

CPA UK Delegation Visit to The Gambia

REPORT SUMMARY

30 January -1 February 2024



CPA UK Delegation

The Rt. Hon the Baroness
Armstrong of Hill Top

Yvonne Fovargue MP

Margaret McKinnon,
Director of the Members
Services Team, House of
Commons

Josephine Jengo, CPA UK

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PROGRAMME OVERVIEW

A CPA UK delegation travelled to the National Assembly of The Gambia for a programme focused on member conduct and women's representation. This was the latest activity delivered as part of CPA UK's Memorandum of Understanding with the National Assembly and the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD). This partnership aims to strengthen parliamentary processes, and in particular committee oversight.

This programme was an opportunity for CPA UK to reconnect with Gambian members who participated in the [CPA UK Post-Election Seminar](#) held in June 2022.

CPA UK is grateful for the support of the National Assembly, WFD and the British High Commission to The Gambia that made this visit possible.



The CPA UK Delegation meeting with civil society organisations at the British High Commission, Banjul.

COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY ASSOCIATION UK - CPA UK

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FULL REPORT

Programme Outputs

Through discussions with senior office holders, members and parliamentary officials, this programme aimed to achieve the following three outputs:

- The CPA UK delegation gain a deepened understanding of the work of the Gender Committee and the Ethics & Privileges Committee in The Gambia.
- To support connections between civil society organisations and National Assembly members in The Gambia.
- To strengthen the relationship between the Parliaments of the UK and The Gambia.



The CPA UK Delegation at areception organised by the British High Commission.

New members discuss expectations and codes of conduct

The Gambia's 2022 General Election saw a high turnover in the National Assembly, with 36 of the 58 members being elected for the first time. The CPA UK delegation and Gambian members reflected on their expectations prior to being elected, and the reality of holding elected office.

In both the UK and The Gambia, parliamentary commitments in London and Banjul respectively mean members must work hard to ensure they spend enough time in their constituencies. Particularly when a member made promises locally when running for office, it can be a challenge to deliver these for constituents once in office.

The Gambia's Committee on Privileges and Ethics has an important role in upholding standards of behaviour in the National Assembly. However, the committee does not yet have the power to sanction members, and this currently limits its impact. The UK equivalent committee, the Standards Committee, has the powers to recommend the suspensions of members to the House of Commons. The CPA UK delegation shared the importance of leaving party affiliations aside and maintaining confidentiality when determining sanctions for members.

Importantly, The Gambia's Committee on Privileges and Ethics is now responsible for agreeing the text of a new Code of Conduct for The Gambia's National Assembly. This work is being supported by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Headquarters and the peer-to-peer discussions from this CPA UK visit will feed into this work.

Increasing the representation of women in The Gambia

The 2022 election saw a decline in the number of women represented in the National Assembly, from six to five. Three female members are directly elected, with a further two nominated by the President. The National Assembly has a target of 30% female representation, but at present it is only 8.6%. Attempts have been made to address this, including a draft bill designed to create more reserved seats for women. In 2022, of the 246 candidates in the 2022 elections, only 19 were women. There have been attempts from political parties to encourage more women to stand for election, given that female candidates are often very popular in local communities.



The CPA UK Delegation at meeting with civil society organisations.



The CPA UK Delegation meeting with the clerk of the Gender Committee in the National Assembly.

The travelling two UK members and the parliamentary official in the CPA UK delegation were all women. They shared their experience as women in politics, having seen slow change over the course of their careers. This included the challenge of gaining access to spaces which were seen as male only, such as working men's clubs. They highlighted the need to persuade political parties that women are an electoral asset. Different political parties in the UK have taken different approaches to increasing the number of women being elected, with one example shared being all-women shortlists. Certain measures are enabled in the UK by the Sex Discrimination (Election Candidates) Act 2002, which allows political parties to take special measures to 'positively discriminate' in favour of female candidates where they are underrepresented.

After The Gambia's 2022 election, the National Assembly saw the establishment of the Gender, Children and Social Welfare Committee. A priority for this committee is developing better relationships with civil society organisations. In the UK the Women and Equalities Committee was also formed relatively recently, in 2015. Learning from the UK's experience, an idea shared by the CPA UK delegation was for civil society organisations to suggest key priorities for the committee to focus on, and to agree as a sector how they will support the committee's work.

During this delegation visit, the British High Commission to The Gambia organised a event for members of the committee and civil society to connect and strengthen their relationships. CPA UK will continue to support this work, in collaboration with the Westminster Foundation for Democracy and the British High Commission.



The CPA UK Delegation meeting with groups of National Assembly Members elected for the first time in 2022.



The CPA UK Delegation meeting with constituents of a National Assembly member.

