

African Media
Development
Initiative



Sierra Leone

Research findings and conclusions

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Sierra Leone

About this report

In March 2005, the UK Government's Commission for Africa delivered a report entitled "*Our Common Interest*", which represented a significant attempt to understand and recommend an action programme for Africa's social and economic development. A key component of the report focused on the importance of a strong media sector to support governance and development in Africa, and called for greater attention to, and resources for media sector development as a result. The BBC World Service Trust, and a number of international and African partners, have subsequently set out to help develop ideas for future Africa media development initiatives.

In order to inform these efforts, the BBC World Service Trust – in collaboration with Rhodes University (South Africa) and Ahmadu Bello University (Nigeria) – has undertaken an extensive, pan-African research effort in 17 African countries, of which Sierra Leone is one. Data presented in this report is based on both secondary research gathered by local researchers in Sierra Leone, and on extensive interviews conducted locally among key media practitioners and leaders. It is presented here in three parts:

- Media Sector Developments: An examination of developments in the media sector in Sierra Leone over the past five years;
- Challenges for Future Media Development Activities: An analysis of the perspectives of a range of key informants on media development challenges in Sierra Leone;
- Case Study: A case study from Sierra Leone illustrating good practice in media development.

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The BBC World Service Trust is the independent international charity set up by the BBC, which uses media to advance development. The Trust works to: Raise awareness of development issues among mass audiences and opinion formers; influence attitudes, awareness and behaviour among poorer communities through a wide range of educational programming on poverty-related topics; and, build capacity in the media sector in developing and transitional countries.

Acronyms

ACC Anti-Corruption Commission

ADB African Development Bank

ADF African Development Fund

BBC British Broadcasting Corporation

CGG Campaign for Good Governance

CIDA Canadian International Development Agency

CJFE Canadian Journalists for Free Expression

C-MET Centre for Media, Education and Technology

CORNET Community Radio Network

CR Conciliation Resources

CSO Civil Society Organisations

DACO Development Assistance Coordination Office

DTR Development Through Radio

ENCISS Enhancing Interaction and Interface Between Civil Society and the State to Improve Poor People's Lives

GDP Gross Domestic Product

GNI Gross National Income

ICT Information and Communication Technology

IJN International Journalists' Network

ILHR International League for Human Rights

IMC Independent Media Council

INFORMOTRAC Radio Netherlands Initiative for Mobile Training for Community Radio

ISP Internet Service Provider

MFWA Media Foundation for West Africa

NGO Non-Governmental Organisation

NPA National Power Authority

OSI Open Society Initiative
OSIWA Open Society Initiative of West Africa
RUF Revolutionary United Front
UN United Nations
UNAMSIL United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone
UNDP United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF United Nations Children’s Fund
RNTC Radio Netherlands Training Centre
RSF Reporters Sans Frontières (Reporters Without Borders)
SFCG Search For Common Ground
SLAJ Sierra Leone Association of Journalists
SLANGO Sierra Leone Association of Non-Governmental Organisations
SLBS Sierra Leone Broadcasting Service
SLENA Sierra Leone News Agency
SLPP Sierra Leone People’s Party
TDS-SL Talking Drum Studio – Sierra Leone
VOA Voice of America



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Sierra Leone

Country Report

Context



1. Introduction

The last decade has witnessed a resurgence of armed intra-state conflicts in Africa. This has resulted in the collapse of state institutions, and has severely damaged governance structures. The West African sub-region has been the worst affected by this problem, with the civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone bringing the region to global attention. Sierra Leone emerged from over a decade of civil war in 2002, a war which left some 50,000 people dead and devastated the country's economic infrastructure. The war may be over but poverty, official corruption and ethnic rivalry continue to plague the country (BBC, 2006).

The media of Sierra Leone, as in the neighbouring states of Guinea and Liberia, faced their greatest challenges during the 1990s. According to Sierra Leonean media academic Richard Mbayo (2006), West African media have, however, demonstrated remarkable resilience in the context of government repression and severe under-funding. Newspapers and other forms of mass communication have flourished, media content quality has improved, and a more people-focused press has developed.

Over the past five years, the media in Sierra Leone have blossomed, partly as a result of various media development initiatives, including the establishment of the Community Radio Network (CORNET), the Radio Netherlands Initiative for Mobile Training for Community Radio (Informotrac) media project, and the Canadian Journalists for Free Expression (CJFE) newspaper printing project. Some of these initiatives have foreign origin and foreign management, while others are locally based.

In Sierra Leone at present, there is little reliable and well-researched material available on the media. However, some data can be sourced from the Independent Media Commission (IMC) and the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ). Information can also be obtained from individual senior journalists and members of civil society who have been involved in media development initiatives over the past five years.

However, even so-called "liberal" NGOs are cautious about giving information regarding sources of funding and disbursement figures, for fear of the information being used for the "wrong" purposes by journalists.

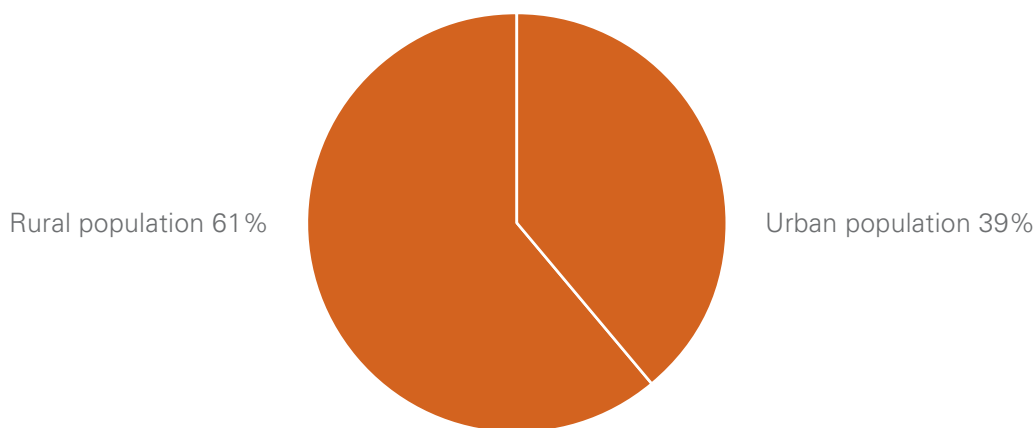


2. Country Overview

The Republic of Sierra Leone is a West African country covering an area of 71,740 sq kms. It is bordered by Guinea to the north, Liberia to the south and the Atlantic Ocean to the west. The name Sierra Leone was adapted from the Portuguese "Serra Leoa", literally meaning "Lion Mountains". Sierra Leone is mostly a plateau, located 300m-1000m above sea level. Much of the coastline is mangrove forest, with the exception of the peninsula on which Freetown, the capital, is located. The climate is tropical.

The country had a total population in 2004 of some 4.9 million (UNDP 2005a), with a July 2006 estimate putting the population at around six million (CIA, 2006). A very high percentage of this population is thought to be aged 0-14 years (43%) (UNSTATS, 2006). Life expectancy at birth is 40 years for men and 43 years for women (World Bank, 2006b).

Figure 1: Percentage of Population Urban vs. Rural



Source: UNDP, 2006b

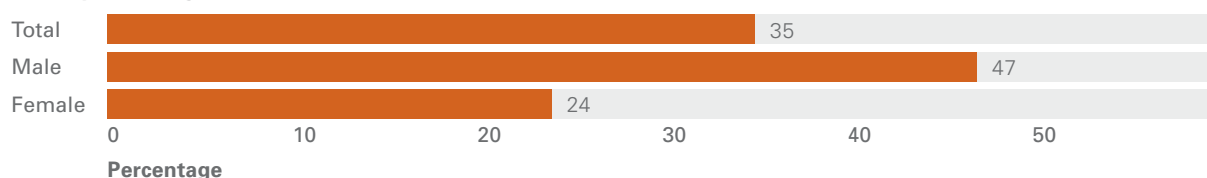
Sierra Leone is a very poor country. With a Gross National Income (GNI) of \$US200 per capita, the people of the country are amongst the poorest in the world (CIA, 2006). There is also tremendous inequality in income distribution, with a reported 68%¹ of people living below the national poverty line in 2002 (UNDP, 2006b).

¹ This is a 1990-2002 figure from UNDP 2006b.

Sierra Leone has a very low literacy rate (UNDP, 2005a, p.vii). World Bank estimates put the literacy rate of the adult population in 2004 at 35%, with male literacy being 47% and female literacy 24% (World Bank, 2006a; 2006b).

Figure 2: Literacy Levels

Literacy Levels Age 15+



Source: 2004 estimate in World Bank, 2006a; 2004 estimate in World Bank, 2006b

Sierra Leone's population is ethnically and culturally diverse, with 18 different main indigenous groups. Estimates of numbers for the groups vary, although most sources state that around 30% of the population is Temne (concentrated in the north), with another 30% thought to be of the Mende group in the south, and another 30% of the population belonging to a variety of other ethnic groups. The remaining 10% is made up of a large number of Krio (Creole) people, and smaller numbers of Lebanese, Indians and Europeans (CIA, 2006).

Up-to-date statistical information on the languages spoken is difficult to obtain. General sources cite Mende, Temne and Krio (an English-based Creole, spoken by the descendants of freed Jamaican slaves settled in the Freetown area), as the main languages. Krio is a lingua franca, and it is estimated to be understood by 95% of the population. English is the official language but its everyday use is limited to a literate minority (CIA, 2006; Gordon (Ed.), 2005).

The main religions are Islam (60% of the population), Christianity (10%), and indigenous beliefs (30%) (CIA, 2006).

Independence from Britain came in April 1961, and Sierra Leone, as part of the British Commonwealth, subsequently opted for a parliamentary system of government. It became a one-party state in 1971 following the appointment of Siaka Stevens as President. He remained head of state until 1985, when military commander Joseph Saidu Momoh succeeded him in a one-party referendum. In 1990, President Momoh set up a constitutional commission to review the one-party Constitution of 1978, with a view to broadening the existing political process and guaranteeing fundamental human rights. This commission recommended the immediate re-establishment of a multi-party system of government. However, in 1991 the country entered civil war, with the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), led by Foday Sankoh, attacking government soldiers and civilians indiscriminately. Tens of thousands of people died and over two million people were displaced during this war, most becoming refugees in neighbouring countries.

The Lomé Peace Accord was signed on 7 July 1999, offering hope to the people of Sierra Leone that the period of civil war was over. However, in 2000, the situation in the country deteriorated drastically, leading to British and UN troops being deployed to evacuate foreign nationals and establish order. This somewhat stabilised the situation and led to the process of a ceasefire and an end to the war. The UN Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) withdrew most of its peacekeeping force at the end of 2005. The political stability of Sierra Leone is still not guaranteed, however, thanks to pockets of continuing land disputes in the country, and because of the tenuous security situation in neighbouring Liberia. The current President, Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, first took office in 1996 and was re-elected to a five-year term in May 2002, gaining more than 70% of the vote. He is required by law to step down after elections in 2007.

In terms of the economy, the government has recently embarked on implementation of macroeconomic and structural reforms. As a result, Sierra Leone has experienced an improved economic performance over the past few years. Real GDP expanded by 7.4% in 2004, up from 6.3% in 2002 (ADB & ADF, 2005). Sierra Leone's economy is dependent on its fishery, agriculture and mineral resource base. It is a country particularly rich in precious gems. The trade in illicit gems, known as "blood diamonds" for their role in funding conflicts, perpetuated the civil war. Today, diamond exports, in particular, are helping to buoy the post-war economy, although much illegal cross-border diamond trafficking continues. The manufacturing industry consists mainly of the processing of raw materials and of light manufacturing for the domestic market. GDP composition by sector was estimated in 2001 as being 49% agriculture, 31% industry and 21% services (CIA, 2006). In spite of gains, the economic infrastructure of Sierra Leone is poorly developed, and serious social disorder continues to hamper growth. Domestic and foreign investments are low and government borrowing is high.

Being a post-conflict country, Sierra Leone faces several critical challenges, the most crucial being that of addressing high youth unemployment and weak institutional and human capacity. Corruption is reported to be particularly rife in the public sector. Post-conflict transition also means that the country faces the prospect of a gradual phasing out of preferential allocations and support by development partners (ADB & ADF, 2005).

Key findings

- Sierra Leone has a population of around six million, with 61% living in rural areas.
- It is an extremely poor country, devastated by civil unrest and 11 years of civil war.
- About 68% of people live below the poverty line, and adult literacy is low at around 35%.
- Economic growth and reconstruction have showed some progress in recent years, but such efforts are hampered by weak institutional capacity, weak human resources and poor infrastructure.



3. Media Health

The media scene in Sierra Leone before the conflict started in 1991 was one of state monopoly of the electronic media and almost total private ownership of the print sector. Most of the media was based in the capital Freetown and concerned with the interests of the “elite” and literate sections of society. Newspapers suffered from a repressive legal regime with low sales, low advertising revenues and poor equipment (Sesay & Hughes, 2005). These are problems that continue to plague the media sector, along with the low literacy rate. Low audience and readership figures presently limit widespread growth of both the print sector and television in the country. Radio, and particularly community radio, has, however, flourished since the end of the war.

The media in Sierra Leone has traditionally been a Freetown phenomenon, with the rest of the country left in a relative “media blackout” (Cole, 1995, p.17). Pre-1991, newspapers and their distribution networks were more or less non-existent in the provinces. Under presidents Stevens and Monoh, arbitrary arrest and detention of journalists was common, causing many journalists to flee the country. Independent media were thus more or less gagged. Repressive laws are still on the statute books and are frequently used to intimidate, harass and imprison journalists. Although changes are currently being made, the regulatory framework with regard to the media is generally described as “chaotic” (Sesay & Hughes, 2005, p.96).

3.1 Status of the laws regarding rights and access to information

At present, Sierra Leone does not have an access to information act. Sections 11 and 25 of the Constitution (Republic of Sierra Leone, 1991) stress the right to receive and impart information, and explain the role and importance of the media in overseeing the operations of public servants. However, there is no specific law that guarantees information access, or which specifically details how access to this information can be obtained. In fact, a 1965 civil service law prohibits senior civil servants from divulging any institutional information to the media without the express permission of a senior authority, preferably the government minister in charge of the relevant ministry.

3.2 Status of the laws regarding criminal defamation and insult

The 1965 Public Order Act criminalises libel and defamation (Republic of Sierra Leone, 1965). The Act also makes it possible to include printers, vendors and other media workers when suing for libel. Over the past five years, these laws have come under intense international and local criticism. Under this controversial Public Order Act, the publication, distribution or possession of content likely to provoke “public disaffection” with the President or other officials is punishable by up to seven years in prison for the offender, and the closure of the offender’s news outlet (Republic of Sierra Leone, 1965). Amongst the law’s victims is Paul Kamara, Editor of *For Di People*, who was sentenced to four years in prison in October 2004 over the publication of an article headlined “Speaker of Parliament challenge! Kabbah is a true convict!” (RSF, 2005b).

The Public Order Act of 1965 also makes it a criminal offence for ordinary citizens to assemble without the express permission of the Inspector General of Police or his authorised representative – a provision which, according to the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ), makes the 1965 Act unconstitutional. The government has promised to look into amending the 1965 law and has asked the Independent Media Commission (IMC) and the SLAJ to suggest alternative laws that will not only replace the anti-media laws but will also protect the rights and privacy of common citizens (RSF, 2005b). It is unknown to the author what the present situation is with this amendment process, although it appears that no amendment has, as yet, been passed².

3.3 Status of the laws that exist to enable media regulatory bodies to function independently

Before 2000, the government (through the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting) directly controlled the media. In 2000, the Independent Media Commission (IMC) Act was passed, and the IMC was set up with a mandate to regulate the media, issue licences and stop government interference with the media. Major funding for the commission comes from government. The commission also receives funding from fees, fines, donations and donor support for specific projects and programmes. Section 3 of the IMC Act states that “The commission should not be subject to the direction or control or any person or authority in the performance of its functions” (Republic of Sierra Leone, 2000a).

To encourage independence from government, at least five of the IMC general members are nominated by the SLAJ, and become members upon approval of the President. Altogether, there are 11 members of the commission, excluding an Executive Secretary, who acts as the administrator. In its 2005 Annual Report, the IMC vigorously defended itself against claims that the government may have attempted to “mastermind” its activities or influence its work, insisting its role is to “provide a mechanism for the protection of the rights of the citizens and the journalists themselves through regulation by an independent body” (IMC, 2005, p.14).

However, the IMC is still struggling to gain credibility, particularly because of cases where it has insisted that journalists reveal their sources (Mansaray, 2005).

² See <http://www.sierra-leone.org/laws.html> for up-to-date information on current laws in Sierra Leone.

3.4 Current provisions that aim to secure the independence of publicly-owned media

A large number of journalists are employed by the government-run Sierra Leone Broadcasting Service (SLBS), which operates a radio service and a limited television service. It is reportedly a common occurrence for SLBS programmes critical of government to be forced off the airwaves by direct ministerial intervention (Sesay & Hughes, 2005).

The government has set in motion an initiative that will most probably see SLBS radio and television become a corporate body, allowing for greater independence from the state. Working to an 18-month timeframe (beginning October 2005), a management team has been established to ensure that the SLBS is turned into a public broadcast cooperation by April 2008. The idea is to make the SLBS autonomous, free from government influence, and with an independent board (Samu, 2006).

