming presidential elections. It will build the capacity of journalist on safety, conflict-sensitive reporting, first aid, and digital safety. It also includes engagements with the Gambia Police Force and political parties to garner political will and support for the safety of journalists. The project will also pilot real time monitoring and documentation of attacks on the media during the electoral period.

The nine months project funded at the tune of 19,790 dollars is expected to overturn the current rising incidence of attack on journalists and media workers by politicians and security agents. Journalists will also be better prepared to maneuver chaotic environment as they cover the election processes. Availability of proper and up to date record of attacks on journalists.

It expires in June 2022.

8. UNESCO_NATCOM



The project, Breaking the gender barriers, was designed to empower women journalists and eliminate barriers to their development using a two-pronged approach – capacity building, and policy formulation on sexual harassment together with advocacy and awareness raising.

The 22,000 dollars project was given to Women Journalists Association of The Gambia (WoJAG) to implement for the 12 months duration of the project.

9. AFIC



In May 2020, Africa Freedom of Information Centre (AFIC) secured funding from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) to implement the *“Improving Transparency and Accountability in Electoral Processes in Africa”* project in three countries namely; Uganda, Zambia and The Gambia.

The overarching objective of the project is to Improve Transparency and Accountability in Electoral Processes in Uganda, Zambia and The Gambia.

The GPU is the implementing partner in Gambia and the cost of its component is about 32,000 US dollars.

The objective is to promote citizens’ rights of access to information in electoral processes, to increase citizens’ participation in electoral processes, and to enhance disclosure and responsiveness of election management bodies and political parties in the three countries.

It started in September 2020 and ended in July 2021.

10. BHC

The Gambia Press Union, with support from the British Government’s Foreign, Commonwealth Development Office, implemented a project aimed at strengthening ongoing efforts at building national consensus on Access to Information (ATI) and media self-regulation.

The project addressed public misconceptions about ATI and media freedom and contribute to reform of laws, policies and practices to enable and ensure free flow of information and responsible journalism.

The project agreement was signed in December 2020 and implementation began in January 2021. It has effectively ended on 31st March 2021.

11. KAS



The three months project has three components. The first component is to provide capacity building to journalists on local language news reporting and translation. The second component focuses on conflict sensitive reporting and countering hate speech and misinformation, while the third one deals with the security of journalists.

The project amount is 17,767 Euros and it would end in December 2021.

7. Covid_19 and the media

The global pandemic of the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) which was first detected in China in December 2019, reached The Gambia in March 2020. The Gambia government declared a public health emergency in the same month and later instituted a lockdown in a bid to curb the contagious virus that causes severe acute respiratory syndrome.

Whether the virus or the resultant lockdown, the pandemic impacted on the lives of ordinary Gambians and everyone began to feel the pinch. Virtually every sector of the society was negatively impacted, including the media, as journalists were on the frontline of the fight against the pandemic.

In order to mitigate the negative economic impact the pandemic has had on various sectors of society, the government came up with some packages of assistance to the most vulnerable sectors, considering how negatively they were impacted by the pandemic.

Like almost every other sector, the media had its fair share of the negative impact of the pandemic. The rapid spread of the virus and the ensuing state of public emergency had some crippling effect on the performance of the media. In the course of their work of keeping the public up to date about the virus and its safety protocols, many journalists, at least 20 across the country, contracted the virus. Also, advertisement revenue which is the lifeblood of media houses in the country was not forthcoming because of the crippling effect of the pandemic on the national economy, and the advertisement sector in particular.

Therefore, following consultations between the Gambia Press Union, as representatives of the media, and the government, through the Ministry of Information and Communication Infrastructure, it was decided to extend some financial assistance to the media. The government, in recognition of the important role that the news and information media plays in the fight against the pandemic, set up the Media Support Grant to the tune of fifteen million dalasi (D15,000,000). The grant was awarded in the context of the national response to the global pandemic.