Scrutinising government and the draft constitution

The Gambia is at an important moment in its history. The Gambian Government is drafting a new constitution that will be put to a referendum this year. The National Assembly has an important role in scrutinising this draft constitution and a significant part of this scrutiny will be done by the Human Rights Committee, with the support of the independent Human Rights Commission. The CPA UK delegation met with the committee and commission and participants shared their experiences of communicating a complicated legal document to constituents, with comparisons made to the Brexit and Scottish Independence Referendums.

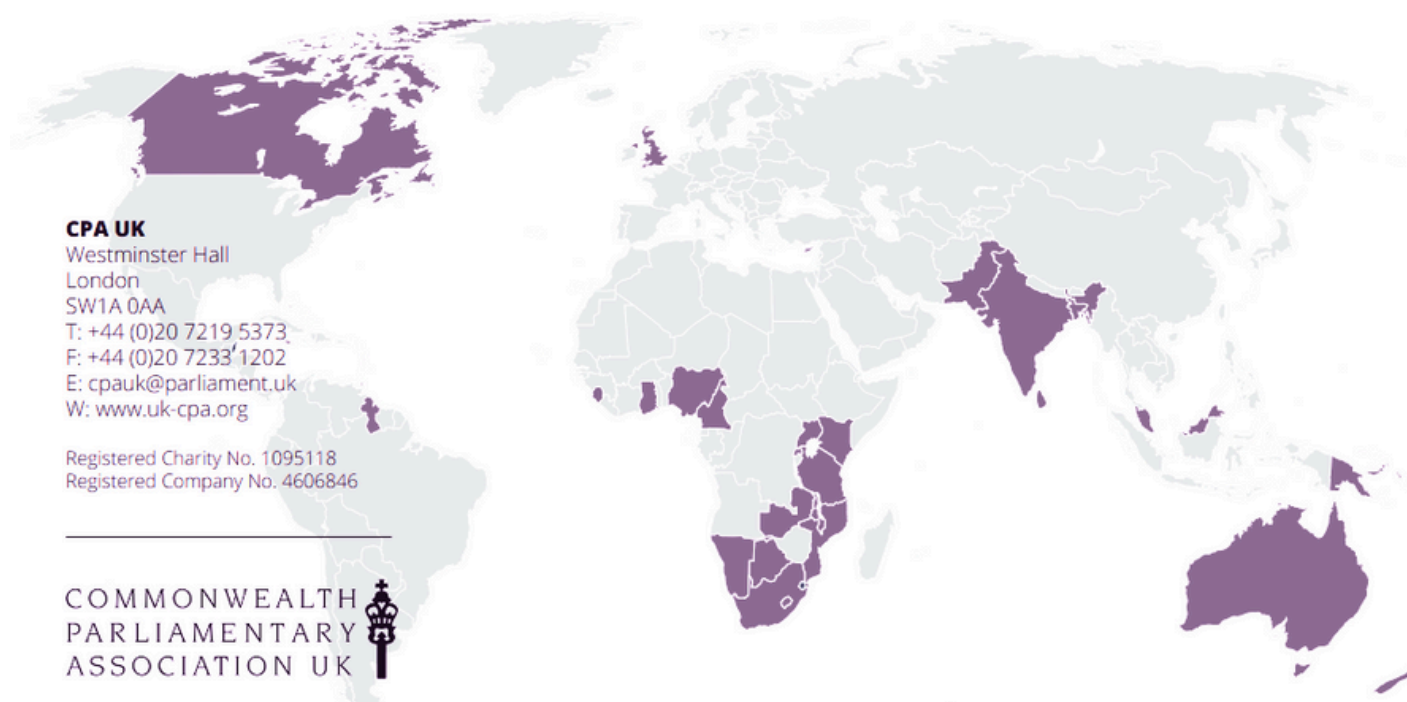
In early 2023, CPA UK received a delegation of members from The Gambia in Westminster for a knowledge-sharing programme on the operation of committees. Committee clerks and officials play a vital role in the smooth-running of impactful committee work, though participants also shared the resource constraints facing committees in The Gambia. CPA UK hopes to host a programme in Westminster in the near future for Gambian clerks and officials examining the operation of parliamentary committees.

The National Assembly of The Gambia and CPA UK

Over the past three years, CPA UK has partnered closely with the National Assembly of The Gambia and the Westminster Foundation for Democracy. From April 2022, CPA UK has facilitated many engagements under a Memorandums of Understanding with these partners. CPA UK looks forward to continuing partnership with the National Assembly of the Gambia with upcoming programmes likely to focus on supporting committee clerks and women in parliament.



The Speaker of the National Assembly of The Gambia speaking with Baroness Armstrong at an event hosted by the British High Commission.



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