3.5 Current provisions to support community or alternative media

There is nothing (to the author's knowledge) in law that directly stipulates the necessity to have community media, but the IMC Act of 2000 does call on the Commission "to promote a free and pluralistic media throughout Sierra Leone" (Republic of Sierra Leone, 2000a). To the author's knowledge, the only apparent support offered by government to community radio stations is the granting of waivers on custom's duty when station equipment arrives at the port in Freetown.

3.6 Regulatory obligations for public or state broadcasters to fulfil a public-service broadcasting remit

According to the Minister of Information and Broadcasting, Professor Septimus Kaikai, the state broadcaster SLBS is, in its radio and TV services, supposed to represent all shades of opinion in society. For instance, although the majority of the population might speak Krio, it is intended that the state broadcaster will cater for all groups, including those speaking minority languages. According to Prof. Kaikai, different political views are also to be accommodated: "This is what is expected of the national media" (S. Kaikai, personal communication, May 28 2006).

3.7 Regulatory obligations for private broadcasters to fulfil a public-service broadcasting remit

Section 11 of the 1991 Constitution stipulates that the role of the media and its agencies is, above all, to "uphold the fundamental objectives contained in this Constitution and highlight the responsibility and accountability of the Government to the people" (Republic of Sierra Leone, 1991). Although there is no legal requirement that establishes the specific social responsibility of private broadcasters, there appears to be an unwritten agreement that private broadcasters devote some of their broadcast time to national issues of common interest, such as elections and human rights.

Despite the recent deregulation of the media, which has resulted in pluralism and some degree of freedom, a high level of mediocrity in certain sections of the media has persisted. A lack of editorial independence in the private sector is a major concern, as some media houses have effectively become mouthpieces for corrupt government officials and openly launch attacks on other journalists and newspapers that refuse to follow the official line (Mansaray, 2005). Sometimes members of political parties own newspapers, which further complicates the situation.

The Independent Media Commission, in collaboration with SLAJ, has recently put together a proposed Code of Conduct for both journalists and media houses, which may address how broadcasters can adequately fulfil a public service remit.

3.8 Journalism

Post-conflict Sierra Leone has witnessed an increase in training programmes for journalists and media practitioners, driven by both locally-based institutions and international organisations. The civil war prompted over 70% of trained media professionals to flee the country, leaving the industry in Sierra Leone in the hands of mostly untrained media practitioners (Coker, 2003). The Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ), the umbrella body of practising journalists, says it has some 240 registered members. Ibrahim Ben Kargbo, President of the SLAJ, estimates that there may be as many as 500 journalists in the country as a whole (I.B. Kargbo, personal communication, April 2006).

Journalists in Sierra Leone are mostly freelance, and virtually all are Freetown-based. Because freelance journalists are not bound by any one media outlet's editorial policy, and because they need to generate stories that have commercial value, journalists often focus on headline potential rather than investigative rigor and veracity.

Journalists are not currently compelled to register with the government or the national journalists union SLAJ. However, the IMC has drafted a Code of Conduct that includes certain requisite priorities for those wanting to become practising journalists. A draft law that includes the Code of Conduct is presently receiving the attention of the Attorney General and Minister of Justice, who will fine tune, re-write and present the bill to parliament. If it becomes law, the act would be binding on all journalists in the country (The author was not able to obtain a copy of the draft law and draft Code of Conduct and thus cannot elaborate on this point).

There is no verifiable data available on journalists' salaries in Sierra Leone. It can be assumed, however, that salaries for journalists vary greatly, as many are freelance and some media houses will pay more than others depending on advertising and sales revenues. Generally speaking, salaries of media practitioners are low. Richards (1996) describes how, due to scarce technological resources and financial hardships, some journalists seek favours and gratuities from the people they write about. In some cases, journalists approach prominent public figures and inform them of impending negative news reports, with a promise to intervene on behalf of the "victims" in return for gifts. An SLBS news editor's monthly salary is within the range of Le250,000 to Le400,000 (\$US83 to US\$133). Meanwhile a junior reporter for a newspaper in Freetown could be taking home a much lower salary, within the range of Le150,000 to Le200,000 (\$US50 to \$US68) per month. To provide a comparison with another sector, university-educated teachers take home roughly Le230,000 (\$US78) per month.

Although not confirmed, it has been said that many reporters often go unpaid, increasing the chances that they will take bribes from government officials or from others who may have something to hide. As one editor of a newspaper (who wished to remain anonymous) remarked, “scoops are lucrative weapons here”.

The media profession is hugely dominated by men, with only two female editors working in the print media. Most women working in the sector are secretaries with little decision-making power. Some are newsreaders or presenters of programmes generally compiled by men (Sesay & Hughes, 2005). However, it should be noted that the current head of the IMC is a woman, Bernadette Cole.

Since the end of the conflict, media development and journalism training schemes have proliferated in Sierra Leone. A Mass Communication Department has been set up at Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone, offering a popular degree programme for Media Studies. The Lycrcs College of Management Studies in Freetown, as well as the College of Business Studies in Kissy, east of Freetown, also offer media studies courses. Chronic underfunding of these departments and institutions, however, remains a problem.

The government of Sierra Leone and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) have recently made plans to open new media training centres across the country, including in smaller towns. Information and Broadcasting Minister Professor Septimus Kaikai has been quoted as saying that the project would “make sure that the activities of government are adequately transmitted to the people” (*Concord Times*, 2006). Meanwhile, the President of SLAJ, Ibrahim Ben Kargbo, has said he hopes these facilities can become a networking tool for independent journalists across the country (*Concord Times*, 2006).

As well, since the end of the conflict, workshops and short journalist training sessions have become frequent in the capital, facilitated by NGOs (local and international), local associations, foundations and foreign government development agencies. Some examples include:

- Thomson Foundation media training, business-reporting and environmental workshops for regional and central staff of the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Service, funded by the UK Department for International Development (DfID)³;
- Canadian Journalists for Free Expression (CJFE) journalism training programmes conducted in collaboration with local NGOs and funded by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA): Canadian journalists have been brought in to train Sierra Leone media professionals, teaching cross-cultural communication in particular. Project emphasis is also on teaching local journalists to be trainers themselves⁴;
- A recent Planned Parenthood Association of Sierra Leone workshop for journalists on how to educate the public about reproductive and women’s health issues, including infant mortality, abortion, sexually transmitted diseases and gender-based violence (Ansumana, 2006);
- Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ) journalism training sessions, dependent on availability of funds;

³ More information on the Thomson Foundation training schemes is available from <http://www.thomsonfoundation.org.uk/docs/consult/sierracon.htm>

⁴ More information on CJFE training schemes is available from <http://www.cjfe.org/eng/projects/projects.html>

- The local human rights NGO Forum of Conscience's Development Through Radio (DTR) project, through which women from 15 isolated villages will be trained as radio journalists: the programme is run in partnership with the Initiative for Mobile Training For Community Radio (Informotrac), which is supported by the Radio Netherlands Training Centre (RNTC) (Informotrac, 2006);
- Commonwealth Broadcasting Association (CBA) bursaries to allow Sierra Leonean journalists to travel abroad for training or to work with journalists in other Commonwealth countries (IJN, 2006).

There have been some recent developments in the relationship between journalists and the government. As of 2002, journalists in Sierra Leone have been invited to attend regular ministerial briefings, organised by SLAJ in collaboration with the government as a way to give local journalists an opportunity to develop a balanced and more in-depth understanding of major policy challenges. These briefings are also seen as a way to promote accurate reporting and responsible and mature debate by public figures and journalists alike (IJN, 2002). An annual media awards ceremony has also been established by the IMC to reward "good practice" in the sector (IMC, 2005).

The main challenge facing the Sierra Leonean journalist remains personal safety. As the UN force UNAMASIL and its security forces have gradually pulled out, security remains a source of concern, particularly in the capital Freetown where raids on media houses and the homes of journalists are common. Journalists may be attacked, harassed or threatened with arrest if they dare publish material that displeases government officials or business elites. The advocacy NGO Reporters Sans Frontières (RSF) has described one incident where the police conducted a raid on the independent daily, *Awoko*, in Freetown, confiscating documents and photos, destroying equipment and assaulting reporters (RSF, 2005a). The raid came after three journalists working for the newspaper began taking photos at the scene of an accident during a police operation against illegal street sellers – an accident in which a police car had collided with another vehicle. After publishing details of the raid on the newspaper in the following day's edition, the journalists involved and members of the newspaper's management team were threatened with arrest.

Another difficulty for journalists has been the conduct of the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC). The ACC was established in 2000 with a mandate to "...examine the practices and procedures of Government Ministries, departments and other public bodies, in order to secure a revision of those practices and procedures which, in the opinion of the Commissioner, may lead to corrupt practices, and to advise the heads of such Ministries, departments and other public bodies thereon" (Republic of Sierra Leone, 2000b). However, the ACC has been accused of leading investigations that are overwhelmingly focused on journalists who report on corruption, as opposed to dealing with those who propagate corruption in public office. The International Press Institute has reported how ACC detectives frequently raid the premises of media houses and the homes of journalists under the premise of looking for documents that confirm their involvement in bribes (Mansaray, 2005).

Key findings

- Sierra Leone does not have a dedicated access to information law, although Sections 11 and 25 of the Constitution recognise the role the media have to play in overseeing the activities of public servants.
- The 1965 Public Order Act criminalises libel and defamation. The Independent Media Commission (IMC) and Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ) are working towards elimination of criminal libel and other undemocratic aspects of this Act.
- There are an estimated 500 journalists in the country, and there are at present no requirements for them to be registered with any authority.
- Standards of journalism are generally low, and the profession is poorly paid.
- Since the end of the conflict, Sierra Leone has benefited from a proliferation of externally-funded training schemes for media professionals.



4. State of the Media – Literature Review

4.1 Mbayo (2006)

In his article entitled *Status of the Media in English-Speaking West Africa*, US-based Sierra Leonean academic Richard Mbayo proposes that the general literature on Sierra Leone (including literature on economic realities) must be looked at in reviewing the media over the past decade. The UNDP *Human Development Report 2004* listed Sierra Leone as the poorest country in the world (UNDP, 2004). As well, there are the legacies of the more than ten years of civil war to contend with, and the current difficulties of government inefficiency, mismanagement and corruption. The state of the media needs to be evaluated with these contexts in mind.

While the decade of war was in some respects disastrous for the media, Mbayo believes that it also helped bring about revolutionary changes in the ownership of some media outlets – encouraging private ownership in newspapers, radio stations, TV and Internet. However, argues Mbayo, in spite of the achievements in liberalisation of media ownership and control, the struggle for a second, perhaps more significant freedom – the right to free expression of ideas through established channels of public communication – continues to be elusive, putting media practitioners at perilous odds with political authorities.

Mbayo also discusses efforts to build a democratic space in the country, including efforts to restructure civil-military relations, the creation of democratic institutions and the rebuilding of physical structures. He argues that adjusting the psyche of a deeply divided community, which has become accustomed to years of militarisation, displacement and war, requires a sustained process of trust-building and re-education. This is where the media, and media development initiatives, can play a major role. However, before media organisations and personnel can discharge this important responsibility they, too, need to be re-educated about their role in reconciliation and peace-building. This is particularly the case because the media also suffered abuses during the days of war – newspaper offices were burnt and personnel were maimed, or even killed. The media were caught up in the web of war, making it difficult to establish the neutrality or non-partisanship of the media, even the independent media. The media's credibility was seriously undermined at the hands of the fighting factions, both government and rebels.

In the current fluid and high-risk environment of Sierra Leone, the media can (and do) play an important role, either contributing to further hatred, extremism, conflict escalation and a return to violence by engaging in unprofessionalism and bad practice or, alternatively, promoting tolerance, moderation, conflict transformation and peace-building. The question is: how can the constructive role of the media be supported?

4.2 Richards (1996)

The vast majority of Sierra Leoneans are avid consumers of the radio stations, newspapers, films, television programmes and videos that are available to them. According to Paul Richards in *Fighting for the Rain Forest: War, Youth and Resources in Sierra Leone*, many Sierra Leonean newspapers are lively tabloids (at times containing more political opinion than factually-based news) with low circulations, produced in difficult circumstances to a low technical standard. Successive governments have tried to control their (at times) unruly political spirit. The privately-owned media have long had to tread carefully when reporting on the activities of government. During the war, journalists were assaulted and/or jailed (or even killed) for their reports on the activities of the armed factions. Journalists have been branded as unpatriotic and unprofessional, as rabble-rousers, rebel collaborators and rebels. The media have also contributed in some small part to the current situation. The undue antagonism some media show towards national leadership and other unprofessional media behaviours are divisive.

The local media are, however, obvious agents for bridging the gap between the government and the people. In an environment where the government is, for various reasons, slow to articulate fully or initiate the process of change or rebuilding, the media must play a crucial role in maintaining the dialogue between the government and civil society.

4.3 I.B. Kargbo, personal communication, April 2006

In an interview with the author of this report in April 2006, Ibrahim Ben Kargbo, President of the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ), argued that the generally low level of professional skills, coupled with the weak economic and technological base of most media institutions (more than half of the country's estimated 500 or so practising journalists may not have had competent professional training before setting out to practice), contribute to the difficulties the country's media face in playing a constructive role. In spite of recent efforts to introduce media studies courses into universities, the issue of professionalism (or the lack of it) of the emerging post-war media practitioners is still a serious concern.

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4.5 Author personal communication

I.B. Kargbo, President, Sierra Leone Association of Journalists, personal communication, April 2006

R. Mbayo, Media Lecturer, Bowe University, personal communication, April 2006

Key findings

- The civil war was in some respects disastrous for the media, with infrastructure destroyed and many journalists killed. However, it also led to the opening up of the media to some extent, including the beginnings of private sector participation in broadcasting.
- The media have a vital role to play in re-establishing dialogue between government and citizens.
- Improved and more frequent training opportunities are needed for journalists if they are to play their necessary dialogue-building and democracy-building roles.



5. Radio

In an impoverished country such as Sierra Leone with a low, 35%, literacy rate (World Bank, 2006a), radio is bound to be the most effective tool for communication and dialogue. In the words of a leading Sierra Leonean journalist, “radios are for all, while newspapers are for a few educated citizens” (Metzger in Tam-Baryoh, 2001). Radio has great geographical reach and, unlike TV, the listener does not necessarily require wired electricity.

An example of the power of radio in Sierra Leone occurred in 1995 when, in spite of being cut off from the rest of the country as a result of rebel fighting, the people of Bo in southern Sierra Leone were given hope and a line of communication with the outside world thanks to a new private station, Radio Kiss 104 FM.

As recently as the early 1990s, there was very little radio in Sierra Leone, with the state Sierra Leone Broadcasting Service (SLBS) maintaining only a small radio operation on short wave. Since the mid-1990s, however, there has been a proliferation of FM radio stations, both state and private.

5.1 Key changes and developments in the radio marketplace in the past five years

There were an estimated 31 domestic radio stations on air in 2005 (see Figure 3, p.17): six state SLBS services and 25 non-state stations (private and community-run) (IMC, 2005, p.24-25). This number was a marked increase on the year 2000, when there were only eight stations: six state and two private.

Out of the 25 stations that were registered with the IMC in 2005, one station – Radio New Song – was not on air. Of the 24 operational stations, three were commercial, 17 were community stations and three were religious stations. The United Nations radio station UN Radio will soon be handed over to the Sierra Leonean government and thus has not been placed under any of the three categories. An important note is needed on community radio stations. While two stations are licensed as community radio stations, one is being used as a political platform while another station is operating as a commercial station due to financial pressures despite its community licence.

As well, there are four non-domestic services available in the country: three international services (Voice of America, BBC World Service, Radio France International) and one regional African service (West Africa Democracy Radio).

5.1.1 At national level, there are no stations with a national footprint. All stations are regional or local in reach and focus.

5.1.2 The state SLBS has six regional stations: one based in the capital Freetown, and an additional five affiliate radio stations around the country. The other 25 stations, a mix of private commercial and community run, are regionally or locally focused.

5.1.3 All but two of the non-state stations are new since 2001. According to the Independent Media Commission (IMC), there were only two non-state stations (SKY FM 106.6 FM and Kiss 104 FM in Bo) when the IMC came into operation in 2001. Now there are 25 non-state stations, a mix of private commercial and community-run outlets (IMC, 2005).

In September 2006 the IMC declared that they would no longer accept requests for any new radio stations to open in Greater Freetown. This has effectively halted the growth of radio in the capital. Radio stations may still be opened in the provincial areas of the country.

Figure 3: Broadcasting & Ownership of Radio Stations



Source: IMC, 2005, pp.24-25; author personal research

5.2 Investment and growth in the radio sector in the past five years

The marketplace for radio has expanded considerably since 2001 with the entry of many new private players. However, the sector is still under-funded.

Community radio stations,⁶ funded through various NGO projects, have proliferated. The community radio network, CORNET, a loose membership organisation, currently has some 13 members and around eight of these stations are on-air. There are other community station projects, not members of CORNET, that have acquired their licences from the IMC to broadcast and are waiting for equipment in order to start operation. There are indications, however, that some of the so-called “community” radio stations might convert to commercial stations, due to high running costs. Community radio stations are not supposed to accept advertising in the same way as commercial stations. However, community operators argue that a gallon of fuel costs the same for a community station as it does for a commercial station, and that the only difference is in wattage of the transmitter and not the

⁵ Licenced stations for 2005 may be broken down into commercial stations (3), (17) community stations and (3) religious stations. The UN station UN Radio will be handed to the government. Both radio stations licenced and operating in 2000 were commercial operations and still continue to broadcast.

