

National Audit Office of The Gambia (NAO)

PERFORMANCE REPORT 2020



www.nao.gm

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About the National Audit Office (NAO)

The National Audit Office (NAO) is the independent Supreme Audit Institution (SAI) of The Gambia headed by an Auditor General (AG). The AG has the responsibility to audit the accounts of all offices and authorities of the Government of The Gambia, accounts of all the courts, the National Assembly, and all State-Owned Enterprises. The establishment and functions of NAO as well as the mandate of the AG are described in detail in Sections 158, 159 and 160 of the 1997 Constitution of The Gambia, and Sections 3, 4, 6, 13 and 14 of the National Audit Office Act 2015.

Our Mission

- To provide independent professional audit services to the people of The Gambia on the economic efficient and effective use of public resources.

Our Vision

- To enhance accountability and transparency in the use of public resources for the benefit of the citizenry.

For more detailed information about the NAO, our core values as an independent public audit institution and our people, visit our website on www.naogm

Audit Work we did in 2020

AUDITS OF MINISTRIES & DEPARTMENTS

We completed 10 audits of government including key government contracts, a report on Gambia Immigration Department, Centralised Services and audit of Diplomatic Passports

We also made huge progress in clearing the audit backlog for Government of The Gambia accounts when we submitted and published 2017 and 2018 annual audit reports, and submitted 2019 to the National Assembly for discussion.

AUDITS OF MUNICIPALITIES & AREA COUNCILS

We completed 4 audits of local government including Kanifing Municipal Council (KMC), Banjul City Council (BCC), Janjangbureh Area Council, and Kuntaur Area Council. We also submitted 2 reports to the National Assembly for KMC and BCC.

For the first time ever, all Municipalities & Area Councils in The Gambia submitted complete financial statements on time for yearly audits

AUDITS OF GOVERNMENT & DONOR-FUNDED PROJECTS

We completed 25 audits of government projects and submitted reports to the auditees with numerous recommendations to boost performance and better manage usage of public resources

More Audit Work we did in 2020

PERFORMANCE AUDITS

We completed an audit of Emergency Obstetric Care provided at Public Health Facilities and also completed a follow-up audit of Drugs Management by Central Medical Store (CMS).

We also audited 68 Institutions as part of the regional trek (schools, health centres, Gambia Revenue Authority branch offices and, Immigration posts, Forestry departments etc) within the West Coast region. These reports are all completed but they are usually not published.

AUDITS OF GOVERNMENT SUBVENTED INSTITUTIONS

We completed 94 audits of government subvented institutions (including provincial treks), and completed 52 reports, some of them rolling over from the previous year.

▲ *Not all of the reports we completed, submitted or published in 2020 were for the current financial year. Our office is still managing audit backlogs in areas across the government.*

OVERALL, WE...

CONDUCTED

258

AUDITS

DELIVERED

161

REPORTS

BONUS: COVID - 19 AUDIT PLANNING



We formed a COVID-19 audit team, conducted a risk assessment and began auditing several high-risk areas (organised according to auditee):

1. Procurement and distribution of medical supplies
2. Procurement of food relief; and
3. Distribution of food relief

Risks and Challenges

Due to the impact of COVID-19 the world over, we were not able to achieve all the activities planned in our Annual Operational Plan 2020.

▲ *We also faced several challenges that were recurring from previous years. The following challenges are the most urgent for the office to mitigate in fulfilment of its mandate as stated in the Constitution.*

DELAYED RESPONSES TO AUDIT QUERIES

Oftentimes, our auditors are forced to spend much more time completing audits because **auditees fail to respond** to our questions and requests for additional information in reasonable time. **Some do not respond at all** despite the numerous reminders that the office sends them.

DELAY IN DISCUSSION OF AUDIT REPORTS AT THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

There is no law barring the Auditor General from laying reports at the National Assembly (NA). However, the current practice is that our annual report on the Government of The Gambia Financial Statements is submitted through the Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs.