The sole objective was to help strengthen the institutional capacity of the news media sector in order to make it more effective in delivering its mandate, among others, of sensitising the public on the protocols necessary to minimize the spread and impact of the pandemic. The grant was subsequently approved by the National Assembly as part of the Supplementary Appropriations Bill, 2020.

To guide the administration and disbursement of the grant to the ultimate beneficiaries, the media houses, a policy framework was developed by the Ministry of Information and Communication Infrastructure and the GPU, in consultation with the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs.

Based on the Covid-19 Media Support Grant Policy, the Minister of Information and Communication Infrastructure constituted a Grant Management Committee, tasked with the overall responsibility of supervising and overseeing the implementation of the grant and ensuring compliance with the stipulated terms and conditions in the policy.

Demba Ali Jawo, a private journalist with no attachment to any media house was appointed chairperson of the committee. Mr. Lamin Jahateh of the GPU was made the Coordinating Secretary. The mandate of the GMC is supposed to last for six months from its formal commencement in November 2020. It is therefore supposed to wind up by May 2021.

To kick-start the disbursement processes, the GMC adopted the clustering of the media sector by the taskforce that reviewed the policy, segmenting the media into five clusters; comprising Commercial Radios, Community Radios, Online Media, Private Televisions, and Newspapers.

The clustering was done for the purpose of apportioning the grant by sector, so that players in each of these sectors easily know how much is to be divided among themselves.

After a series of discussions, the allocation was finally made as follows:

Media Type	Percentage allocation	Total allocation
Commercial radios	26%	D3,640,000
Newspapers	25%	D3,500,000
TV	20%	D2,800,000
Online	19%	D2,660,000
Community radios	10%	D1,400,000
Grand Total	100	D14,000,000 *

**Please note that out of the D15 million grant; D500, 000 was set aside for the treatment and recuperation expenses of journalists infected by COVID 19 and another D500,000 for operational costs of the GMC.*

This final allocation by the GMC was a reflection of the agreement by the five subsectors of the media during the review of the draft policy at the GPU.

The allocation was mainly done taking cognizance of the average cost of maintaining an entity in each subsector. For instance, it was agreed by all the stakeholders that a television station has the highest operating cost, followed by a newspaper. That was therefore the reason why even though there were fewer players in the television and newspaper subsectors, they were allocated a higher percentage of the fund.

With an agreement reached on the sectoral allocation, the committee then developed the Media Classification Framework form, which basically asked for certain basic information such as the name and address of the media house; year of registration; nature of ownership (sole proprietorship, partnership or community-owned); source(s) of income/revenue; total number of staff (name, position and telephone number of each staff), and total number of regular freelance journalists (name and telephone number of each).

The form was sent to the representatives of all the five media subsectors to further distribute among their constituents. Both the GPU and MoICI also sent the same form to individual media houses to make sure that it reached all potential beneficiaries.

Filling the form was considered an expression of interest in the grant, sort of an application for the grant.

The deadline was publicly announced for interested media houses to apply for the grant, which was later extended. Before end of the final deadline, communication was intensified to make sure that opportunity is given to any media house that met the minimum requirements.

At the end of the day, a total of 50 media houses applied for the grant, and their sectoral breakdown was as follows:

Media Type	Total Application
Television	3
Newspaper	5
Community Radio	8
Online media	13
Commercial Radio	21

Of the 50 media houses that applied for the grant, 46 were eventually approved to receive the funds. Three applications from two radios and one online media were rejected for late submission and failure to meet the minimum eligibility criteria, respectively. One media house discontinued the application process, therefore could not be considered.

Two media houses – QRadio and QTV – approved for the grant were not eventually paid because they rejected the amount that was allocated to them. The QTV management complained of unfair treatment by GMC by allocating them the same amount as other television stations.

However, after a review of their complaint by the GMC, it was decided that there was not enough merit in their argument to vary the original decision to make equal allocation to the TV stations.