⁶ Community radio stations have been categorised as “private” for the purposes of Figure 3.

running cost (Community radios are not supposed to have transmitters with capacity of more than 500 watts). Therefore, the community radio operators argue that they too have the right to broadcast advertisements and receive advertising revenue, in order to support their small stations.

5.3 Plurality, ownership and control

One station (Capital Radio) belongs to a Serbian national, Adonis Aboud. Ownership of the other private commercial stations could not be determined within the scope of this research. Partnerships or “understandings” exist between various owners of the private stations across the country. Radio operators generally communicate with each other on issues such as advertisement pricing and frequency interference.

At present, most of the community radios are run by, and their programmes mainly driven by, the various citizen groups and NGOs that were involved in setting them up. For example, the NGO-backed Talking Drum Studio project set up FM Radio Moa, and the NGO C-MET set up Citizen FM 103.7. Such community radios are run by committees, which act as the boards of trustees. Many depend on outside funding for survival. For example, Informotrac (Initiative for Mobile Training for Community Radio), a project established by the Radio Netherlands Training Centre (RNTC), cooperates with 11 community stations, providing training, programme production support and equipment (Informotrac, 2006).

5.4 Diversity

Radio has made an important contribution to peace and development in Sierra Leone. In the past five years, there has been an increase both in the diversity of radio station types and in radio programming. Broadcasting was previously the domain of the national broadcaster, SLBS, with current affairs and news presented by government functionaries and programmes tending to be connected to the national leadership. More coverage is now given to ordinary people and programmes are audience-oriented. Phone-in programmes and talk shows, where listeners take part in discussions, are popular formats – with the obvious drawback that mobile or land-line phones are still “luxuries” in the country. The United Nations UNAMASIL radio programmes emphasise peace-building and neutrality. Capital Radio, meanwhile, is primarily a Western music service. Community stations include Voice for the Handicapped FM, established with help from the BBC, and Kiss FM, established in the provincial town of Bo with equipment donated by Voice of America (VOA) (IMC, 2005).

However, in spite of the increased diversity of content and ideas heard on radio, it has been argued that non-state stations are still wary of completely open debate, for fear of antagonising the state (Sesay & Hughes, 2005). There is also concern in some quarters that increasing commercial imperatives are eroding the commitment of many stations to civic-minded programmes. This is thought to be true for stations such as Radio Democracy which, as funding disappears, is becoming more reliant on commercially-driven advertising revenues.

5.5 Quality of radio output and programming

Radio programme production quality has improved in recent years. Many stations are producing programmes themselves as well as broadcasting programmes produced by media development organisations such as Search for the Common Ground (SFCG, 2006). Technical quality is improving through the use of digital editing software. News editors and readers on radio seem to have assumed more responsibility for the quality of their efforts, and a greater deal of professionalism can now be heard⁷. Some of the private commercial stations, however, only broadcast a limited amount of information programming, and thus the scope for assessing their skills is limited (Sesay & Hughes, 2005).

Communities outside the capital Freetown now have greater access to radio, and to radio broadcasts in their own language. Radio stations based in Freetown and with a wide coverage tend to be broadcast in Krio or Mende, but other stations, such as UNAMISIL radio, broadcast in local languages all over the country.

5.6 Specific challenges

The radio sector still faces significant challenges. For instance, in a country where many regions experience only intermittent electricity supply, all radio stations are run on generators. In an environment of increasing oil prices, this is likely to affect the quality of the radio business, and could result in reduced broadcast hours. Some of the other key issues facing radio in Sierra Leone include:

- the lack of a legislative instrument recognising community radio;
- sustainability problems for community radio projects initiated with international donor money; and,
- the need for the SLBS to become completely independent from government.

Key findings

- The landscape of radio broadcasting has changed considerably, with the number of domestic stations increasing from eight to 31 since 2001.
- Listeners now have greater diversity in terms of stations and in terms of the content on stations.
- Some observers are concerned about over-commercialisation, and declining civic-oriented content, at some private commercial stations.
- Several community-run radio stations have sprung up, but they face sustainability problems.
- One of the greatest challenges for stations is coping with unreliable power supply.

⁷ Author's personal observation.



6. Television

6.1 Key changes and developments in the television marketplace in the past five years

Over the past five years the television market in Sierra Leone has seen only minimal change. Since television stations are expensive to run in comparison to radio stations, and since it is more expensive to own and operate a television set than a radio, Sierra Leoneans tend to be listeners rather than viewers. Viewing television in a post-war country with a weak economy is a luxury, not a necessity. Due to incessant power cuts, only the affluent with generators can watch TV (Tam-Baryoh, 2001).

6.1.1 SLBS, the state-run TV broadcaster, is trying to increase its national broadcast footprint. Until recently, SLBS-TV only covered Freetown, but now also transmits to the southern town of Bo and to Kenema in the east. SLBS primarily covers news from government functionaries and general national politics, as well as some environmental issues. It also shows movies, mainly from Nigeria.

6.1.2 At regional/local level, there is a second TV service, the private commercial ABC-TV, based in Freetown. It was established in 2005 and covers only half of the city. Apart from SLBS-TV and ABC-TV, there are no other TV stations operating in the country. TV signals from neighbouring Guinea (Conakry) can, however, be received, depending on the sophistication of the set, and some people subscribe to foreign satellite services.

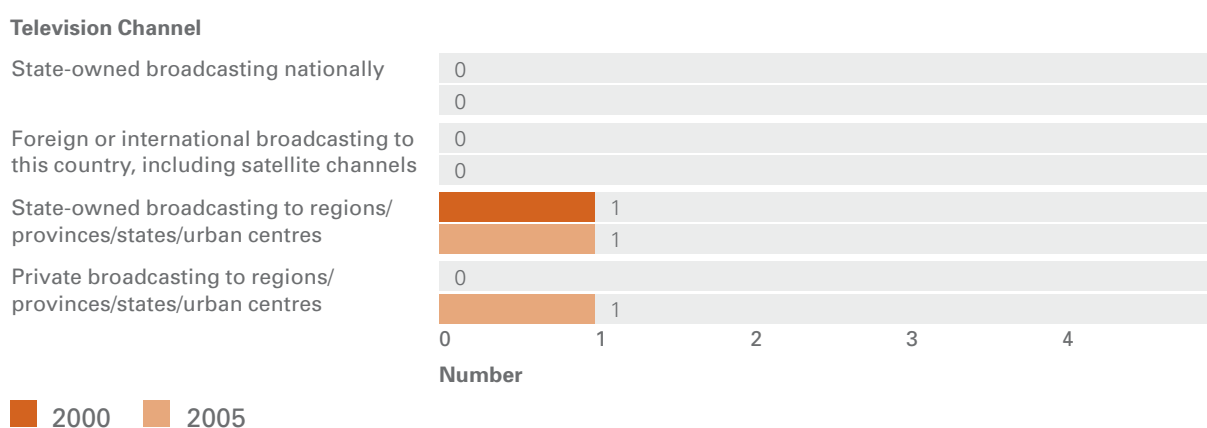
6.1.3 As well, four other companies have registered to operate television stations in the country but are yet to come on air (see Table 1, p.21).

Table 1: Television stations registered with the IMC

	Name of Station	Status
1	ABC Television	Commercial
2	Open Door Communications (TV)	Religious/commercial
3	Fortune Television	Commercial
4	Afritex Television	Commercial
5	Starr Television	Commercial

Source: IMC, 2005, p.26

Figure 4: Broadcasting and Ownership Status of Television Stations



Source: IMC, 2005, p.26

6.2 Investment and growth in the television sector in the past five years

Specific audience figures for the two domestic channels, SLBS-TV and ABC-TV, could not be obtained. Television ownership is thought to sit at just 7% of the population (World Bank, 2004), making the TV market a small one, and lack of reliable electricity means only those who can afford a private generator are able to watch. The only significant advertisers are mobile phone companies, oil marketers and Asian shopkeepers. Most businesses rely more on radio and newspapers for their advertising needs.

There are a small number of subscribers to satellite television, primarily subscribing to the South African-based MultiChoice DStv service. The one-off cost for the satellite television service is around \$US700, with a monthly subscription for the basic satellite package of \$US30 (Trend TV, personal communication, April 2006).

6.3 Plurality, ownership and control

SLBS-TV was established in 1934, but was moribund from 1980 to 1993. It had stopped broadcasting due to mismanagement and the hard economic realities of the late 1980s. It was rehabilitated by the Valentine Strasser military government in early 1994 and initially began broadcasting in black-and-white. The government arguably has an overriding influence on the content of the state-owned station SLBS-TV. For example, in 2003, a popular programme called *Bottom Line*, which provided a critique of policy issues, was stopped. Its producer, frustrated with censorship, took up a job with an NGO (Sesay & Hughes, 2005). There are plans to remove government's excessive control over the SLBS. An 18-month preparatory period for the SLBS to become a public broadcaster began in October 2005.

The privately-owned television station established in 2005, ABC-TV, is owned by Sierra Leonean, Allieu Shaw, and has a slightly more international focus than SLBS.

6.4 Diversity

There is not much difference between the programming on the two channels, as they both re-broadcast from international stations such as CNN and the BBC. Politics dominates SLBS-TV, while commerce takes precedence on ABC-TV. When ABC-TV does allow political and local content, it is usually sponsored. A discussion or sports programme may be associated with or sponsored by a political interest so that it can bring the much-needed funds into the station. SLBS-TV also carries commercials. ABC-TV programmes are mostly sourced from the US, UK and South Africa. However, local programmes are occasionally featured, depending on the availability of space and time.

6.5 Quality of television output and programming

The quality of the programmes on the two local TV stations shows signs of improvement – as they are now moving from ready-made programmes from Europe and America to doing local programmes from the provinces. However, the news programming is still mainly sourced from foreign television, leaving much need for increased local content.

6.6 Specific challenges

The Sierra Leonean TV sector faces many challenges, including:

- Lack of a reliable electricity supply hindering the operation of the stations and the ability of viewers to power their TV sets.
- The smallness of the viewer market, making advertising difficult to come by.

Key findings

- There are only two stations operating in Sierra Leone, the state-owned SLBS-TV and the privately-owned ABC-TV.
- SLBS-TV transmits to the capital Freetown and two other areas of the country, while ABC-TV is only available in parts of Freetown.
- The lack of a reliable electricity supply hinders the sector.
- The number of TV viewers is small, limiting the potential for advertising sales.
- Many programmes are sourced from abroad, resulting in a lack of local content.



7. Newspapers

The first-ever newspaper in West Africa was founded in Sierra Leone in 1801, and called the *Sierra Leone Gazette*. The second newspaper in the region came 25 years later in Liberia, where the *Liberia Herald* was established by Charles L. Force in 1826.

When the Lomé Peace Accord was signed in 1999, the government had one official newspaper, the *Sierra News*, which was produced by the Sierra Leone News Agency (SLENA), the country's only news agency. There were various other newspaper ventures in existence, but these came out irregularly, depending on when funds became available. At the time, newspapers were largely sold in Freetown, where the country's only printing press was located, and even the most popular-selling newspapers sold no more than 3,000 copies. Newspaper distribution networks in the country were non-existent (Sesay & Hughes, 2005).

Due to poor marketing strategies, newspaper editors were often at the mercy of powerful vendors who could determine cover prices and exert control over headlines. Readership was generally very low, and was practically non-existent in rural areas. The state was the biggest advertiser in newspapers at the time, meaning that those who were more likely to praise the government received the most advertisements, and those who criticised the state were ignored.

7.1 Key changes and developments in the newspaper marketplace in the past five years

In recent years, a number of new newspapers have been established, and there are signs that these are growing positively in organisational and professional stature. In the year 2000, there were only about ten newspapers in the country, compared to around 40 registered with the IMC in 2005 (IMC, 2005, p.23). This is due mainly to changes in the attitude of government towards the media in general, which has led to the establishment of the Independent Media Commission (IMC) as a regulatory body. Other recent changes in the sector have included moves from black-and-white to colour printing, and increases in the number of pages of some publications. However, each newspaper only prints about 2,200 copies on average. According to Mariama Moody, Director of a media development initiative called the Media Support Group, precise circulation figures are not available, but no newspaper at present publishes more than 4,000 copies, as there is no market for larger print runs. (M. Moody, personal communication, April 2006). Newspaper readership in Sierra Leone is very low, not just because of the low rate of literacy among the country's six million people, but also because of a lack of purchasing power.

The country's best-selling "quality" newspapers are *The Concord Times*, *Standard Times*, *Salone Times* and the *Independent Observer*. These have all received significant international assistance, particularly from the NGO Canadian Journalists for Free Expression (CJFE). The papers *For di People* and *Peep* are also popular.

Post-war media development initiatives by NGOs and individual media houses have encouraged the setting up of new papers. As well, some students from the Mass Communication Department at Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone, have been trying their hands at publishing newspapers while still at the college.

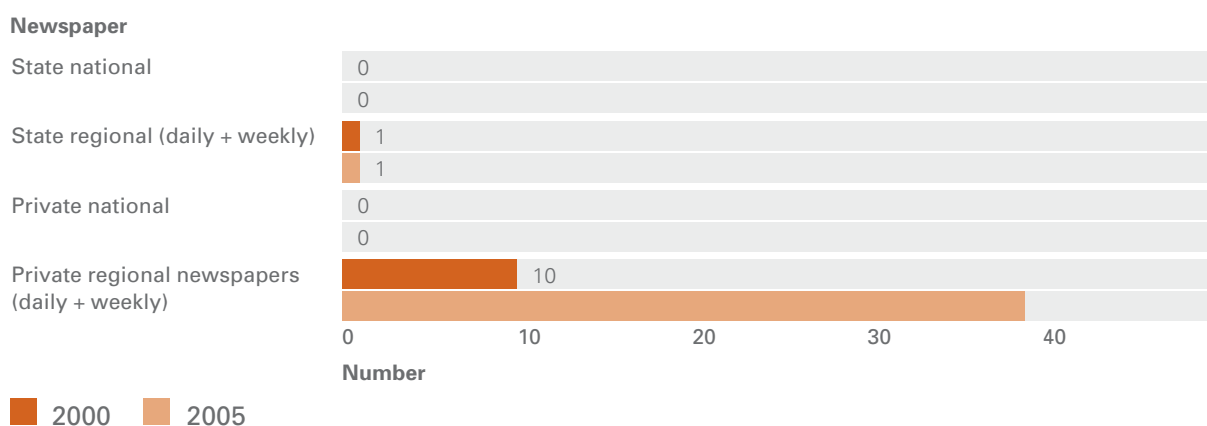
The IMC has played a positive role by largely shying away from censorship and instead focusing on building professional standards through its complaints committee.

7.1.1 Sierra Leone presently does not have a national newspaper, daily or otherwise. The national daily, the *Sierra Leone Daily Mail*, stopped publishing in 1994 under the military regime of Capt. Strasser.

7.1.2 All the country's papers operate at regional level. There is one state-controlled paper, the ruling Sierra Leone People's Party newspaper. Another main paper, *We Yone*, is controlled by an opposition party. The remaining newspapers could be called "independent", though many are still seen as having a close relationship with certain politicians, either in government or in the opposition party.

7.1.3 As Figure 5 below shows, around 30 new papers have sprung up since 2000, bringing the total number of papers to around 40 in 2005. However, due to the uncertain publishing schedules of many papers, one typically only finds around 25 papers publishing at any one time.

Figure 5: Total number of newspapers



Source: IMC, 2005, p.23; author personal research

7.2 Investment and growth in newspapers in the past five years

Investment in the private newspaper sector has been encouraging, though financially challenging. One barrier to investment is the existence of the 1965 Public Order Act, which criminalises libel and defamation. Business people hesitate to invest, knowing that a paper can be shut down overnight based on a libel allegation.

Some newspapers survive mainly through commercialisation of their editorial policies. For example, almost all the newspapers get advertisements from the Celtel mobile phone company, and thus it is unlikely that any stories will be published that would do damage to this company's reputation.

7.3 Plurality, ownership and control

Despite the existence of some laws not favourable to the media, the government has made great strides in allowing private individuals to own and operate newspapers (although certain politicians are actually the hidden owners of some papers). There is no single conglomerate that owns the newspapers, and the party in government only owns one newspaper.

7.4 Diversity

The print media are seen as freer than the electronic media – particularly freer than the state SLBS-TV, where it is still common for programmes critical of the government to be forced off by direct ministerial intervention.

The print media, operating in a difficult post-war environment, seem to understand their peace-building role, and hence, as with radio, there is a kind of unwritten agreement that news stories of civic interest should be published. However, more recently, tabloid-style papers have emerged, containing mainly opinions and commentaries rather than news stories. These papers carry frequent sensational and alarmist headlines, as well as poorly researched and sometimes fabricated reports.

7.5 Quality of newspaper reporting

Over the past five years, most papers have doubled their number of pages and are coming out almost daily, five times a week. A key enabler has been the availability of new printing presses provided by the Media Support Group project established by the NGO Canadian Journalists for Free Expression (CJFE), making printing output more reliable, cheaper and of higher quality.

