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SIERRA LEONE

Three years ago, Sierra Leone organized landmark democratic elections that brought about a peaceful transfer of power from the Sierra Leone People's Party, which governed the country during the turbulent periods of civil war and frequent military coups, to the opposition All People's Congress (APC). The elections, both national and local, were widely acclaimed as free and fair by all significant actors in the international community.

After more than two decades of one-party rule, characterized by tribalism, nepotism, widespread corruption, and political harassment, and culminating in a devastating civil war that destroyed the country's socioeconomic fabric—a war that killed, maimed, and displaced thousands—the elections of 2007 presented a rare opportunity for Sierra Leone to start all over again.

And yet, Sierra Leone continues to rely heavily on donor support for a significant part of its budget. The British government, through its international development agency, DFID, provides support, and the European Union funds major infrastructure projects. Direct foreign investment is insignificant. In recent times the mining sector has received investment from two companies, London Mining and African Minerals, which have acquired iron-ore concessions in the northern province of the country. The unemployment rate is more than 80 percent. Many young people have turned to crime or taken menial jobs in war-torn Iraq.

The media, themselves a major casualty of the war, have grown beyond recognition. On any single day, at least 10 newspapers are on sale in Freetown. The Independent Media Commission (IMC) has registered more than 40 newspapers and has more applications to consider. Radio stations have grown in number, too—mainly community radio stations operating in small rural communities.

Despite this plurality, the newspapers are divided along party lines, and accusations and counter accusations, rather than balanced reporting, are the order of the day. Scrutiny of government is lost in a relentless battle to convince a largely illiterate population of the advantages of one side over another.

As the nation prepares for crucial parliamentary and presidential elections in 2012, many observers are concerned that the media might have to be watched closely. This is an election that Sierra Leone will have to conduct on its own—UN soldiers have been withdrawn, and even civilian personnel have been trimmed drastically. Umaru Fofanah, president of the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists, warned in a speech last year that journalists must not become the “trigger for the next civil conflict in Sierra Leone.”