Some other reports, such as performance and local government audits, are submitted by the NAO directly to the Clerk of the NA, who is required to distribute it to the National Assembly Members (NAMs) and also make arrangements for discussion of the reports. In the case of some subvented institutions, audit reports are submitted directly to the National Assembly.

These indirect processes have resulted in **delays and, in some cases, no discussion at all of our reports**. For example, we have submitted 7 performance audit reports on various topics throughout the last few years, all on issues of importance to citizens, but none have been discussed. This affects publication and citizens' right to access audit reports.

The lack of timely discussion of audit reports may mean implementation of the recommendations might be irrelevant as circumstances would have changed at the time the reports are discussed.

We will continue to explore ways to address the above challenges through increased engagement with National Assembly on timely discussion of the reports, as well as

with auditees on the importance of timely responses to audit queries, acting on the recommendations, etc.

INSUFFICIENT FOLLOW UP ON AUDIT RECOMMENDATIONS

This is a challenge both within NAO and among auditees and strategic partners in government. It is difficult for us to allocate time for tracking audit recommendations because there are always urgent audits to carry out and not enough staff. Since audits happen in a cycle, review of recommendations is typically carried out during the audit of subsequent years. However, this is not very helpful as the auditees tend to relax and not implement the recommendations.

In order to ensure auditees follow up and that audits result in better public financial management, our recommendations should also be followed up by the National Assembly and the Directorate of Internal Audit (DIA). In the case of DIA, Section 68(20) (c) of the Public Finance Act requires it to “conduct follow up reviews on audit reports issued by National Audit Office”. However, the DIA has not carried out any review or follow-up of NAO recommendations since its inception.

INSUFFICIENT VEHICLES TO CONDUCT OUR FIELD WORK

Most of the work that NAO does is located outside the office, thus requiring staff and supervisors to be frequently moving between the office and their field work locations. The continual availability of transport is therefore critical to the proper coordination of our daily work routine.

However, the frequent commandeering of our vehicles by the controller of government vehicles at the State House for state functions including the bi-annual meet the peoples tour by the President, sometimes for weeks and even months, causes disruption to our work schedules which results in delays in completing audits.

Other Big Achievements and Progress in 2020

2020 was the first year implementing our Strategic Development Plan (SDP) 2020-2024. Due to the emergence of Covid-19, it was also one of the toughest years for the office and the world at large as we faced numerous challenges with implementation of some strategic priorities.

However, with the determination, skills and agility of the NAO staff, with support from development partners, we managed to make great strides this year. Some of our greatest SDP milestones achieved include:

COMMUNICATIONS

In 2020, we achieved several of our longer-term milestones early, including some that were set for 2022. With our first-ever Communications Officer in place, we redesigned our website to make our past reports and other work more accessible. We developed a Communications Policy to guide staff on how to engage stakeholders both in and outside the office. Informed by a consultation workshop with key stakeholders in November 2020, we also developed our Communications and Stakeholder Engagement Strategy, setting out clear tactics for achieving our SDP outcomes, promoting audit relevance and fostering stakeholder relations.

▲ *Due to COVID-19 in-person meeting restrictions, we could not hold all our planned stakeholder meetings for the year. We were, however, able to host a webinar on the findings of the US fiscal Transparency Report 2019 and a coordination meeting with development partners.*

Our work was featured in more than **4 newspaper articles and TV programmes.**



We created the **NAO social media accounts: Twitter and LinkedIn**

With support from the International Republican Institute, we also aired **2 radio programmes.**

GENDER, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

Our new Gender Focal Point launched a survey and held staff consultations around issues of diversity, inclusion and gender to assess staff needs and concerns. We also consulted with gender and diversity experts in the Africa region, sharing knowledge and resources and thinking about the best way to move forward with the development of a new gender, diversity and inclusion policy in the coming years.

INDEPENDENCE

We held several engagements with the Constitutional Review Commission (CRC), including formal submissions, to advocate for the new draft constitution to include the provisions necessary to safeguard NAO's independence and facilitate greater audit impact.