The ten years of civil strife affected the media, and newspapers in particular as editors were either for or against the war, thereby rendering the media divided along tribal, regional and political-interest lines. Relying on their limited knowledge of crucial national issues, some journalists were the cause of greater chaos and disunity (Richards, 2006). Since the end of the war in 2001, journalists have begun organising themselves into groups interested in supporting specific standards and styles of reportage. For example, there is now an HIV/AIDS reporters grouping and also a group called Media Against Corruption. These entities try to protect fellow reporters, and they source funding for seminars and training. Efforts such as these seem to have improved the overall standard and style of print reporting in recent years.

7.6 Specific challenges

A key challenge is to improve training, so that the quality of newspaper content can improve, which in turn should lead to improvements in layout, printing and use of colour. As for the commercial viability of the newspaper business, this will depend on the growth of the national economy. Other specific issues that need to be addressed include:

- the lack of reliable electricity supply, a problem that increases the cost of production because newspaper offices have to buy generators and fuel;
- the still limited number of training facilities;
- the need for a reduction in the tax on printing materials imported into the country; and,
- the existence of anti-media laws that hinder the free conduct of newspapers, undermining democracy and investment in the sector.

Key findings

- The newspaper industry has expanded dramatically, from about ten papers in the year 2000 to around 40 today.
- All papers are regional or local, and one is owned and controlled by the ruling Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP).
- Newspaper readership is low, due to the low literacy rate and the lack of reader purchasing power.
- There has been growth in low-quality, tabloid-style papers, often accused of sensationalism and fabricating news stories.



8. Media Support

In the absence of significant business investment, the media industry in Sierra Leone remains severely underfinanced and ill-equipped. To the author's knowledge, there are currently only three printing houses for around 40 newspapers. These printing presses are under-serviced and over-worked, with few or no spare parts available. In addition, there is a chronic shortage or absence of printing materials. Most newspaper organisations do not have their own computers, and rely heavily on the services of street-side typists and ill-trained proofreaders (Tam-Baryoh, 2001).

Furthermore, the National Power Authority (NPA) uses outdated machines to supply the city of Freetown with electricity. These machines frequently have to be overhauled, and during these servicing periods, whole sections of the city go without electricity and thus access to electronic media.

8.1 Key changes and developments in new media technologies in the past five years

In terms of information and communication technology (ICT) potential in Sierra Leone, it was estimated in 2002 that only 24,000 people owned land-line telephones, 67,000 owned mobile telephones, and there were only 8,000 Internet users (CIA, 2006). But there has been clear growth in the mobile telephony and Internet sectors in recent years. The country now has five mobile phone companies, and people can access the Internet via Internet cafés or various Internet service providers (ISPs) (IMC, 2005).

8.2 Key changes in media support in the past five years

The author estimates that there are now about five locally-based advertising agencies, all part of multinational franchises, and approximately four locally-owned television/film independent production companies. Also, various youth theatre groups have begun to see the need to go into film production. Since 2004, and with the influx of Nigerian-produced films that usually have themes such as occultism, wealth acquisition and witchcraft, many Sierra Leonean youth have now ventured into participation in local movie production.

8.3 Audience and readership research data

There are not any media audience research services in Sierra Leone, either conducted by individual stations or by a dedicated research organisation or NGO. Not even the state broadcaster SLBS has any reliable audience figures. One of the few indicators of media audience available in the country is from the 2004 Census, in which it was found that radio was the most popular medium for information access – not a surprising result given the country’s low literacy rate. However, the Census provided no further indicators about the media (Republic of Sierra Leone, 2004).

The mobile phone companies are not forthcoming with their subscriber statistics – and such statistics would anyhow be difficult to interpret given that many mobile users subscribe to at least two companies at the same time. Asked what exactly their subscriber figures were, senior members of both the Millicom and Datatel mobile phone companies said it was not in their interest to reveal the figures.

8.4 Media support, ISPs and ownership

With the exception of Datatel, which has a local partnership, all the other mobile phone companies are owned and controlled by foreign business interests.

The Internet service provider (ISP) firms are operated mainly by Nigerian business people. Only Datatel’s ISP service is owned by a Sierra Leonean, while Millicom’s ISP service is owned by a quasi-Sierra Leonean partnership. There is no reliable data available on ISP ownership in the country, even at the Ministry of Transport and Communication, the official body responsible for tracking the deployment of ISP services.

Key findings

- There is no recent data on computer, mobile phone or Internet usage. However, with five mobile phone companies, and access to the Internet increasing via numerous Internet cafés, it can be assumed that there has been an increase in mobile phone and Internet access in recent years.
- The mobile phone sector is primarily foreign-owned and controlled.
- All the advertising firms in the country are local offices of multinational companies.
- There has been some emergence of local film/TV production companies.
- There is currently no media audience research in the country.



9. NGO Activity

9.1 Key changes and developments in NGO activity in the past five years

Since the end of the war and the setting up of various democratic institutions by the government (such as the IMC, the National Privatisation Commission and various other commissions), civil society has become increasingly engaged in participatory democracy through dialogue. This has led to an increase in advocacy programmes, especially those that deal with freedoms such as free expression and the need to access information.

9.1.1 NGOs have become increasingly interested in issues around supporting media freedom and upholding fundamental human rights and principles. The need for high-quality, relevant information to be made available to the general population via diverse media has also become the centrepiece activity of many NGOs. Many have recognised that, because in previous times the population was given only minimal information, it is now expedient to use the media to sensitise this hitherto uninformed populace.

In response to the vast increase in number of NGOs appearing after the war, the government decided to create the Sierra Leone Association of Non-Governmental Organisations (SLANGO). NGOs are now required to register with the Ministry of Development and Economic Planning. After registering with the Ministry, it is mandatory to register with SLANGO. The fee for this is the equivalent of around \$US50 (SLANGO, 2005). SLANGO is a consortium of NGOs, both local and foreign, and its primary role is to ensure co-ordination among its members. SLANGO's purpose is to serve as a unified voice for the NGO community and to interface with civil society organisations around the country. It seeks to build the capacity of civil society organisations (CSOs) for increased participation in governance and to reduce the duplication of their efforts.

Figures for the number of NGOs operating in Sierra Leone are unreliable and information is disparate. One available figure, however, is for the number of international NGOs officially registered to act within Sierra Leone, a number which increased from 47 in 2000 to 189 in 2005 (DACO, 2006).

9.2 Key NGOs involved in media development activities

Some of the main funders of media development activities in post-conflict Sierra Leone have so far been USAID, the UK's DfID, Canada's CIDA and the Open Society Initiative of West Africa (OSIWA). Intermediary organisations which receive funding from the aforementioned agencies include Search for Common Ground (SFCG), the British Council, the Thomson Foundation, Canadian Journalists for Free Expression (CJFE), the Centre for Media, Education and Technology (C-MET) and the Informotrac project of the Radio Netherlands Training Centre (RNTC).

The following are some of the key NGO-driven media development efforts in the country:

9.2.1 Talking Drum Studio Sierra Leone (TDS-SL)

With financial assistance from USAID and implementation driven by the Search for Common Ground (SFCG) NGO, the Talking Drum Studio (TDS-SL) project has done much work in media development. Since 2000, TDS-SL has been principally involved in training, programming, advocacy, institutional capacity-building through the provision of funds, and provision of equipment for the running of community media. TDS-SL has been at the forefront of media initiatives that aim to disarm, demobilise and re-integrate ex-fighters, particularly children. Their public sensitisation and education programmes are designed to promote a culture of peaceful resolution to conflict and are broadcast across the country. A popular TDS-SL programme called *Golden Kids News* is played on 13 radio stations. Children serve as producers, reporters and actors, identifying issues for and about children and advocating on their behalf (SFCG, 2006).

9.2.2 DfID, British Council, Thomson Foundation

The UK's Department for International Development (DfID) has focused much of its media development funding on improving professional media standards through training programmes (run by the British Council and Thomson Foundation, as mentioned earlier in the 3.8 Journalism section). DfID has also sought to support enhanced performance by the state broadcaster SLBS through provision of equipment.

9.2.3 Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), Canadian Journalists for Free Expression (CJFE)

The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), with implementation by the Toronto-based NGO Canadian Journalists for Free Expression (CJFE), has funded establishment of the Media Support Group (MSG), which in turn has supplied a printing press that does work for major newspapers in the country. The project has now been turned over to a local board to manage (CIDA, 2001).

9.2.4 Open Society Initiative of West Africa (OSIWA), International League for Human Rights (ILHR), Centre for Media, Education and Technology (C-MET)

The Open Society Initiative of West Africa (OSIWA) and the International League for Human Rights (ILHR) have channelled funds through a local NGO, the Centre for Media, Education and Technology (C-MET). OSIWA's aim is for media to be utilised to promote democracy and human rights. C-MET, which began operation in Freetown in 2000, has supplied computers, scanners and printers to several media houses and has organised training schemes for media practitioners from both private and state-owned media⁸. As well, the community radio network CORNET receives equipment from OSIWA.

⁸ For more information, see <http://www.comminit.com/africa/experiences/pds22004/experiences-2213.html>

9.2.5 Initiative for Mobile Training for Community Radio (Informotrac)

The Initiative for Mobile Training for Community Radio (Informotrac), previously mentioned in the 3.8 Journalism section of this report, is a project established by the Radio Netherlands Training Centre (RNTC). Informotrac focuses on training, programming and the supply of basic equipment to community and public media. There are now plans to make Informotrac a local NGO, as RNTC's contribution has come to an end.

9.2.6 Media Law Reform

Organisations involved in media law reform in Sierra Leone include the National Democratic Institute⁹, the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA), the Commonwealth Press Union and Article 19, a London freedom of expression and communication rights group.¹⁰

As well, there is the Media for Democracy in Africa programme run by the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ)¹¹.

9.2.7 New Trends in Training

The Media Foundation for Development and Peace is currently focusing on peace education, while the Guild of Newspaper Editors concentrates on ethical training for members. The Centre for Media, Education and Technology (C-MET) has recently broadened its focus by going into Internet training for editors, as well as supporting research skills on human rights issues.

9.3 Climate of opportunity for media development activities

With so much NGO focus on media development in Sierra Leone over the past five years, some commentators¹² have advanced the argument that this might lead to duplication of projects and wastage. Some NGOs involved in media have had to divert into different fields. A few of the key players have now limited their activities to advocacy, while those with the necessary funding from donors have continued to supply equipment, especially to the electronic media.

Some NGOs, for want of properly defined and well-focused media development projects, have erroneously identified the holding of seminars or workshops for media practitioners as the only way of helping to develop the media. There is certainly more to media development than mere one-day workshops.

Key findings

- The main funders of NGO media support work include USAID, DfID, CIDA and OSIWA.
- Key implementing bodies are Search for Common Ground, the British Council, the Thomson Foundation, Canadian Journalists for Free Expression (CJFE), the International League for Human Rights (ILHR), the Centre for Media, Education and Technology (C-MET) and the Radio Netherlands Training Centre (RNTC).
- Key projects are the Talking Drum Studio, British Council/Thomson Foundation professional training, the Media Support Group printing press project and the Initiative for Mobile Training for Community Radio (Informotrac).
- The heavy focus on media development in the NGO community in recent years has led to concerns about potential overlap and wastage of resources.

⁹ For more information see <http://www.ndi.org/worldwide/cewa/sierraleone/sierraleone.asp>

¹⁰ For more information see <http://www.article19.org/work/regions/africa/index.html>

¹¹ For more information see <http://www.ifj.org/default.asp?Issue=MFDAfrica&Language=EN>

¹² I. El-Tayyib Bah, personal communication, April 2006; I. Massaquoi, personal communication.



10. Conclusions

In a post-war country where all media infrastructure was destroyed, any approach to the development of the media must not only involve local initiatives but must be holistic in approach. Various media development initiatives, such as those by the Radio Netherlands' Informotrac training team, the Centre for Media, Education and Technology (C-MET), the Media Support Group (MSG) and the Talking Drum Studio, have all, in diverse ways, contributed immensely to the development of the media during the past five years.

It seems clear from this research that there is room for more improvement in quality and professionalism, both of practitioners and of media infrastructure. The use of modern technology in journalistic practice must be encouraged. The absence of knowledge of computers among some members of the Sierra Leone media, in the 21st Century, is an alarming reality that should be addressed.

The Independent Media Commission (IMC) has so far been playing an arbitration role through its complaints committee, but its key functions, to train and develop the media, are still not realised because of lack of proper and adequate funding from government and other partners.

As well as these technical, infrastructure and institutional needs, the legal framework within which the present media operate needs to be improved if democracy, human rights and media freedom are to be properly upheld. Within the next couple of years, media development programmes may need to place more emphasis on training and advocacy around changes in the legal framework, so as to engender a sustainable and conducive atmosphere for media practice.

Key findings

- A holistic approach is needed to media development in Sierra Leone, with a mixed focus on infrastructure, human resource development, institutional development and an enabling legal-policy-regulatory environment.
- The Independent Media Commission needs to be empowered so as to be able to play a greater role in media development.
- Capacity building is needed in support of advocacy for an improved legal framework.



11. Appendices

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Appendix 2: Individuals/organisations consulted during the research

Individuals:

- O. Creighton-Randall, Justice Sector Development, British Council, personal communication, April 2006
- I. El-Tayyib Bah, Former President, Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ), personal communication, April 2006
- R.A. Gordon, former Secretary, Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ), personal communication April 2006
- S. Kaikai, Minister of Information and Broadcasting, personal communication May 28 2006
- S. Kamara, Media Consultant, Network Movement for Justice and Development, personal communication, April 2006.
- I.B. Kargbo, President, Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ), personal communication, April 2006.
- C. Mambu, Coordinator, Coalition of Civil Society and Human Rights, personal communication, April 2006.
- I. Massaquoi, Coordinator, Community Radio Network (CORNET), and Mass Communications Lecturer, Fourah Bay College, personal communication, April 2006
- R. Mbayo, media academic, Bowe University, personal communication, April 2006.
- M. Moody, Coordinator, Media Support Group Sierra Leone (MSG-SL), personal communication, April 2006.
- J. Nicol, Coordinator, Initiative for Mobile Training for Community Radio (Informotrac), personal communication, April 2006

Organisation:

- Trend TV Agents, Freetown, personal communication, April 2006



Sierra Leone

Country Report

Way Forward



12. Introduction

Interviewees were selected to include several shades of opinion, keeping in mind that it was not only media professionals who would understand issues relating to media development initiatives. Gender was also a factor. An initial shortlist was drawn up and approved but some people had time constraints. Others said that media issues are specialised and decided not to take part. All together, from a list of 21 interviewees 15 were finally accepted and interviewed.

Four women (including the only female editor in the country) and 11 men were selected. The individuals, drawn from six categories, comprised five from NGOs, two government officials, two media trainers, two media commentators, a youth group worker and three media rights activists within the civil society. Thirteen of the 15 interviewees were from the capital city, Freetown.¹ The reason for this is that all 44 of Sierra Leone's newspapers are based in Freetown. The city is also home to the country's only two TV stations and seven of its more than 33 registered radio stations, according to the IMC (2005).

In the absence of any Audit Bureau for Circulation or audience surveys, interviewees depended on their own perceptions, experience and assumptions with regards to media figures.

Generally speaking, all respondents were more than ready to cooperate and all signed consent forms. Interviewees were frank and open about the issues, although three of them felt that the length of the interview was rather long. Thirteen of the 15 agreed to be quoted directly in the report, while three interviewees declined to disclose issues of funds or funders. Nonetheless, these three interviewees agreed to be quoted on all other issues.

Until specific questions on media development initiatives were asked, all interviewees took advantage of the first few minutes to market their own organisation. While three interviewees tended to dwell more on issues relating to their own organisations.

The interviews were conducted between 15 April 2006 and 28 May 2006.

A shortage of electricity in Freetown hampered the compilation of this report. Extra funds were used to pay for fuelling the generator. This event was not forecast in the original budget.

¹ One interview was conducted in Waterloo, 20 miles outside of Freetown, while another interview was conducted in Makeni, approximately 100 miles north of the capital city.



13. Media Development: an organisational perspective

13.1 Key Organisations

The choice of interviewees represented organisations from many sectors. Interviewees from the non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have been involved either directly or remotely with the media and media development initiatives during the past five years. The other interviewees included media trainers, umbrella organisations for journalists, the only official media regulatory body, media practitioners and government officials.

The five journalists interviewed were:

- Betty Foray, the owner of the *Evening Scoop* and the only female newspaper Editor in Sierra Leone;
- Olu Richie Awoonor Gordon, the Editor of *Peep! Magazine*;
- Ibrahim Ben Kargbo, President of the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ);
- Sahr Mbayo, a journalist with 30 years' experience. He is now Chief Trainer for the Initiative For Mobile Training For Community Radio (Informotrac); and,
- Isaac Massaquoi, a lecturer in the Mass Communications Department at Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone. He also serves as the Coordinator for the Community Radio Network (CORNET).

Also interviewed were three female activists: Valnora Edwin, the Director of the Campaign for Good Governance, and two from NGOs.

Gibril Foday-Musa is a trainer and Public Affairs Officer from Talking Drum Studios. Charles Mambu is Chairman and Coordinator for the Alternative Civil Society group of Sierra Leone. This organisation has been working with the media, especially in the area of advocacy for the repeal of anti-media laws.

Bamie Baker, Managing Director of Media Magic Advertising and Head of Betracom, was interviewed along with the former Information and Broadcasting Minister, Dr Julius Spencer, who is now Managing Director of the Premier Media Marketing company.