SIERRA LEONE AT A GLANCE

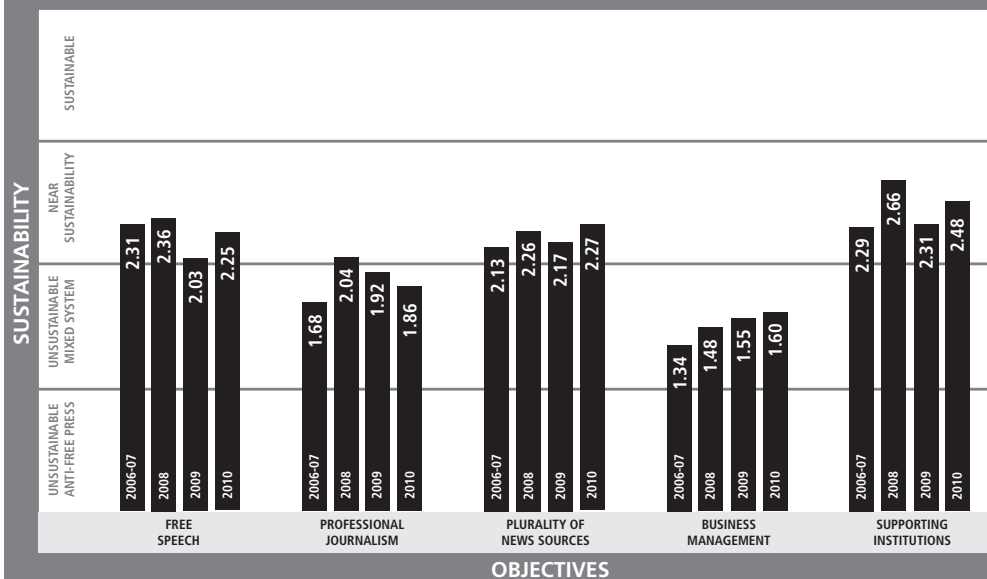
GENERAL

- > **Population:** 5,363,669 (July 2011 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Capital city:** Freetown
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** emne 35%, Mende 31%, Limba 8%, Kono 5%, Krio 2% (descendants of freed Jamaican slaves who were settled in the Freetown area in the late-18th century; also known as Krio), Mandingo 2%, Loko 2%, other 15% (includes refugees from Liberia's recent civil war, and small numbers of Europeans, Lebanese, Pakistanis, and Indians) (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Religions (% of population):** Muslim 60%, Christian 10%, indigenous beliefs 30% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Languages:** English (official, regular use limited to literate minority), Mende (principal vernacular in the south), Temne (principal vernacular in the north), Krio (English-based Creole, spoken by the descendants of freed Jamaican slaves who were settled in the Freetown area, a lingua franca and a first language for 10% of the population but understood by 95%) (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **GNI (2010-Atlas):** \$2.009 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2011)
- > **GNI per capita (2010-PPP):** \$830 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2011)
- > **Literacy rate:** 35.1% (male 46.9%, female 24.4%) (2004 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **President or top authority:** President Ernest Bai Koroma (since 17 September 2007)

MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations:** Print: 39; Radio Stations: 55; Television Stations: 1 (Independent Media Commission)
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** *Awoko* (privately owned), *Concord Times* (privately owned), *Premier News* (privately owned)
- > **Broadcast ratings:** Top three ranked stations: Radio Democracy (privately owned), Capital Radio (privately owned), Radio Mount Aureol (university owned)
- > **News agencies:** Sierra Leone News Agency
- > **Annual advertising revenue in media sector:** N/A
- > **Internet usage:** 14,900 (2009 est., *CIA World Factbook*)

MEDIA SUSTAINABILITY INDEX: SIERRA LEONE



Unsustainable, Anti-Free Press (0-1):

Country does not meet or only minimally meets objectives. Government and laws actively hinder free media development, professionalism is low, and media-industry activity is minimal.

Unsustainable Mixed System (1-2):

Country minimally meets objectives, with segments of the legal system and government opposed to a free media system. Evident progress in free-press advocacy, increased professionalism, and new media businesses may be too recent to judge sustainability.

Near Sustainability (2-3):

Country has progressed in meeting multiple objectives, with legal norms, professionalism, and the business environment supportive of independent media. Advances have survived changes in government and have been codified in law and practice. However, more time may be needed to ensure that change is enduring and that increased professionalism and the media business environment are sustainable.

Sustainable (3-4):

Country has media that are considered generally professional, free, and sustainable, or to be approaching these objectives. Systems supporting independent media have survived multiple governments, economic fluctuations, and changes in public opinion or social conventions.

OBJECTIVE 1: FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Sierra Leone Objective Score: 2.25

The Sierra Leone constitution of 1991 makes free speech a fundamental part of state governance by guaranteeing the freedom to “express views and impart knowledge” in section 25 (1). This, according to lawyer Michael Kanu, is in line with international standards, and all panelists agreed that section (25) 1 of the 1991 constitution should be an adequate guarantee of freedom.

In section 11 of the same constitution, the media are obliged to “uphold the fundamental objectives contained in this constitution and highlight the responsibility and accountability of the government to the people.” Most journalists have used this section to underline the crucial nature of their work in the country’s democratic fabric.

On the other hand, Kanu argues there are other laws on the books that curtail those freedoms. There are common-law provisions contained in part (5) of the Public Order Act of 1965, for example, which successive governments have invoked against the press, particularly those media that dare to criticize the government. Emmanuel Abdulai, of the Society for Democratic Initiatives (SDI), described part (5) of the Public Order Act as a pack of “outdated and archaic laws,” noting that senior government officials have sometimes invoked what he called the “mythical official secrets act” to

Further impacting the press, Abdulai said the “judiciary has positioned itself as an anti-free expression organ.” The panelists were unanimous that when journalists are charged in court, the case is expedited. The public is generally not too bothered when such cases occur, because they tend to think that journalists are normally responsible for their predicament.

deny requests for simple information from journalists, despite the fact that Sierra Leone has no official secrets act.