▲ *The new draft constitution included a time limit of 90 days for the National Assembly to discuss audit reports before we can publish them. Such a limit would have helped address part of our challenge around delayed discussion of reports and potentially help increase audit impact. The current constitution is not specific on this point, allowing for publication only if there is an “undue delay”.*

ORGANISATIONAL PLANNING AND REPORTING

We held quarterly evaluations and monitoring meetings with management and the Operational Planning Team to monitor progress of the 2020 operational plan.

We also had our first operational plan last year (2019) for the implementation of our Strategic Development Plan (SDP) 2020-2024. You can read how our planning challenges and lessons learned in 2020 will influence coming years at: www.nao.gm/national-audit-office-completed-its-second-operational-plan-workshop-in-november-2020/.

AFROSAI-E INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY BUILDING FRAMEWORK (ICBF)

As a member of the African Organization of English-speaking Supreme Audit Institutions (AFROSAI-E), we conducted a virtual self-assessment using the ICBF guidelines to measure our progress and growth as a Supreme Audit Institution (SAI) vis-à-vis the stipulated assessment guidelines by AFROSAI-E. In addition, three staff also attended a workshop on ICBF self-assessment in February 2020 in South Africa.


QUALITY ASSURANCE (QA)

We reviewed our progress against an external quality assurance review recommendations completed by our regional partner African Organization of English-speaking Supreme Audit Institutions (AFROSAI-E) in 2017. The QA team has also been working on reviewing files across the different units.

▲ *QA is a function established in 2020 and it is currently being executed by NAO staff in other units. This means that less capacity and staff time is given to QA due to other unit tasks being managed by an already inadequate staff level.*

AUDIT MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEM (AMIS)

We developed an Audit Management Information System (AMIS); and integrated a Task Management Information System to it to accommodate non-audit assignments. Additionally, provision has been made to the system to capture audit findings, recommendations and their implementation status.

 *Tracking audit recommendations and their implementation has been a big challenge for the office. The AMIS will help with documentation of recommendations and ease the process for subsequent audit cycles*

How we Engaged our Stakeholders in 2020

STRATEGIC PARTNERS IN GOVERNMENT

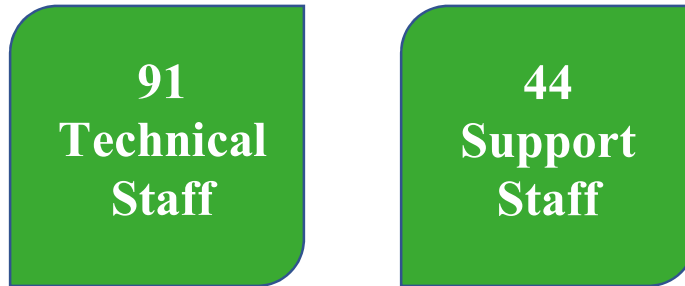
To increase our support and collaboration with the Directorate of Internal Audit, we met and discussed ways to strengthen our partnership. Currently, we are working on a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to achieve this.

PUBLIC, CIVIL SOCIETY AND MEDIA

We could not hold all planned engagements due to the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, however we adapted to the environment and challenges to continue our work. We engaged the media, CSOs and the public in **3** different ways as follows:

- In July 2020, The US State Department released the 2019 Fiscal Transparency Report which recorded that The Gambia made significant progress in transparency and fiscal governance, and indicated that the NAO was not publishing audit reports within reasonable time. We held **a webinar with the US Embassy and International Republican Institute (IRI)** to discuss NAO challenges in terms of submission and publication of reports as well as other gaps to improve public financial governance.
- We hosted **3 radio programs** to give the public updates about our work as well as what the office is doing to ensure public resources are efficiently utilised during COVID-19.
- We held **a workshop with media and civil society** to develop our Communications and Stakeholder Engagement Strategy for the next 4 years.

Staff and Resources



Of the total number of staff, **8** were away for long term absence, **4** on study leave for a degree update, **18** were newly appointed.

The office has recorded an increase in its staff count in order to help in achieving its organisational goals.