Senior government officials and representatives directly involved with media legislative issues were also interviewed. Francis D.D. Ganda is Executive Secretary of the Independent Media Commission (IMC), and Professor Septimus Kaikai is Sierra Leone's Minister for Information and Broadcasting. The other interviewee was Peter Ngutaung. He is a Media Officer for the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and a lecturer in the Mass Communications Department at Fourah Bay College at the University of Sierra Leone.

Four of the interviewees (Betty Foray, Valnora Edwin, Charles Mambu and one from an NGO) said that they were not directly involved with media development initiatives. However, Betty Foray has *"been a member of various teams dealing with media development issues."* Valnora Edwin said that the Campaign for Good Governance (CGG) had been cooperating with other groups on media development issues but not directly.

13.2 Impact of media development initiatives

Important media sector changes in the past five years

Three interviewees (Ibrahim Ben Kargbo of SLAJ, Olu Richie Awoonor Gordon of *Peep! Magazine*, and Peter Ngutaung of the UNDP) discussed the considerable development of media in Sierra Leone over the past five years. Ibrahim Ben Kargbo singled out the development of print and radio commenting:

" Radio has done very well and... print is doing very well. [They are] gradually improving from where we started in the '80s to where we are now; and there is ... free expression... Both here in Freetown and the provinces ... radio has been providing some kind of forum for discussion and has brought on board ... ordinary citizens in the business of running the state, which, to me, is very important. To your question, radio has been in the lead over the last five years... through various media development programmes. "

(Ibrahim Ben Kargbo, President; Media Support: SLAJ, Sierra Leone)

Betty Foray also felt that media in Sierra Leone had improved, noting that:

" A lot of contribution has been made in the past five years and a lot of improvement in the area of reporting and writing. Radio is booming and the newspaper sector is growing gradually, which ... is quite a lot in terms of development and I know for sure that more is on the way for the media. "

(Betty Foray, Owner and Managing Editor; Media Practitioner Public Sector: Evening Scoop, Sierra Leone)

Some media practitioners interviewed also felt that over the past five years media development initiatives impacted the diversity of the media in Sierra Leone. Dr Julius Spencer felt that radio has seen a large expansion:

“ There has been the increase in the number of radio stations. Five years ago I think there were about four or five radio stations but now there are about 30-something radio stations all over the country. ”

(**Dr Julius Spencer**, Managing Director; Media Entrepreneur: Premier Media Marketing, Sierra Leone)

In fact, according to the Independent Media Commission (IMC) of Sierra Leone, the radio and print landscape has changed considerably. In 2000, there were fewer than three radio stations and six newspapers which had registered with the IMC in Freetown. However, according to the IMC, as of June 2006, there are seven radio stations (with some additional applications pending by the IMC), and 44 newspapers registered with the IMC in the capital alone.

Interviewees generally think that the media's promotion of democracy and good governance was a positive development. It was seen as the result of cooperation between multiple stakeholders (e.g. government, journalists, NGOs) and as a possible sign of mature growth. According to Charles Mambu:

“ We are also working very closely with [the] SLAJ to ensure that everybody has access to information, as information is very powerful in the promotion of development and democracy. ”

(**Charles Mambu**, Chairman and Coordinator; Media Support: Civil Society Alternative, Sierra Leone)

Four interviewees (Olu Richie Awoonor Gordon, Ibrahim Ben Kargbo, Charles Mambu and Dr Julius Spencer) felt that the areas of ethics, professionalism and content are yet to be improved upon. Eight interviewees from five sectors believe that the media in Sierra Leone has become open and pluralistic during the past five years. Dr Julius Spencer commented that:

“ The availability of newspaper pages for discussions and various talk shows on radio stations are signs of media diversity and pluralism. ”

(**Dr Julius Spencer**, Managing Director; Media Entrepreneur: Premier Media Marketing, Sierra Leone)

Despite this optimism, the same eight interviewees felt that domestic content growth and professionalism have been lacking. One interviewee felt that:

“ A lot ... needs to be done with regard [to] reporting human rights issues in this country especially as it relates to social and economic rights.... ”

(NGO, Sierra Leone)

Strategic changes within the interviewees' work area

While three NGO interviewees (Valnora Edwin of CGG and two others) had not personally been involved with media development over the past five years, they all felt that, in some capacity, their organisations had. One NGO respondent commented that despite direct involvement with media development, their organisation could still participate through providing training and equipment:

“ Though we may not be directly involved in media development issues, I think our individual NGOs can still help to provide equipment and offer training to help Sierra Leone media grow. ”

(NGO, Sierra Leone)

Four of the 15 interviewees (Francis D. D. Ganda, Professor Septimus Kaikai, Dr Julius Spencer and Valnora Edwin) were happy with the newly established Mass Communication Department at the Fourah Bay College (FBC). The college was viewed as having the potential to produce strong journalist graduates who could improve the standards and practice of journalism in Sierra Leone.

“ The establishment of the Mass Communications Department at the Fourah Bay College in the University of Sierra Leone... [has] contributed towards producing a crop of Sierra Leoneans who now have the required technical skills to be able to work in the media. ”

(**Dr Julius Spencer**, Managing Director; Media Entrepreneur: Premier Media Marketing, Sierra Leone)

Another interviewee shared the optimism that this new academic department will improve the skills of journalists and the quality of reporting:

“ There is hope that the newly established Mass Communication Department at FBC will help produce good media people. ”

(**Valnora Edwin**, Director; NGO: Campaign for Good Governance, Sierra Leone)

On the other hand, four interviewees (Valnora Edwin, Francis D.D. Ganda, Professor Septimus Kaikai, and one from an NGO) believed that interaction with their clients via the diverse media has enhanced their own work over the past five years.

Professor Septimus Kaikai said that as Minister for Information and Broadcasting in Sierra Leone, he conducts most of his work through the media:

“ I inform the general populace about government policies and activities through the radio [stations], newspapers and televisions. My job can be easier or [more] difficult, depending [on] how I interact with the media. ”

(**Professor Septimus Kaikai**, Minister; Government: Information and Broadcasting, Sierra Leone)

Charles Mambu feels that the media laws of libel and slander should be relaxed to allow government's tolerance of the media, which will help open up the society. However, he calls for media and civil society to collaborate on training. While media practitioners will receive requisite training to practice their profession well, civil society members will also be trained in media issues so as to understand some of the problems and practice of journalists.

“ What is required urgently is for all media and civil society members to be trained and equipped with ... knowledge. If we all know how the other operates ... it will be easier. ”

(**Charles Mambu**, Chairman and Coordinator; Media Support: Civil Society Alternative, Sierra Leone)

Impact of media development on the media sector or their area of work

Three of the 15 interviewees (Charles Mambu of Civil Society Alternative, Betty Foray of *Evening Scoop* and Professor Septimus Kaikai, Minister of Information and Broadcasting) felt that media development activities have had a significant impact over the past five years.

Charles Mambu cited developments in media law:

“ Allowing the passing of the Media Practitioners Act 2000 into law went a long way to ease registering of newspapers and radio stations at the IMC. ”

(**Charles Mambu**, Chairman and Coordinator; Media Support: Civil Society Alternative, Sierra Leone)

Betty Foray agrees that:

“ this can be seen as having a positive impact on our work as journalists as well as diversifying the media. ”

(**Betty Foray**, Owner and Managing Editor; Media Practitioner Public Sector: Evening Scoop, Sierra Leone)

Two of the four NGO interviewees believe that had it not been for the more open nature of the media that evolved through better media laws (excluding the laws of libel and sedition), their work as human rights and governance activists would have been difficult. The reason being that the media would have found it hard to cover their activities and sensitize their clients.

Charles Mambu said that:

“ we do all our programmes through the media, so we are part of [the] media development initiatives in the country. We therefore should be more than willing to be part of anything that will develop the media in this country. ”

(**Charles Mambu**, Chairman and Coordinator; Media Support: Civil Society Alternative, Sierra Leone)

In summary, five interviewees (three journalists and two interviewees with a media background) perceived media development within the media sector as a positive challenge. However, the other ten interviewees from the NGO and non-media sectors think that their work and activities have been enhanced by a positive development of the media sector, either through open and pluralistic ownership of media or lighter media laws.



14. Media Development Initiatives

14.1 Review

The civil war in Sierra Leone lasted from 1991 to 2001. Fifteen journalists were killed during that time, and many more left the country for fear of persecution and death. In the post-war country, the media have become exceedingly important as a democratic tool and check to government excesses. In view of this situation, few media development programmes have emerged to help resuscitate the media, which had suffered greatly both in terms of infrastructure and manpower, and to help map out strategies for media development initiatives. These initiatives can help the media become a positive tool for national development. Some of the media development initiatives that have emerged and seem to have worked are:

- ❑ Talking Drum Studio in Sierra Leone (TDS-SL);
- ❑ Centre for Media, Education and Technology (C-MET);
- ❑ Initiative For Mobile Training For Community Radio (Informotrac);
- ❑ Premier Media Marketing (PMM) and Media Magic Advertising (MMA).

Talking Drum Studio in Sierra Leone (TDS-SL)

This programme was established after 2000. It is an affiliate of a US-based media programme called Search for Common Ground and the Talking Drum Studio programme in Liberia.

In a country where there were few radio stations both before and after the war, the work of TDS-SL has not been easy. TDS-SL, though media programme producers, could not own radio stations. Instead, TDS-SL depends largely on other radio stations to air its programmes. As an initial community-oriented initiative, TDS-SL helped to develop a few radio stations, among them Peninsular Radio (FM 96) Tombo, Radio Moa in Kailahun (east of the country) and Radio Kabala. With funds from the European Union (EU), CAUSE Canada and local resources, it also supported setting up Radio Gbaft in Mile 91 (north of the country). TDS-SL was also instrumental in setting up Radio Mankneh in Makeni (north of the country). It works closely with SKYY (FM 106.6), a commercial radio station in Freetown, and Kiss (FM 104) Radio in Bo, Sierra Leone.

TDS-SL is mainly interested in radio programming that is aired on radio stations across the country. As an incentive to individual stations that air its programmes, TDS-SL gives fuel, batteries, stationery and minimal financial help to buy cassettes and other items. Several community and state radio stations across the country broadcast drama, parliamentary discussions and other democratic programmes depicting issues of injustice in society, human and media rights, good governance, HIV/AIDS and gender.

With dwindling funds from its main source, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), TDS-SL has reduced its staff, programme production and assistance to radio stations. In the early days of democratic re-introduction, with reference to demobilization of ex-combatants and the call to reconciliation, TDS-SL was instrumental and helpful in setting up the first few community radio stations in the country. This was the situation until 2003, when other individual programme-making media groups began to emerge. According to Gibril Foday-Musa:

“ We had the task of sensitising people about disarmament, demobilization and resettlement. We did this through radio. But because we had few radio [stations] then, we had to help set up a few more. This was media development ... or you may call it media creation. ”

(**Gibril Foday-Musa**, Information and Training Officer; Analysts: Talking Drum Studios, Sierra Leone)

Centre for Media, Education and Technology (C-MET)

C-MET was established in June 2000 through a collaborative effort of Sierra Leonean journalist David Tam-Baryoh and the African Director of the US-based International League for Human Rights (ILHR), Kakuna Kerina. Its aim has been to resuscitate the destroyed media following the war. Its main objectives include training (with an emphasis on ethics) and providing affordable technology and equipment for media houses. It is also involved in advocacy to expunge some of the anti-media laws in Sierra Leone.

After the first few years of its mandate, it went into research regarding media and other rights. Through a capacity-building approach, it has enhanced the administrative structure and capacity of the national media umbrella body, the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ), by providing them with an office, computers, scanners, books for the library and Internet connection.

Initiative For Mobile Training For Community Radio (Informotrac)

Informotrac is Radio Netherlands' non-government, non-profit media organisation. It helps to provide radio equipment for eight radio stations in the country as well as to train their personnel in radio programme production. In existence since 2004, Informotrac is about to be localized with the emergence of donor funds. According to Sahr Mbayo:

“ We have had success in training so many community radio broadcasters. And, we have provided them with transmitters, recorders and various other broadcast equipment. The president, Tejan Kabbah, is our chief patron. ”

(**Sahr Mbayo**, Chief Trainer; NGO: Informotrac (Radio Netherlands) Media Development Project, Sierra Leone)

Premier Media Marketing (PMM) and Media Magic Advertising (MMA)

PMM and MMA are two different media companies that do almost the same thing. Moreover, they have almost the same clients and audiences. Their primary clients are cellular phone companies in Sierra Leone with the general public serving as its audience and target groups. The five mobile phone companies in Sierra Leone use both firms to market, advertise and sell their products. PMM and MMA use the Sierra Leone media to disseminate their information, while at the same time offering their own quota of media development through donations, patronage, training and financial help. While not discussing profit, Dr Julius Spencer confirms that,

“ Premier Media Marketing has been offering its own quota of service delivery to the citizenry. ”

(Dr Julius Spencer, Managing Director; Media Entrepreneur: Premier Media Marketing, Sierra Leone)

Both PMM and MMA are essentially profit-making media outlets. According to Dr Julius Spencer, Managing Director of Premier Media Marketing,

“ We are a business venture, despite our media responsibilities. ”

(Dr Julius Spencer, Managing Director, Media Entrepreneur, Premier Media Marketing, Sierra Leone)

Of the two locally established advertising and marketing companies, PMM, under Dr Julius Spencer's management, is the most successful in terms of resources, contribution to media development initiatives and information development networks. PMM personnel have been involved in training and supplying equipment to media houses. For example, Citizen FM 103.7 Radio in Kissy received a 14.5 KVA generator, and Radio Mount Aureole of the University of Leone received a 25 KVA generator. PMM is involved in the music industry.

Summary

In spite of the programmes mentioned above, it must be understood that over the past five years individual NGOs in the country have been involved in various media development activities. These activities range from supplying free equipment to training or advocacy for the repeal of the country's anti-media laws.

Such individual NGO programmes include the training of some 60 journalists in 2004 by the Conciliation Resources (CR), Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ) Panos Institute from Dakar, Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) in Ghana, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and several others. These training sessions may have been unrelated, but they have offered extant and invaluable contributions to the development of the Sierra Leonean media since the end of the war in 2001.

Generally speaking, organisations dealing with media development initiatives seem to have overarching goals. Those goals seek to improve the performance of the media through making available good training, provisions and equipment. In addition, these organisations are advocates for better media laws.

14.2 Success and impact

Organisations generally appear to have various methods for evaluating not only their involvement in media development initiatives, but also their own individual and specialised projects. The usual accepted norms and methods of evaluation include:

- interviews;
- questionnaires; and,
- audience surveys.

Interviewees tend to agree on the following key factors as being responsible for the success of media projects:

- more democratic environment;
- increased availability of funding;
- new private investment in the media; and,
- need for communications media.

More democratic environment

Four interviewees (one from an NGO, two journalists and one from media support) felt that the democratic practice in the country over the past five years has led to:

- media plurality;
- increased information flow; and,
- facilitative environment for better media practice.

According to Dr Julius Spencer,

“ democracy has led to tolerance from the populace and free flow of information. Every one is aware of the need for fair play in society. Thus the media too are compelled to behave accordingly. ”

(**Dr Julius Spencer**, Managing Director; Media Entrepreneur: Premier Media Marketing, Sierra Leone)

Charles Mambu agrees, noting:

“ our democratic culture, since our last general elections in 2002, have meant that we must be democratic and that our institutions, including the media, must be democratic. Listening to the other side of the story. This would not have been possible under one-party dictatorship. ”

(**Charles Mambu**, Chairman and Coordinator; Media Support: Civil Society Alternative, Sierra Leone)

Increased availability of funding

Five of the 15 interviewees (three journalists, one from an NGO and one educator) felt that the availability of funding has helped develop the media over the past five years by funding relevant projects. Through external organisations such as the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA), USAID, Canadian Journalists for Free Expression (CJFE), CAUSE Canada, the EU and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), funds have been made available to support various media development programmes.

For example, in 2003, the UNDP provided funding (over \$30,000) to three local partners. CR and SLAJ trained 60 local journalists to monitor local government elections. OSIWA has provided up to \$US1 million in cash and equipment for some community radios. In Freetown, OSIWA has also set up components of a sub-regional radio station (the West Africa Democracy Radio based in Dakar, Senegal).

Other organisations are also providing assistance. USAID is spending money to help run the TDS-SL media programmes. The Department for International Development (DfID), through its sister project Enhancing Interaction and Interface Between Civil Society and the State to Improve Poor People's Lives (ENCISS), is funding programme production aspects of the TDS-SL media project. Ibrahim Ben Kargbo discussed the importance of this financial assistance:

“ We should be able to ensure that we have the necessary funds to travel all over the country to educate our membership, to educate our people about the need for us to be a significant and important part of the governance of the state. Some times we have such funds and we have used [them] well for the intended purposes. ”

(Ibrahim Ben Kargbo, President; Media Support: SLAJ, Sierra Leone)

Private investment in the media

Five interviewees, all of whom were directly involved in media, felt that private investment in the media has helped develop the media through various initiatives.