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Predictions in last year’s MSI that broadcast licensing, which had been considered relatively free of political considerations, is beginning to change proved correct. The panelists changed their opinions on indicator 2 (broadcast licensing) dramatically this year, compared with the past couple of years, when they gave much higher marks to the issue. Many panelists changed their scores in the course of the discussion.

Francis Sowa, the station manager of Radio Mount Aureol, said while he is generally satisfied with the IMC’s procedure for the registration of media organizations, he sees “no need for the Commission (IMC) and the National Telecommunications Commission (NATCOM)—the body that allocates broadcast frequencies—to operate separately.” He expressed concern that the IMC approves radio and television broadcast applications, only for the applications to stall with NATCOM.

Ahmed Kallon, station manager of Eastern Radio, in Kenema, Eastern Sierra Leone, cited the example of an application made by a private radio production NGO, Talking Drum Studio, for a radio license to operate RADIO TORNYA about three years ago. NATCOM still has not granted, despite the fact that the IMC cleared Radio Torny’s application.

More than half of the panel believes that politics is at the root of NATCOM’s actions—a point stressed by panelist Rod Mac-Johnson, noting that he believes that some

LEGAL AND SOCIAL NORMS PROTECT AND PROMOTE FREE SPEECH AND ACCESS TO PUBLIC INFORMATION.

FREE-SPEECH INDICATORS:

- > Legal and social protections of free speech exist and are enforced.
- > Licensing of broadcast media is fair, competitive, and apolitical.
- > Market entry and tax structure for media are fair and comparable to other industries.
- > Crimes against journalists or media outlets are prosecuted vigorously, but occurrences of such crimes are rare.
- > State or public media do not receive preferential legal treatment, and law guarantees editorial independence.
- > Libel is a civil law issue; public officials are held to higher standards, and offended parties must prove falsity and malice.
- > Public information is easily accessible; right of access to information is equally enforced for all media and journalists.
- > Media outlets have unrestricted access to information; this is equally enforced for all media and journalists.
- > Entry into the journalism profession is free, and government imposes no licensing, restrictions, or special rights for journalists.

NATCOM commissioners were “brought in purely for their political leaning.”

Kelvin Lewis, of *Awoko*, criticized the IMC’s “open-door policy” by approving almost all newspaper applications. He said the IMC’s recent decision to deny the Freetown City Council a license to operate a radio station was “definitely political,” because the council is heavily dominated by the ruling APC party.

Panelists expressed concern over a major new development affecting entry onto the media market. They said the new integrated tax structure, called the Goods and Services Tax, or GST, which was controversially introduced about a year ago, is skewed against newspaper companies. Lewis argued that while businesses that service newspaper houses are charging GST, the National Revenue Authority has refused to allow newspaper companies to increase the cover price of newspapers to include the GST charged on newsprints and other such materials.

The panel noted that where other taxes are concerned, journalists are ignored—in other words, they are not forced to pay despite numerous threats made by the authorities. A good number of community radio stations are in arrears on license renewal fees, with both the IMC and NATCOM running two or more years behind, a problem described in last year’s MSI as well.

Sheik Barwoh, of *The Global Times*, made the point that the “government would always go after papers that publish unfavorable stories using taxation as a cover.”

Panelists said that assault is the crime most frequently committed against journalists, and it happens most in times of serious political tension, especially during demonstrations against political authority. Ismeal Koroma, acting secretary general of the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists, mentioned an ongoing case being jointly investigated by his organization and the opposition Sierra Leone People’s Party. The journalists were roughed-up when they went to cover the party’s most recent convention in the southern city of Bo.