At the end of the process, the grant was distributed among 44 media houses as follows:

NO.	NAME	ADDRESS	AMOUNT (GMD)
Newspapers			
1	The Standard	Sait Matty Junction	800,000
2	The Point	Centenary Building	800,000
3	Daily News	Manjai Kunda	500,000
4	The Voice	32 Sayerr Jobe Avenue	600,000
5	Foroyaa	Kombo Sillah Drive	800,000
Television			
1	Paradise TV	Pipeline	933,333
2	Star TV	Kombo Sillah Drive	933,333
Community Radios			
1	Brikamaba Community Radio	Brikamaba	175,000
2	Farafenni Community Radio	Farafenni	175,000
3	Bansang Community Radio	Bansang	175,000
4	Kaira Nyining Community Radio	Kuloro	175,000
5	Brikama Community Radio	Brikama	175,000
6	Bwiam Community Radio	Bwiam	175,000

7	North Bank Community Radio	Kerewan	175,000
8	Soma Community Radio	Jarra Soma	175,000
	Commercial Radios		
1	City Limits Radio	Westfield	202,222
2	Hilltop Radio	Sukuta	202,222
3	Choice FM	Sanchaba Junctionba	202,222
4	Taxi FM	Brusubi Phase 2	202,222
5	Capital FM	Kairaba Avenue	202,222
6	King FM	Churchills town	202,222
7	Vibes FM	Manjai Kunda	202,222
8	Gunjur Radio Janneh Koto	Gunjur, Kombo South	202,222
9	Niumi FM	Essau, Lower Niumi	202,222
10	Senn FM	Westfeild	202,222
11	Taranga FM	Sinchu Alhagie	202,222
12	DHK Radio	Old Yundum	202,222
13	Paradise FM	Pipeline	202,222
14	Fayda One FM	Kairaba Avenue	202,222
15	Hot FM	Bakau New Town	202,222
16	Al Falaah FM Radio	MDI Road, Kanifing	202,222
17	Sky FM	Latrikunda Sabiji	202,222
18	Star FM	Serrekunda	202,222
	Online Media		

1	Eye Africa TV	Wellingara	420,000
2	Block TV	Pipeline, Fajara	250,000
3	Kerr Fatou	Bijilo	320,000
4	Bayo News Network	Ebotown	100,000
5	Sahel Entertainment Studios	Banjul	250,000
6	Mamos Media Company	Brusubi	250,000
7	Mansa Banko Online	Senegambia	200,000
8	Trumpet Newspaper	New Jeshwang	200,000
9	Voice Out Digital	Serrekunda	250,000
10	The Fatu Network	Kairaba Avenue	320,000
11	Generation TV	Sukuta	100,000

Challenges

Of course, like everything else, managing the COVID 19 Media Grant fund was not without its constraints and challenges. Among the very first challenges was to identify the number of genuine media houses eligible for the grant. With the advent of the ‘New Gambia’ where freedom of the media is fully guaranteed, there has been a proliferation of media outlets; both conventional and online. As a result, therefore, so many media outlets have emerged in the last four years that it was extremely difficult to identify all of them much more knowing their addresses, which made it difficult to initiate communication with some of them about the process.

However, certain eligible media houses that were reached out to about the application process chose not to apply for the grant for reasons best known to them. Some started the application process but later discontinued.

However, even after the expiration of the deadline and the final list of eligible media houses was compiled, the GMC continued to receive more requests from other media houses, claiming eligibility.

The distribution was not as smooth as we would have wished, as some of the media houses were not quite satisfied with the amount allocated to them. A good example was the Q Group (owners of QTV and QRadio) who felt that being the biggest media house amongst their group they deserved to get more than the rest. Therefore, when they were not given what they had requested, they decided not to take what they were allocated by the GMC. However, one of the biggest challenges for the GMC in the whole disbursement process was determining who gets what. While the big and well-established media houses wanted the lion's share of the funds by virtue of the size of their operational expenses, yet it was obvious that the smaller ones that were ever struggling to keep publishing and broadcasting were almost grounded by the impact of the pandemic, if their reports to the GMC were anything to go by. Therefore, the dilemma for the GMC was how to get to the equilibrium point in this situation. It was for this reason that beneficiaries in the community radio, commercial radio and television sub-sectors equally shared the allocations for their sectors.