“ That a rich football star, Mohamed Kallon, a Serbian ambassador, Adonis Aboud, and even individual journalists ... have been privately investing in radios and newspapers in the country is a good development. ”

(Ibrahim Ben Kargbo, President; Media Support: SLAJ, Sierra Leone)

Need for communication

Interviewees described the sheer need of Sierra Leoneans to communicate as another area of success and impact of media projects since the restoration of democratic rule in the country in 1996. Many Sierra Leoneans now desire discussing national issues in larger forums other than just within their homes. Three interviewees (two from NGOs and an advertising agent) believe that if the media had been as buoyant, numerous and challenging as they are today, probably the ten-year war would not have lasted so long. Asked specifically what success and impact there have been either by the media themselves or various media development initiatives, such as the community radio initiative, Dr Julius Spencer said:

“ [The media] have created a lot of impact for the past five years now that they have been visible. ... For example, if all of these community radio stations were in operation during or before the war, what would Sierra Leone look like in terms of accessing information? Because there was a deficiency in that area, you see the people at the local levels misinformed and even the information they got was interchanged with the ideas of those in command. So far, the community radio stations have created an impact in terms of involving the community people themselves ... [in] their radio programmes; and they... feel the need for ... radio [stations] in their areas. A radio [station] in a particular community can contribute to the development of that community through education and sensitization. ”

(Dr Julius Spencer, Managing Director; Media Entrepreneur: Premier Media Marketing, Sierra Leone)

Factors undermining success

Three interviewees (a journalist and two from NGOs) agree that the lack of experience by local partners could also be responsible for the failure of media development projects. Isaac Massaquoi believes that,

“ in as much as we need local partners in media development projects, lack of experience can ruin... good media development intentions. ”

(Isaac Massaquoi, Coordinator; NGO: Community Radio Network, Sierra Leone)

14.3 Lessons learned

The NGOs involved in media development initiatives saw the interviews as an opportunity to explain what they see as problems within the media itself and how media practitioners may be helped through training and providing equipment to develop the media for an emerging post-conflict society.

The following are some lessons learned from media development projects:

- ❑ encourage the support of media development activities;
- ❑ increase access to training;
- ❑ involve local organisations and encourage local partnerships;
- ❑ promote professionalism among journalists and;
- ❑ recognise the importance of cultural context in project planning.

Encourage the support of media development activities

Supporting media development activities, such as the local media umbrella bodies for individual media professional groups, can enhance the success of media development projects. For example, OSIWA's financial and technical support to the recently created Community Radio Network (CORNET) strengthened the reliability and viability of these independent community-based radio stations. It also helped to give local credence and success to the project. It was not seen as a foreign or external media project. Instead, it is now anticipating local ownership.

Increase access to training

There have been calls for an increase of access to media skills training for female journalists as well as a demand to build their institutional capacity. (Betty Foray, Owner and Managing Editor; Media Practitioner Public Sector: *Evening Scoop*, Sierra Leone)

Involve local organisations and encourage local partnerships

Strengthening the capacity of the national journalists' association might be a future goal. A review of some of the failed media development initiatives, such as the media for peace and media for democracy projects, showed that not developing the capacity of local implementing partners could endanger any project no matter how good intentioned it might be. (Ibrahim Ben Kargbo, President, SLAJ; Olu Richie Awoonor Gordon, *Peep! Magazine*; Peter Ngutaung, UNDP, Lecturer)

Involving civil society and community-based organisations in a more informed exchange of views helped some of the earlier media initiatives to be successful. This approach helped to encourage interaction between civil society and government. Interaction between civil society organisations and media practitioners will also emerge. Certain media development projects have failed because there was no coordination between the government and the media, on the one hand, and between civil society and the media, on the other. Therefore, the project could not get institutional cooperation; nor could it be attained sustainability.

“ We all will have to cooperate, the media, government and NGOs like us, so that projects, like media development initiatives, can work. This is a lesson we must repeat. ”

(**Valnora Edwin**, Director; NGO: Campaign for Good Governance, Sierra Leone)

Not encouraging local partnerships and ownership of media development projects might lead to failure of even the best conceptualized projects. Media Support Group in Sierra Leone (MSG-SL), formerly the Canadian Journalists for Free Expression media project in Sierra Leone, provides a valuable lesson for other projects. Through competence and the commitment to enhance local partners, it succeeded in contrast to failed projects, which were being driven from abroad. Isaac Massaquoi said:

“ My experience with these projects is that ... [they] are designed from abroad... Somebody sits in some office in the Netherlands, in Cardiff. ... The request comes mostly from our own government or from some organisation... In Sierra Leone, we want this to happen and somebody sits out there, designs these things and get[s] the specialist ... [to] come here and administer the projects. I think what we should do is to develop our own programmes for which we can take ownership ... locally. We want to have training [programmes] on reporting, but what kind of reporting? Who is going to be involved? What [are] going to be the main themes in these training [programmes]? We will develop our own training programmes and sell them. And, we are not going to allow people, simply because they have money, to come into Sierra Leone with already designed programmes that they have done in Mongolia or Vietnam and try to repackage them for Sierra Leone. No... We should ask them to come and sit with us... and also use some of our people who understand media to serve as resource people. There is no point teaching somebody in Sierra Leone and giving examples of London, though London is a great city with a vibrant media landscape. They should come to Sierra Leone and discuss ... Sierra Leone. One of the strategies is to take ownership and also ask people to plan much more long term, so [that we] will not have sporadic things happening all over the place, [and to] consolidate media training.... In the market today ... somebody will ... find money to train people in election [reporting]. The next [group of] people also raise money to train people on elections. You will find the same group of election reporters taking part in all these training programmes [and] learning the same thing over three weeks. So, if these organisations consolidate their training programmes into one, we could have [just] two weeks of training on elections. ”

(**Isaac Massaquoi**, Coordinator; NGO: Community Radio Network, Sierra Leone)

Promote professionalism among journalists

At least three interviewees (Gibril Foday-Musa, Talking Drum Project; Dr Julius Spencer, Premier Media Marketing and an NGO interviewee) felt that an emphasis on promoting professionalism was needed in order to lift the standards of the profession. One NGO respondent attributed the lack of professionalism to an emphasis on earning an income as opposed to applying a trade and felt this needed to change:

“ We want to see real professionals doing their jobs because most of the journalists are not real professionals, its just a means of earning their living so we don't have the level, the standard of journalism that is required in a country. ”

(Valnora Edwin, Director; NGO: Campaign for Good Governance, Sierra Leone)

Recognise the importance of cultural context in project planning

Two interviewees (Isaac Massaquoi of CORNET and Ibrahim Ben Kargbo of SLAJ) stressed the importance of local needs, cultural or otherwise. Some interviewees (Dr Julius Spencer, Ibrahim Ben Kargbo and Isaac Massaquoi) pointed out that knowing the socio-political and cultural life of the country would help in planning media initiatives well. Being aware of the educational and social cultures of Sierra Leone can also help cut costs while developing salient training modules for media practitioners. According to one of these interviewees:

“ If it is going to cost us more by bringing in foreign experts to [train] here... the Internet must be utilized to get some materials and [must be] applied here by our local personnel. We must be aware of cultural and other societal value-differences. This will help us achieve more for less cost. This must be our future approach in developing the Sierra Leone media. ”

(Ibrahim Ben Kargbo, President; Media Support: SLAJ, Sierra Leone)



15. Developing the Environment for Success

15.1 Key factors

All 15 interviewees accepted that there have been remarkable improvements in media development in Sierra Leone over the past five years. Areas of improvement were identified as media plurality and the formation of the Independent Media Commission (IMC).

Media plurality

During the past five years, the radio and newspaper sectors have experienced tremendous growth. Two interviewees (Dr Julius Spencer and Isaac Massaquoi) agreed that there have been great developments in these sectors.

“ There has been a growth... [There are now] many radio stations, many newspapers and many shades of opinion. There are radio stations that [broadcast] 24 hours a day, speaking about issues, playing music, linking people up... In Guinea, which is just next door, there is no community radio station; there is no private radio station. ”

(Isaac Massaquoi, Coordinator; NGO: CORNET, Sierra Leone)

Dr Julius Spencer concurs in saying that:

“ Definitely there has been growth. Growth in quantity and quality [in the media] and we have not yet arrived at where we should be. ”

(Dr Julius Spencer, Managing Director; Media Entrepreneur: Premier Media Marketing, Sierra Leone)

Generally, interviewees believe that the media have opened up a space for democratic debate. Some interviewees regret that the present media plurality was not in operation during the ten-year civil war.

“ For example, if all of these community radio stations were in operation during or before the war, [imagine] what Sierra Leone would look like in terms of accessing information. ”

(**Dr Julius Spencer**, Managing Director; Media Entrepreneur: Premier Media Marketing, Sierra Leone)

IMC formation

The formation of the Independent Media Commission in 2000 was viewed as a key factor in creating a positive environment for media development. In the opinion of Gibril Foday-Musa:

“ The most important change has been in the area of freedom of expression... In the days of the military regimes of 1992, and even the military [Armed Forces Revolutionary Council] AFRC of 1997, and the [All People’s Congress] APC’s 23 years of misrule, journalists were not that bold or free to express their opinions about the government. ”

(**Gibril Foday-Musa**, Information and Training Officer; Analysts: Talking Drum Studios, Sierra Leone)

15.2 Political and economic influences

Economically, Sierra Leone is rich in mineral resources, such as diamonds, bauxite, iron ore, rutile and gold. However, the country is very poor due to the previous mismanagement of these resources and bad governance. Politically, the civil war (1991-2001) meant ten years of instability.

Six of the interviewees (two from NGOs, one government official, one commentator, one lecturer and one civil society coordinator) agreed that the return of democracy in 1996 was the beginning of free media in Sierra Leone. This trend was aided by free and fair elections in 2002, after which several newspapers and radio stations were registered to operate in the country. Francis D.D. Ganda discusses his organisation’s impact on the media:

“ During the past five years [2001-2006] ... there have been remarkable media development activities, which in turn impacted positively on the media sector of the country with the establishment of the Independent Media Commission just a little over five years ago. [It has] ... statutory responsibilities to ... promote a free and pluralistic media throughout Sierra Leone. The media sector is experiencing steady growth and practitioners are demonstrating professionalism. ”

(**Francis D.D. Ganda**, Executive Secretary; Government: IMC, Sierra Leone)

For Valnora Edwin, the privatisation of the media led by the government has helped to open up the media. People began to see the media as a good business venture. Even civil society began to consider the idea of setting up radio and other media outlets.

“ We are also planning to have our own media house in the not too distant future. ”

(**Charles Mambu**, Chairman and Coordinator; Media Support: Civil Society Alternative, Sierra Leone)

In discussing media laws, two interviewees (Betty Foray and Professor Septimus Kaikai) mentioned their impact on the media. Betty Foray suggested that by understanding them, media personnel can work around them. However, these laws are still problematic.

“ Yes, there are bad media laws. But, if you are smart, you will work without being caught in those traps that are embedded in the laws ... like in football you have the offside [rule]. There is always a way to get ... out of it. Those laws are not good, especially the criminal and defamatory laws in the 1965 Public Order Act. ”

(**Betty Foray**, Owner and Managing Editor, *Evening Scoop*, Freetown, Sierra Leone)

However, on a cautionary note, Professor Septimus Kaikai felt that legislative instruments, such as the 1965 Public Order Act that criminalizes libel, slander and sedition, would remain in the law books for the moment.

State support

Ibrahim Ben Kargbo noted that unlike in French-speaking West Africa, governments in English-speaking West Africa do not always help independent media financially. Media development initiatives and setting up individual media houses are private sector initiatives. Apart from ensuring independent media structures and other initiatives abide by current legislation, successive governments in Sierra Leone have tended to look at the independent media as the opposition. Kargbo underscored this point by saying:

“ The government itself must accept us as important participants in the process. They should not always be suspicious; and until they accept us ... we are going to run into difficulties. ”

(**Ibrahim Ben Kargbo**, President; Media Support: SLAJ, Sierra Leone)

Of the 15 interviewees, only three think that the government does not usually support media development initiatives to facilitate respect for human rights and the opening up of society. Olu Richie Awoonor Gordon stated that regarding

“ the issues of bad governance and human rights, we can only rate our government as having scored only 45%. ”

(**Olu Richie Awoonor Gordon**, Editor; Media Practitioner Private Sector; *Peep! Magazine*, Sierra Leone)

However, the government has given support to some individual media development initiatives, depending on the people involved. For example, in 2003 the Community Radio Network (CORNET) argued that imported radio equipment worth several thousand US dollars should not be taxed. The government waived import duty of \$US38,000. Thus, a memorandum of understanding was signed between the project and the Sierra Leone government, leading to a duty waiver concession involving several million leones. From that point of view, one can say that there has been some state support for some media development initiatives over the past five years (Isaac Massaquoi, Coordinator; NGO: CORNET, Sierra Leone).

The government has been generous on a few occasions. For example, it waived a duty payment to the National Revenue Authority (NRA) on radio and printing equipment shipped into the country by journalists or media-related NGOs. It was aware of the high cost of newspaper productions, in terms of newsprint, ink and filming plates. The government was also probably cognizant of the impoverished media's meagre resources. Isaac Massaquoi explains:

“ When the equipment came in ... we went to the government and ... [it] gave a duty waiver... [of] about \$US26,000, a huge sum of money. So that was great and even now we are asking the government to release some equipment that we have at the port... we are negotiating... To that extent, the government has done much, and besides that, they have also supported us... I now sit on the media committee that deals with radio and, together with other people, I have made a lot of suggestions as to how to amend the Independent Media Commission Act so that it takes on board the existence of community radio stations. They are doing that. ”

(Isaac Massaquoi, Coordinator; NGO: CORNET, Sierra Leone)

15.3 Donor communities' role

Three interviewees (Valnora Edwin, Isaac Massaquoi and Ibrahim Ben Kargbo) felt that some media development initiatives had involved local partners. But, external partners tended to bring along tailored programmes, which were usually devoid of the political, cultural and situational requirements of Sierra Leone. The Thomson Foundation brought training programmes in 2003 for personnel from the country's only national broadcaster, the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Service (SLBS), as well as select media personnel from other independent media outlets. Yet, almost as soon as the British tutors left, the broadcasters went back to their old rules. For example, the presidential weekly TV programme *President at Work* was to be cut from 45 minutes to five minutes, according to the British tutors. *“ Who was going to tell the president that his programme was to be reduced to a mere five minutes? ”* asked Isaac Massaquoi.

As an SLBS news editor then, Isaac Massaquoi thought that the British tutors did not take the political sensibility and cultural adherence and respect into consideration when tailoring the programmes. The socio-political culture of the country must be borne in mind when devising initiatives.

“ We should develop our own programmes for which we can take ownership locally, since we are au fait with the cultural and socio-political demands. ”

(Isaac Massaquoi, Coordinator; NGO: CORNET, Sierra Leone)

Five interviewees (Peter Ngutaung, Bamie Baker, Charles Mambu, Sahr Mbayo and an NGO interviewee) believe that donor agencies could be more effective by employing local personnel and extricating themselves from too much government control. One interviewee, who wished to remain anonymous, said:

“ When donors come with their funds and approach government to identify help for the media, they [government] will quickly identify state media as needing help the most. For example, the Thomson Foundation training programme did not achieve much because their first and only target had been government media institutions, institutions that are so censored that it is difficult to make any difference therein. Thank God they changed later and added private independent media [training]. ”

(NGO, Sierra Leone)

Four interviewees (two from NGOs and two journalists) believe that donors could do better if more of the funds were brought to project sites instead of going abroad to pay the technical fees for consultants on the projects.

“ It is far cheaper to train 20 journalists using five local professional and regional human resources from Ghana, Nigeria or The Gambia, compared to bringing in one expert from Asia or the United States to do the same. Also, the insurance demands for expatriates from Asia and the USA might not be same for regional expatriates whose local, cultural and socio-political situation will be similar. ”

(**Charles Mambu**, Chairman and Coordinator; Media Support: Civil Society Alternative, Sierra Leone)

Two NGO interviewees who declined to be named on this topic, admitted that most of the funds for such media projects remain in donor countries. However, Isaac Massaquoi thinks that externally driven media programmes, such as training, would be better left in the hands of local personnel, if they were competent.

Within the past five years, various donor agencies have begun dealing with local partners for media development initiatives. With financial and material help from external donors, some initiatives have involved partnerships with local groups, such as the SLAJ, Media Support Group, Informotrac, C-MET, Talking Drum Studios, CORNET and others. These initiatives have been successful to a large extent.

“ The Talking Drum Studios has been a successful media project in Sierra Leone over the last three years for two major reasons: 1) because of donor confidence and the huge amount of money [that] the organisation receives every year from USAID and others; and 2) because of [our] good performance record. ”

(**Gibril Foday-Musa**, Information and Training Officer; Analysts: Talking Drum Studios, Sierra Leone)

15.4 Other issues influencing the success of media development

Two government interviewees (Professor Septimus Kaikai and Francis D.D. Ganda of the IMC) felt that the growth and influence of the Internet had facilitated the success of media development. The recent availability of Internet cafés in Freetown and journalists' usage of the Internet have opened up opportunities for research and improved the quality of content.