Crimes against journalists are not prosecuted vigorously. Panelists mentioned the case of Abdul Charles Mansaray, of Radio Maria, who was arrested in the middle of the night by police officers on bogus allegations of visa fraud. Mansaray was released after three days without charge. A police tribunal concluded their officers acted unlawfully but fined them only ridiculously small sums. According to Abdulai, the general public is always “lukewarm,” and there is hardly any serious public outcry to such cases.

Regarding preferential legal treatment of the public media, the panelists noted that the IMC only recently urged the

state media to register all broadcasting outfits across the country. Unlike other media groups and freelance journalists, state media have unrestricted access to the State House to cover the president’s activities, and there is no system of accreditation for other journalists wanting to cover the State House.

On political interference, the panelists argued that recent incidents have dampened the spirit of many Sierra Leoneans. Sowa cited the rejection of Julius Spencer—nominated by the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists to represent the association on the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC)’s board of trustees—by a ruling-party-dominated parliamentary committee as a “clear indication of political interference.” Additionally, the panelists noted that the recent creation of “an independent national broadcaster” with considerable UN support “is very promising” but they feel that it is “too recent to judge.”

In Sierra Leone, libel is both a civil and a criminal issue, but most authorities who seek court action against journalists ignore the civil route altogether. Nearly all libel cases are brought against journalists by politicians, whether in government or the opposition, and truthfulness is considered a mitigating factor only, not a defense against libel. When it comes to libel cases, journalists have little or no chance against public officials because the judiciary usually sides with the politician or senior civil servant.

The panelists were at a loss as to why the national prosecution service pursues such cases against journalists on behalf of politicians and does not do the same for private citizens—who are responsible for huge legal fees if they want to bring a libel action to court.

Past MSI studies have detailed the difficulties journalists in Sierra Leone face accessing public information. However, in a potentially positive development, the panelists noted the government’s commitment to the enactment of the Freedom of Information bill during the next six months. They feel confident that once it is passed, public information will be relatively easy to access. One of last year’s panelists, though, said that an additional hurdle is the lack of training to give journalists the skills to obtain public information.

There is no restriction in Sierra Leone for any media house wanting to access and publish or rebroadcast international news. There are three international broadcasters relaying such transmissions into Sierra Leone, which many radio stations carry with or without permission: VOA, BBC, and RFI.

The profession is open, and there is no licensing of journalists by government. The only visible restriction is that to be an editor of a newspaper, a journalist is required to be a member of the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists. It takes on

average three months to conclude membership procedures in the organization. What's more, the recently formed Guild of Newspaper Editors is looking to make it a bit more difficult to become an editor. They are planning to introduce academic or professional qualifications.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Sierra Leone Objective Score: 1.86

Panelists noted that, with the increase in the number of newspapers and the corresponding competition for readership and advertising revenue, gains made over the period in terms of adherence to professional standards appear to have faltered.

Alimatu Fofanah, of *The Exclusive*, said, "There is too much one-sided reporting, as many journalists make very little effort to cross-check information." Sowa went further: "They do not only fail to fact-check; they concoct stories, and that is serious among newspapers. Sourcing is a major problem in Sierra Leone journalism...in fact, they encourage subjectivity."

In Sierra Leone, getting experts to talk about many issues is very difficult because of deep mistrust for journalists and the fear they might displease the government. Despite these obstacles, the panel noted that there remains a small group of journalists who practice professionally.

A Code of Ethics has been developed by both the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ) and the IMC. The code is binding on all journalists in Sierra Leone. Despite this, the panel agreed that frequent ethical violations persist,

JOURNALISM MEETS PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS OF QUALITY.

PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM INDICATORS:

- > Reporting is fair, objective, and well sourced.
- > Journalists follow recognized and accepted ethical standards.
- > Journalists and editors do not practice self-censorship.
- > Journalists cover key events and issues.
- > Pay levels for journalists and other media professionals are sufficiently high to discourage corruption.
- > Entertainment programming does not eclipse news and information programming.
- > Technical facilities and equipment for gathering, producing, and distributing news are modern and efficient.
- > Quality niche reporting and programming exists (investigative, economics/business, local, political).