8. Attack on Press freedom



GPU leadership pays courtesy call to the IGP

Indeed, the space for media freedoms and freedom of expression has expanded over the last three years. But it's far from ideal. The media situation in the country is only better than the dark days of the dictatorship.

With a current score of 30.76 points in the Reporters Without Borders measurement, the media landscape in The Gambia is still a 'problematic situation'. One of the reasons the country is still stuck in this situation is because of the unfriendly environment and legislations against the media.

In terms of the environment, in the last three years, there has not been any desired improvement in the safety environment of journalists as their working condition is neither safe nor reasonably free. Old habits have refused to die.

Between 2018 and 2021, there were at least 13 cases of physical or verbal attack on journalists and media workers. Two of the attacks resulted in injuries and two other resulted in loss of equipment.

Perhaps, the most aggressive attack of all was in January 2020 when two radio stations were forced to cease operations and four journalists of these radios arrested on the same day,

arbitrarily and for no legally justified reasons. Brikama-based Home Digital FM and King FM in Tallinding were closed down by state security forces, on the orders of the executive.

All the 13 registered attacks were perpetrated either by the police or politicians, including supporters of the president. No serious investigation has been carried out. No one ever brought to book. The climate of impunity for crimes against journalist persists.

GPU's analysis of the current realities and trends indicates that hostilities faced by journalists would likely worsen in the run to, and during the election. The political rhetoric from the State House in Banjul about the media has not been so good. The president repeatedly accused journalists of biased and for us is a stark reminder of how the dictatorship government of former president Yahya Jammeh gradually started his onslaught against the media.

The politicians, by their words and action, continue to incite their followers against journalists.

Elements in the Gambia Police Force who have been oriented to hate journalists and trample on press freedom, continue to occupy the frontline of the state security's anti-riot efforts.

The police have also targeted politicians and political activists for exercising their right to freedom of expression. A political scientist and university lecturer was invited for questioning by the police over newspapers comments. Two political activists, including a lactating mother, were arrested and prosecuted for comments that form part of protected speech under international law. These actions have dire consequences for the exercise of the right to freedom of expression by citizens.

Therefore, as the country goes into the first-post dictatorship presidential election in December, the safety of journalists and the issue of impunity remain a concern to the GPU.

As part of efforts to tackle this unfortunate trend, the GPU has developed and submitted a position paper to the government through the Minister of Information. The Union has made a case, based on evidence and insights, for the government to provide proactive and reactive mechanisms towards safeguarding the safety of journalists and combat impunity for crimes against journalists in line with the UNESCO Plan of Action.

Also, the GPU has worked with our partners to continue to roll out safety training programmes for journalists and dialogues with politicians and security personnel.

Series of training were held, including First Aid training for reporters, safety training, and election reporting. Media-security dialogue and training of security officers on safety of journalists was also held. My executive has also provided safety jackets and press cards for journalists. The initiative is meant to reduce incidents of mistaken identity attack on journalists.

While the police are ready and willing to receive complaints and are open to dialogue with the media over the attacks, they have not brought a single perpetrator before the law. On many occasions, they have promised to investigate attacks. Nothing has so far come out of those efforts, if there were any.

Going forward, the tactics of engagement with the police needs to change, perhaps. We need to be more ascertain and firm on the pursuance of justice for crimes against journalists and the media.

9. Recommendation

To the GPU:

Welfare Issues: My executive has a solid foundation for the welfare of journalists. It needs to be built upon. The incoming Executive Committee should therefore lead bold interventions towards addressing deplorable working conditions of media practitioners.

To Media Practitioners:

The GPU caters to all media practitioners. It is therefore important that we take ownership of the Union by signing up for membership and paying dues regularly.

Media practitioners are also urged to abide by the Code of Ethics and embrace the Media Council of the Gambia.

#End