“ Presently, Freetown has many Internet cafés. Students and journalists have been using this opportunity for various research and study. Five years ago, to do research on the Internet or to look for news therein was impossible as very few journalists and students could access the Internet. They were barely available. ”

(**Professor Septimus Kaikai**, Minister; Government: Information and Broadcasting, Sierra Leone)

Professor Kaikai also said that the international community has been demanding respect for human and media rights from the government as part of funding national economic programmes. The government has been sensitive to these demands. This stipulation has invariably required government leniency and reduced tension with journalists when discussing media freedom and the relaxation of the anti-media laws (Isaac Massaquoi, Coordinator; NGO: CORNET, Sierra Leone)

According to Dr Julius Spencer of Premier Media Marketing, greater media plurality is also influencing media development in Sierra Leone. Newer media houses have come up with newer professional practices and style, which led to an improvement in the quality of content. This progress will continue to influence media development in the country, according to Charles Mambu and Betty Foray.

Meanwhile, national media unions are cooperating with the IMC to develop the media standards. These standards have developed considerably by advocating journalists to adhere to ethical standards and improve their style.



16. Future Strategies

16.1 Strategic priorities

This section highlights six interviewees' views on the strategic priorities that a new donor-backed media development initiative would address in Sierra Leone. Dr Julius Spencer and two NGO interviewees felt that private media houses could cooperatively pool their resources in order to assist the development of the media in Sierra Leone. Three other interviewees (a lecturer and two from NGOs) felt that donors could play a part by providing advice. In addition, it was suggested that donors could finance the mergers of various media outlets, such as some newspapers and radio stations, and enable them to operate from a position of professional and technical strength.

Concerning training, five interviewees (two journalists, two from NGOs and one educator) felt that while many donors sponsor various training programmes, there was little communication between parties nor were training organisations aware of what each other were doing. Various organisations, such as the BBC, the Thomson Foundation, the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ) and Talking Drum Studio–Sierra Leone (TDS–SL), often compete for journalist participants, especially when programme dates coincide. They often run the same type, format and style of training. In view of this overlap, five interviewees felt that *training should be harmonized between organisations*.

“ *What will be better for all of those who want to help develop the media through various initiatives, is that they must pool resources together or before doing anything, one could first find out who is doing what, and at what time.* ”

(Valnora Edwin, Director; NGO: Campaign for Good Governance, Sierra Leone)

Moreover, two interviewees were in favour of designing and using *local resources* for training programmes in order to address the present needs of the Sierra Leonean media. Isaac Massaquoi made this point succinctly:

“ *I think what we should do is to develop our own programmes of training as well as media content for which we can take ownership of the programmes locally.* ”

(Isaac Massaquoi, Coordinator; NGO: CORNET, Sierra Leone)

Apart from training, two interviewees (Ibrahim Ben Kargbo and Olu Richie Awoonor Gordon) felt the need for proper infrastructure. During the ten-year war, the media infrastructure in Sierra Leone was destroyed. Newspaper houses were burned down and machines destroyed. There is thus a need to rebuild the infrastructure. Not even the national media union has a suitable place for its members to meet. Some media houses, including newspapers, have no permanent offices. (Ibrahim Ben Kargbo, President; Media Support: Sierra Leone Association of Journalists, Sierra Leone).

Charles Mambu and an NGO interviewee thought that constant monitoring of media development activities by donors and local partners would help.

16.2 Focus of support

Generally speaking, the interviewees agreed that the focus of support for media development initiatives should include:

- more training designed specifically for the needs in Sierra Leone;
- a repeal of anti-media laws;
- providing adequate equipment for media organisations;
- encouraging external and local networking for journalists; and,
- obtaining private investment.

16.2.1 Media frameworks

Two of the 15 interviewees (Charles Mambu and Bamie Baker) appraised the importance of media frameworks. According to Charles Mambu,

“ The media also ensures that there is justice and equality, the true interpretations of the constitution that binds each and every category, irrespective of the political and economic status in the country. ”

(Charles Mambu, Chairman and Coordinator; Media Support: Civil Society Alternative, Sierra Leone)

Bamie Baker believed that *“ there should be changes in the media sector in order to have an effective media ”* and that these changes within the media framework must include encouraging media plurality. (Bamie Baker, Managing Director/Head; Media Entrepreneur: Media Magic Advertising/Betracom, Sierra Leone).

Six interviewees (three journalists, two from NGOs and one educator) stressed the importance of training, financial support and providing infrastructure. One NGO interviewee's comments capture these sentiments in saying that:

“ The greatest contributions [would] be the effective training of media practitioners in the country, the provision of more printing presses and an adequate power supply. If there is a power supply, the newspapers will do their job effectively. If the laws sending journalists to jail are taken away, that too will be an impact in terms of contribution. Journalists should be able to operate freely without...hesitating about what not to write in order not to step on somebody's toes. ”

(NGO, Sierra Leone).

On this issue, another interviewee said:

“ The journalists too must be professional [and] not ... offend others unnecessarily. Let's practise according to the rule of the game, fairness. ”

(**Olu Richie Awoonor Gordon**, Editor; Media Practitioner Private Sector; *Peep! Magazine*, Sierra Leone)

16.2.2 Developing local content

Four interviewees (two from NGOs, one journalist and one civil society coordinator) felt that developing local content must be a goal both for practitioners and donors. One interviewee summarizes this point.

“ Donors have [the] right to demand what the content of the media is and might be before bringing in funds to train, equip and help the media grow. But we, too, must [put] stress on developing the local content of our media, to serve the news and information needs of our people. We should be locally oriented about our information needs. Let us report on ourselves. ”

(**Charles Mambu**, Chairman and Coordinator; Media Support: Civil Society Alternative, Sierra Leone)

As an example of linking training and content, Isaac Massaquoi said that helping to develop local content for the local media can be enhanced through local media personnel taking over training of journalists, as they will be aware of the cultural and political sensibilities of the society.

16.2.3 Supporting growth of independent media

Twelve interviewees (the exceptions being: Bamie Baker, Valnora Edwin and an NGO interviewee) felt that there *was a need to support the growth and development of the independent media* in Sierra Leone. Some think this will help to bring about a more democratic and open society, as well as giving confidence to media workers, even those from the state media. Reflecting on his experience with the media in Sierra Leone, Olu Richie Awoonor Gordon noted the following:

“ Looking back on my own earlier days of practice, I started as a journalist in 1978, and comparing that with the last five years, there has been considerable support for the independent media in this country. We must let this culture continue if we must help democracy grow. No viable democracy [can exist] without a viable independent media. ”

(**Olu Richie Awoonor Gordon**, Editor; Media: *Peep! Magazine*, Sierra Leone)

Three interviewees felt that relaxing the anti-media legislation would help open up and develop the media.

“ All the governments on this side of the Sahara should remove all laws that inhibit media freedom. ”

(**Isaac Massaquoi**, Coordinator; NGO: CORNET, Sierra Leone)

Betty Foray felt that general support must come from the government for the media.

“ I would like to see the government of Sierra Leone embarking on media development projects [and] ... building ... press research centres where journalists can go and get the information they need in all the areas of government. I also want them to create an atmosphere in which journalists can practice without the threat of going to jail. ”

(**Betty Foray**, Owner and Managing Editor; Media Practitioner Public Sector: *Evening Scoop*, Sierra Leone)

Bamie Baker thinks that the anti-media legislative instruments should give way to laws that are more favourable to journalists, as this would allow private investment into the independent media. Otherwise,

“ there will be no form of development as the media will not attract investors, and without investors the business will not grow. ”

(**Bamie Baker**, Managing Director/Head; Media Entrepreneur: Media Magic Advertising/Betracom, Sierra Leone)

16.2.4 Raising standards of journalism

Six of the 15 interviewees (Sahr Mbayo, Peter Ngutaung, Isaac Massaquoi, Dr Julius Spencer, Ibrahim Ben Kargbo and Betty Foray) rated *training* as *having the highest priority among all media development initiatives* listed at the beginning of this section. For the standards of journalism to be raised to an acceptable level in Sierra Leone, training is paramount. For Isaac Massaquoi, there are people who have never had any formal training in media, but today they are editors. When you read their papers, you see that some of these people are making efforts to communicate, or trying to do proper journalism.

“ But because of their academic and professional limitations, their journalism is a bit slanted it's not very straightforward. ”

(**Isaac Massaquoi**, Coordinator; NGO: CORNET, Sierra Leone)

Thus, standards for such people can only be raised through rigorous training. Ibrahim Ben Kargbo thinks that the SLAJ was formed some 30 years ago,

“ deliberately to protect the profession ... and to provide modalities for the training and development of journalism and journalists in Sierra Leone. ”

(**Ibrahim Ben Kargbo**, President; Media Support: SLAJ, Sierra Leone)

In helping to raise the standards of journalism in the country, the government formed the Independent Media Commission (IMC) to help train journalists and advocate engaging in good practice. (Francis D.D. Ganda, Executive Secretary; Government: Independent Media Commission, Sierra Leone).

For Betty Foray, only training can help raise the standards of journalism, with ancillary factors attached.

“ Training! ...If journalists are trained effectively on the job and are provided the right atmosphere to operate... there will be a lot of impact in the media sector in the country. But without ... the necessary equipment and [the] repeal of sections of the Public Order Act that are inimical to press freedom, much is not to be expected. ”

(**Betty Foray**, Owner and Managing Editor; Media Practitioner Public Sector: *Evening Scoop*, Freetown, Sierra Leone)

16.2.5 Other areas

Though all the interviewees appear to support training, advocacy for professionalism and deregulation as areas for the development of media in Sierra Leone, none of them specifically dwelled on any particular factor that can be singled out as against those already mentioned.

16.3 Views on media sector focus

Generally speaking, most interviewees talked about hope and support for better media initiatives in the future with regard to state, public-owned or community media. However, Dr Julius Spencer was more neutral in saying:

“ I don’t know. I wouldn’t know. Time will tell... I think [that] there should be some changes if the media is to develop. If the bad media laws are repealed or revised, then there will be a change. Other than that, I don’t think or expect any positive change. ”

(**Dr Julius Spencer**, Managing Director; Media Entrepreneur: Premier Media Marketing, Sierra Leone)

However, two other interviewees (Isaac Massaquoi and Ibrahim Ben Kargbo) believe that community media has a great future, is growing fast and needs to be supported. They also indicated that state or public media would have to catch up and that support must be accorded through investment in the private media sector. For Ibrahim Ben Kargbo, there is more investment in other countries:

“ For example, if you go to Nigeria or Ghana, there are media investors there, people who are willing to develop the media with their resources. And even in the United States, it is big business. But of course you must provide the environment for people to come and invest. This is one weakness that has created a problem for media development in Sierra Leone, the weakness of having a poor environment in attracting investors. Bad media laws. ”

(**Ibrahim Ben Kargbo**, President; Media Support: SLAJ, Sierra Leone)

With regards to the future of media development initiatives in the country and which media sector will take the lead, Betty Foray thinks radio has already been successful.

“ I don’t know much about the equipment they use, but I think... radio is easier to manage than newspapers and TV stations. ”

(**Betty Foray**, Owner and Managing Editor; Media Practitioner Public Sector: *Evening Scoop*, Sierra Leone)

According to Francis D.D. Ganda,

“ I want to see private media growing, but what about the public broadcaster, the SLBS? This must take the lead. Public media, and not private-interest media, must be paramount. It serves everybody, not just some business interest. ”

(**Francis D.D. Ganda**, Executive Secretary; Government: Independent Media Commission, Sierra Leone)

16.4 Type of support most needed/useful

Six interviewees (two from NGOs, one educator, two journalists and one civil society coordinator) think that the following types of support are the most needed:

- more training for media personnel;
- obtaining the necessary equipment;
- abolishing anti-media laws; and,
- increased investment from the business community.

Training and equipment

The need for training was acknowledged by many interviewees. In fact, all 15 interviews stressed the importance of training in some manner, while 11 interviewees mentioned the importance of training directly. However, as noted below, the priority training is given over other support, such as abolishing restrictive media laws, is debatable. One interviewee in particular commented on the need for training. Betty Foray, owner and managing editor of the *Evening Scoop* noted,

“ training is necessary, but even if we have the best trained journalists in the sub-region, without the necessary equipment, we cannot operate efficiently. So we need computers, electronic equipment, etc., to practice. ”

(**Betty Foray**, Owner and Managing Editor; Media Practitioner Public Sector: *Evening Scoop*, Freetown, Sierra Leone)

Abolishing anti-media laws

Concerning the abolition of media laws, comments of three interviewees are relevant. Overall, there was a feeling that dropping restrictive media laws would improve the investment environment in the country. For Ibrahim Ben Kargbo, the issue of abolishing these laws goes beyond the media. He believes that not even the general laws or investment in the media are favourable in Sierra Leone. He noted that:

“ We are not only talking about the media, we are talking about the laws of the country. If the laws are archaic, backward and not in the interest of the investor, the investor will not come. If the environment is archaic, who will come here to invest \$US2 million in a radio station when there is no electricity supply? When all the other things related to media development are not available, who will come on board? ”

(**Ibrahim Ben Kargbo**, President; Media Support: SLAG, Sierra Leone)

Betty Foray similarly commented that changing these laws would result in increased investment.

“ If only the laws are looked into, I think the atmosphere will attract investors to come and invest in the media in Sierra Leone. But with all these bad laws, I don't see any prospect [of that]. ”

(**Betty Foray**, Owner and Managing Editor; Media Practitioner Public Sector: *Evening Scoop*, Sierra Leone)

Although Isaac Massaquoi agreed that training and equipment are badly needed, he also felt that other hurdles, such as the anti-media laws related to sedition, slander, libel and defamation, must be cleared first.

“ Do we feel that there has been training enough for journalists as reflected in the output? I think [that] the fundamental thing to do is clear up the market, clear the field of mines so that people will be free to do their work effectively, and they will have the ability to produce. ”

(**Isaac Massaquoi**, Coordinator; NGO: CORNET, Sierra Leone)

Increased investment from the business community

Nine interviewees (three from NGOs, three journalists, two advertising and marketing personnel and one educator) think that business concerns and enterprises have a lot more to offer in helping develop the Sierra Leone media. Another four interviewees (two government officials, one NGO and a lecturer) believe that this could compromise the independent role of the media, as business people begin to determine media content. However, two interviewees from NGOs said that they could not foresee how aid from the business community would impact on the media.

Interestingly, nearly all of the interviewees agreed that the involvement of business concerns in running the media is a dangerous issue. Most of the interviewees declined to be quoted for fear of losing their advertisers. Some of these advertisers include big mobile telephone companies which have been giving generators, telephone sets and other equipment to media houses. Yet, some of the interviewees suggested that the influence of such companies on the media could be negative.

16.5 Appropriate organisational framework

Four interviewees think that networking would help greatly. However, only Isaac Massaquoi and Dr Julius Spencer seem to ask for external networking opportunities.

“ Perhaps what will be most useful is for our local journalists to be exposed to other media institutions outside the country... so that they will see their own failings and also perhaps for some people to critique on a constant basis what is published or broadcast in Sierra Leone... These should not be criticisms from [the] government circle or from public officials but from professionals who will look at the work of media practitioners in Sierra Leone. ”

(**Dr Julius Spencer**, Managing Director; Media Entrepreneur: Premier Media Marketing, Sierra Leone)

But Isaac Massaquoi sees the need to network across borders.

“ For instance, [if] some radio stations in Mali were doing programmes on female genital mutilation, which is a very hot topic in this part of West Africa, then we in Sierra Leone could access that programme on a website, download it and adapt it for our own purpose. Even if it was in French, we could translate and broadcast [it]. ”

(**Isaac Massaquoi**, Coordinator; NGO: CORNET, Sierra Leone)

On a related note, Gibril Foday-Musa suggests that Sierra Leone should,

“ train more journalists... broadcasters and producers, and also introduce conflict resolution in the practice of journalism. ”

(**Gibril Foday-Musa**, Information and Training Officer; Analysts: Talking Drum Studios, Sierra Leone)

16.6 Pan-regional versus country-specific initiatives

Only three of the 15 interviewees (Olu Richie Awoonor Gordon, Isaac Massaquoi, and one from an NGO) gave consideration to a type of external media development arrangement that would have a pan-regional focus. In the case of Sierra Leone, a pan-regional initiative would

mean focusing on the issues and needs of the Mano River basin countries of Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea. This arrangement would in turn integrate general and specific issues for the West African media development scenario.

Olu Richie Awoonor Gordon felt that as there were many parallels between countries in Western Africa, a pan-regional focus would be helpful:

“ The media landscape in Sierra Leone is not much different from the one in The Gambia, Nigeria or Ghana, except that political tolerance of [the] media by politicians differs a little bit. But the technological and financial problems are the same in these countries. So one media development initiative in Ghana, or Nigeria, or The Gambia, could be replicated here, or copied for [a] test case implementation. This is why we must seek ways to collaborate and find out which media initiatives are working in the sub regional situations. ”

(**Olu Richie Awoonor Gordon**, Editor; Media Practitioner Private Sector; *Peep! Magazine*, Sierra Leone)

Reflecting on the past glory of Sierra Leone’s media, Olu Richie Awoonor Gordon also believed that regional competence, collaboration and professionalism can still be attained:

“ Sierra Leone was one of the leaders. I believe the first newspaper in West Africa was published in Sierra Leone... what we can do once, we can do again, but [the] general, political and physical infrastructure need to be improved. This is why all journalists must always try to fight to ensure that these things are consolidated. ”

(**Olu Richie Awoonor Gordon**, Editor; Media Practitioner Private Sector: *Peep! Magazine*, Sierra Leone)

Dr Julius Spencer felt that there must be an alignment between what happens in the media development of Sierra Leone and what we use from outside to shape the local media. He believes that Sierra Leonean journalists should experience,

“ ... external exposure and critique. [They] will be the two most important things that will develop the media. ”

(**Dr Julius Spencer**, Managing Director; Media Entrepreneur: Premier Media Marketing, Sierra Leone)

One NGO interviewee said that the establishment of a regional network of sub-Saharan journalists would enable a multi-directional flow of information, thus having a positive impact on media development in Sierra Leone:

“ For example, Sierra Leonean journalists should be able to access information from Liberia, South Africa, Libya and so on, as this is not the case now. If that were done, that would definitely have a great impact in terms of media development. Another impact would be the free flow of information from journalists from these countries to other countries in order to expose them internationally and on issues that are not common in their countries of origin so that when the need arises, the media will be in the position to handle it effectively [and] with vast knowledge. ”

(NGO, Sierra Leone)

16.7 Initiatives relating to developmental content

Participants were not unanimous as to what initiatives relating to content and development goals should be. Charles Mambu thinks that the participation of the civil society in media development initiatives has been limited.

“ So far, we have only been involved in advocacy for media plurality and to scrap the bad laws against media. ”

(**Charles Mambu**, Chairman and Coordinator; Media Support: Civil Society Alternative, Sierra Leone)

Olu Richie Awoonor Gordon agrees that the anti-media laws are restricting investment in media development.

“ The bad laws, such as the libel and sedition laws hanging over journalists, must go. Many people now respect the media and journalists. But, people other than journalists should invest in the media. There should be more intellectual journalism. The Internet should be made cheap for people to access other media in other countries. ...Government should reduce the tariffs on printing and broadcast materials. ”

(**Olu Richie Awoonor Gordon**, Editor; Media Practitioner Private Sector: *Peep!* Magazine, Sierra Leone)

However, seven interviewees agreed that content is the problem for the Sierra Leone media.

“ Journalism should not limit itself to what has happened but to why did it happen and how can we stop it from happening again, especially if it impacts on society badly... [It should] go into things that will prevent conflict. ”

(**Gibril Foday-Musa**, Information and Training Officer; Analysts: Talking Drum Studios, Sierra Leone)

One NGO interviewee said that content of the newspapers, for example, was limited to politics with less information on development and human rights issues.

16.8 Initiatives to develop an independent media

Nine of the 15 interviewees agreed that the independent media has grown over the past five years. However, not all of them appear to know what it would entail to develop an independent media financed by advertising and sponsorship. For example, Charles Mambu thinks that the expansion of media outlets is a welcome advancement. Even his organisation will be growing.

“ We also are planning to have our own media house, with all three major components. ”

(**Charles Mambu**, Chairman and Coordinator; Media Support: Civil Society Alternative, Sierra Leone)

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is one group that finances local media through training, and sometimes advertising in the local publications. At the same time, the UNDP financially supports local partners such as Talking Drum Studios, SLAJ and others who advertise in the local media. Peter Ngutaung discussed the effect that this assistance has had on the quality of media content.

“ Not only have the newspapers improved on their reporting styles, they have also improved on the quality of reporting in everything that has to do with media development. I think we have to work with them closely as they too are supportive of our initiatives. ”

(Peter Ngutaung, Media Officer; NGO: UNDP, Sierra Leone)

However, one interviewee thinks that the laws make it difficult for individual business people to invest in the media and that until the anti-media laws are repealed, growth of the independent media will be impeded.

“ Let the ordinary people begin to invest in the media. Almost all the media in this country are owned and operated by journalists because some people see media investment... as a bad thing, because... the laws that guard the media are bad. Nobody wants to put his money or her money into a place that is prone to trouble [such as] law suits that might close the business. ”

(Olu Richie Awoonor Gordon, Editor; Media Practitioner Private Sector: Peep! Magazine, Sierra Leone)

16.9 The role of media development in the country's democratisation process

All 15 interviewees agreed that the role of the media in Sierra Leone's democratisation process could not be overemphasised.

Dr Julius Spencer took a historical view to substantiate how providing information to citizens during a crisis period has helped the democratic process of the country.

“ As you are aware, there are lots of radio stations in the country and at the community level. With the establishment of these radio stations you can see that the area of information dissemination has increased. Take for example during the coup in 1997 and after the setting up of a mechanism that provided information to the general public. As raw as the information was, people appreciated that source because there was no other means of getting information at that time as journalists were attacked, molested and a few of them were killed. I think we lost 14 media practitioners. ”

(Dr Julius Spencer, Managing Director; Media Entrepreneur: Premier Media Marketing, Sierra Leone)

In addition to helping sustain democracy, the media has also helped to attain peace by providing better sources of information during and after crisis periods. Isaac Massaquoi offers the following example:

“ First of all, it has been the ability of the government to speak to the people... radio was restricted to Freetown alone. This government came to power in 1996, and then we had a coup in 1997. The government went away... came back in 1998 [and] was almost toppled again in 1999. But, when all that subsided a bit... the Department for Information Development came, through the Thomson Foundation and other organisations, and set up about five radio stations in the administrative districts of this country and cut across [the] north, south, east and west... That was fantastic, and the government was suddenly able to pass on information to the people. Some people said that one of the main reasons the war lasted so long was because people didn't know what was happening... What was the government doing? So it was easy for [the] rebels to tell the people lies, to manipulate people... The government did allow tolerance to reign... other people to come and play in the media industry – other players to create space, people to set up their radio stations... So today we can pride ourselves... we have one of the most vibrant media landscapes in the whole of West Africa. ”

(Isaac Massaquoi, Coordinator; NGO: CORNET, Sierra Leone)

Charles Mambu agrees by saying that one of the lasting positive democratic effects of an open media in Sierra Leone has been

“ ensuring access to information by the greater majority of our population. ”

(Charles Mambu, Chairman and Coordinator; Media Support: Civil Society Alternative, Sierra Leone)



17. Summary and Conclusions

The key findings of this study are summarised below.

17.1 Media development: an organisational perspective

- The most relevant changes that occurred during the past five years in Sierra Leone are the results of democracy (free and fair elections in 2002) and establishing the Independent Media Commission Act (IMC) of 2000 to help deregulate the formation of new media outlets.
- The resilience of media practitioners and others fighting for press freedom led to some of the changes.
- Financial support from external partners also opened up the media and helped to develop the sector.
- Training, repealing anti-media laws, supporting an open media market, making information communication technology (ICT) available, deregulation and civil society cooperation with media practitioners are key issues.
- Media development initiatives over the past five years have been remarkable. Interviewees were upbeat about future progress.

17.2 Lessons learned

- Most interviewees had not been directly involved in media development initiatives over the past five years. Two interviewees said that although they were not directly involved as individuals, their organisations have been part of some media development initiatives during the period under review.
- All interviewees agreed that equipment, advocacy and training are now the most important needs of the media in Sierra Leone.

17.3 Developing the environment for success

- Generally, interviewees agreed that there has been considerable improvement in the Sierra Leonean media over the past five years and that democratic tolerance has helped greatly.
- Foreign donors have also helped to open society through their support for local and community media, in particular radio.
- Various anti-media laws, specifically sections of the 1965 Public Order Act criminalising libel, still dampen enthusiasm to invest in the media.
- Support for independent media is still needed. Funders give priority to supporting the state media. Yet, the government does not provide any financial support for independent media apart from occasional imported broadcast materials.
- Some donors have helped to spread financial support for various media. Intermittent funding has sometimes been delayed. Often programmes and objectives are not sufficiently connected. The US government has supported a few fellowships for qualified journalists and helped to provide one external lecturer a year for the Mass Communications Department at Fourah Bay College at the University of Sierra Leone.

17.4 Strategic priorities

- Issues that should be addressed include: Donors' inequitable allocation of funds for media development, poor media infrastructure, anti-media laws, a lack of adequate and sustainable training, the absence of any government financial support for local media and political intolerance.
- Areas to focus on include: The media framework, support for independent media, local content, and training for media practitioners.
- Some interviewees felt that private sector involvement in media would be a positive step. However, the anti-media laws have inhibited private investment. While some interviewees were in favour of private sector media, others supported government and state media dominance. The rest of the interviewees varied from quasi-private and state arrangements to having public participation in media use and development.
- More training for journalists was seen as forming the bulk of the need for media development initiatives.
- Networking between media and media practitioners in the sub-region, especially among the countries of the Mano River basin, are seen as vital.
- Three interviewees advocated regional cooperation and a regional approach to media development issues. Others did not favour the regional approach to media development initiatives while Sierra Leone's media is still undergoing development.
- Better ICT was seen as essential.
- Media practitioners should be exposed to external colleagues to form a better understanding of national and international issues.

Conclusion

The existence of anti-media laws in Sierra Leone appears to be hampering the development of good media practice and professional media personnel. The 1965 Public Order Act was constantly cited, with special reference to section 46, which criminalises libel and sedition.

On the vital issues of media health and media support, it was clear that training, access to ICT, and funding will continue to be the highest priorities for media development initiatives in Sierra Leone. The interviewees felt that greater Internet access for journalists and other citizens and deregulation of the media landscape are necessary for a viable media environment and sustained democracy for Sierra Leone.



18. Appendices

Appendix 1: Interviewees

Bamie Baker, Managing Director/Head; Media Entrepreneur: Media Magic Advertising/
Betacom, Sierra Leone

Valnora Edwin, Director; NGO: Campaign for Good Governance, Sierra Leone

Gibril Foday-Musa, Information and Training Officer; Analyst: Talking Drum Studios,
Sierra Leone

Betty Foray, Owner and Managing Editor; Media Practitioner Public Sector: *Evening Scoop*,
Sierra Leone.

Francis D.D. Ganda, Executive Secretary; Government: Independent Media Commission,
Sierra Leone

Olu Richie Awoonor Gordon, Editor; Media Practitioner Private Sector; *Peep! Magazine*,
Sierra Leone

Professor Septimus Kaikai, Minister; Government: Information and Broadcasting, Sierra
Leone

Ibrahim Ben Kargbo, President; Media Support: Sierra Leone Association of Journalists,
Sierra Leone

Charles Mambu, Chairman and Coordinator; Media Support: Civil Society Alternative, Sierra
Leone

Sahr Mbayo, Chief Trainer; NGO: Initiative For Mobile Training For Community Radio
(Informotrac) Media Development Project, Sierra Leone

Isaac Massaquoi, Coordinator; NGO: Community Radio Network (CORNET), Sierra Leone.
Lecturer; Educator: Mass Communications Department, Fourah Bay College, University of
Sierra Leone, Sierra Leone

Dr Julius Spencer, Managing Director; Media Entrepreneur: Premier Media Marketing, Sierra
Leone, and Educator: Department of Mass Communications, Fourah Bay College,
University of Sierra Leone, Sierra Leone

Peter Ngutaung, Lecturer; Educator: Mass Communications Department, Fourah Bay
College, University of Sierra Leone, Sierra Leone; and Media officer; NGO: United Nations
Development Programme, Sierra Leone

Two NGO interviewees asked not to be named

Appendix 2. Media development projects/activities described in Section 14 of interview

Interviewee name and organisation	Specific media development project: title	Key purpose/ aim of project/ initiative/ or activity	Project time span (dates or length in months/years of project) and status (ongoing etc)	Outcome sought	Target audience	Evaluation method used (if any)	Result of evaluation
Isaac Massaquoi, Coordinator, Community Radio Network Sahr Mbayo, Deputy Director, Informotrac	Training and provision of equipment to community media outlets	The Community Radio Network, CORNET, and the Netherlands Radio (Informotrac) projects provide equipment and training for working and would-be community-based media practitioners	Three year period, start date as November 2004 for Informotrac and 2003 for CORNET. Both projects ongoing	To enhance technological and training capacities of community media	15 community media outlets and some two million radio listeners country wide	Through questionnaires/ personal interviews	Not given
Ibrahim Ben Kargbo, President, Sierra Leone Association of Journalists and related organisations such as	Training and capacity building for local media (provision of computers, etc.)	These provide training, and are involved in advocacy for journalists/change in media laws	Since 2000. Ongoing	To develop the technological and training base of local media	Some 20 newspaper offices, about 200 working journalists	Questionnaires, interviews	Not given
Global Rights, Campaign for Good Governance (CGG), Finance and Development Planning (MFDP), Conciliation Resources (CR), Civil Society Alternative, the Network Movement for Justice and Development (NMJD)	Train journalists through workshops/seminars	These are human rights and governance advocacy NGOs that also intermittently help train journalists to enhance their (CR and CGG) own work.	Since 1998 for CGG, and 2003 for Global Rights, ongoing	Help training journalists through workshops	All media	Person-to-person interviews and questionnaires	Not given
The Sierra Leone Association of Women in the Media (SLAWIM) /Association of Independent Journalists	Advocates for women's media rights and specialised training for practitioners	This is an umbrella body for women journalists in Sierra Leone to help enhance women's participation in the newsroom	Since 1996 for Slawim and since 1999 for AIJ, both ongoing	Help solicit training for women journalists	Women in both print and electronic media	N/A	Not given
Talking Drum Studios (TDS)	Help train electronic media practitioners	Make programmes to be inserted on radios and television.	Since 1999, ongoing	Help solicit finding for training and equipment for media	All media but emphasis on radio	Questionnaires/ interviews	Not given



Sierra Leone

Country Report

Case Study



19. Case Study

CORNET: The community radio network of Sierra Leone

The Community Radio Network (CORNET) of Sierra Leone was formed in December 2003, and is a media umbrella initiative with 11 community radio stations as members. CORNET has a central office in Freetown manned by a coordinator, secretary and finance officer. Its main objectives are:

- ❑ disburse funds equitably to member stations based on need;
- ❑ prepare, produce and distribute programmes to member stations for broadcast;
- ❑ help train the staff of member stations; and
- ❑ advocate for professionalism and the repeal of anti-media laws.

The Open Society Initiative of West Africa (OSIWA) and an affiliate foundation of George Soros' Open Society Initiative (OSI) of New York originally funded CORNET. OSIWA has spent more than \$US1 million on the CORNET project to:

- ❑ pay licence fees for smaller CORNET stations across the country;
- ❑ supply radio and studio equipment to CORNET stations;
- ❑ train CORNET staff on newer broadcast technologies; and,
- ❑ allocate funds for initial expenses.

CORNET has a membership of nine independent community radio stations and two government, rural stations as affiliate members. CORNET has a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with its members. The MOU binds them to broadcast programmes prepared and produced by the central studio in Freetown, while at the same time adapting a local (rural) approach to national issues. The secretariat is mandated to negotiate, to be a source funding and to provide training facilities on behalf of its members. It can also solicit and execute other professional training modules in the name of the entire membership. The coordinator is on the electronics committee of the Independent Media Commission (IMC).

The following are members of CORNET:

- ❑ Voice of Women, Matru Jung (south)
- ❑ Radio Wanje (south)
- ❑ Radio Gbaft-Mile 91 (north)

- Radio Mankneh (north)
- Radio Kolenten-Kambia (north)
- Voice of the Handicapped (Freetown, west)
- Citizen FM Kissy (Freetown, east)
- Radio Peninsular (western rural)
- Eastern radio (east)
- SLBS Makeni (north)
- SLBS Kailahun (east)

Two applications from Waterloo (32 kilometres from Freetown) and Portloko (in the north) have also been submitted for membership. These proposals seek to establish radio stations, although they do not currently have transmitters or studio equipment.

Prior to galvanising individual efforts and funding the operation of radio stations in the country, donors were overwhelmed by innumerable proposals from every radio operator and community for support. These proposals included requests for equipment, training and financial support, as well as engaging in the production of individual radio programmes.

With a central command in Freetown and manned by professionals, CORNET will continue to offer programmes with local and situational content, as well as to avail other stations of the opportunity to share programmes the content of which might be necessary or applicable to other localities. For example, a programme on the fishing habits of citizens in Tombo (50 kilometres from Freetown and home to Radio Peninsular) may only seem suitable for that area. Yet, the same programme could be shared with eastern radio stations, the broadcast territory of which is comprised of diamond- and gold-mining populations. Thus, while programmes on child-mining might be applicable to eastern radio listeners, the same programme could provide useful listening for Radio Kolenten in the north of the country, where diamond mining is just beginning.

On the issue of training, CORNET provides a novel idea where efforts and resources can be maximised for better use. Individual training needs for stations are assessed. Then, a schedule is set for general training that uses the same materials, personnel and resources.

Despite geographical differences, these community radio stations have their own needs and programme content. However, some of the needs and content are similar and interchangeable across regions because of the shared culture, people and national issues. Lastly, in broadcasting for local people, these community radio stations offer programmes in the local languages.

Given the community focus of these stations, local people serve as both newsmakers and news reporters. This method of media development is not encumbered by the usual embellishments of large and overly structured initiatives that can be influenced by donors or bureaucratic tendencies.

Conclusion

The CORNET media project has had a very good impact on the general media landscape in Sierra Leone since 2003. The nine community radio stations and their two affiliate government-owned rural stations offer jobs to more than 70 Sierra Leonean journalists. Through this project, other voices, hitherto silenced by the congested national media, can now be heard. If democracy would include an open society, then one can say the CORNET media development initiative has helped open the democratic discourse.

The above case study is based on the project files of Community Radio network, CORNET-SL, as well as discussions and interviews with the coordinator, Isaac Massaquoi, and some of the community radio operators.

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