Williette James, a lecturer at Fourah Bay College, said: "There are three kinds of journalists in Sierra Leone: those who know the code and abide by it but do not have a say in what is published; those who flout the code out of ignorance; and those who know the code but still flout its provisions."

judging from the many complaints before the IMC Complaints Committee, which meets weekly.

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James argued, without dissent, that "coasting"—the scheme by which journalists accept money to influence their coverage of a particular event—is widespread. She points the finger at editors who "are most responsible because they are the gatekeepers."

There is no doubt among the panelists that self-censorship exists in newsrooms across the country in order to conform to the dictates of their political and, particularly, business interests. The panel underscored that newspapers in particular have engaged in so-called press wars, attacking each other with scurrilous articles about the others' interest in mobile-phone and mining companies.

Generally, the media in Sierra Leone cover all events, even though access is restricted, depending on the organization one works for. State media enjoy greater access to the government and its agencies than the private media. Preference for the state broadcaster is clear with occasions like the state opening of parliament, the university congregation, and major football matches—while independent journalists are marginalized.

The panelists recorded significant improvement in the working conditions of many reporters and editors over the past year but noted that serious challenges still remain. They said that even though wages are paid in many media houses, they are still low. The average wage is \$30 a month. Fofanah pointed to the pay situation at her publication, *The Exclusive*, one of the biggest-selling tabloids. She said: "I will say it here: I am not paid ... in fact, there are four editors, but only one is paid a proper salary."

Furthermore, there was a consensus among panelists that it is difficult to depend on the news from just one media house to fact-check another, because “they all seem to be reporting the same thing from the same angles with the same emphasis.”

The panel concluded that situations like these encourage corruption and lead to uncontrolled staff attrition.

Many radio stations in Sierra Leone operate a fixed-news bulletin schedule—no 24-hour news radio exists here. It was the consensus of the panel that entertainment programs cover about 60 percent of broadcast time as a way of attracting young listeners who are more into the hip-hop and rap culture now sweeping Sierra Leone.

Almost all radio stations have relatively good on-air digital studio facilities, but the greatest need is field equipment to collect materials, which would enrich programs. Many radio stations have resorted to cheap phone-in, studio-based discussions and syndicated programs produced by NGOs and international production houses to fill airtime. There is also a serious problem with expertise in maintenance and repair of broadcast equipment.

The country has a lot of generalist reporting and hardly any history of real specialized reporting. This is not to say that there haven't been attempts at improvement in the past, and the panelists noted that journalists are beginning to move toward specialization. There is the Parliamentary Journalists Group, and there are journalists specializing in court reporting, mining and extractives, and HIV/AIDS. And the recently formed Network of Development and Economic Reporters enjoys good World Bank country office support. Training was identified as the issue of greatest need for this kind of reporting.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

Sierra Leone Objective Score: 2.27

Media plurality continues to grow; as reported earlier, the IMC has registered more than 40 newspapers and has more applications to consider. Radio stations have grown in number, too—mainly community radio stations operating in small rural communities.

In terms of broadcasting, the broadcast equipment and staff were all transferred to the newly created National State Broadcaster, the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC). The SLBC, with its satellite units in major headquarter towns outside the capital, Freetown, covers almost 80 percent of the country; there is still no station with national coverage.

As far as newspapers are concerned, all are now based in Freetown. *Sweet Bo*, which was started in the second city, Bo, collapsed in less than six months. Newspapers have limited circulation even in Freetown. As for Internet access, there are hundreds of Internet access points for newspapers and general research, but at \$1.00 an hour to use the Internet, the average Sierra Leonean cannot afford it. Thus, rural populations rely on the growing number of community radio stations for news and entertainment.

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There is no record of any government attempt to restrict citizens' access to news from any local or international sources. Foreign broadcasts from VOA, BBC, and RFI are relayed to the country in FM quality 24 hours a day. Foreign newspapers, particularly from the United Kingdom, are available in some stores in Freetown, but they are very expensive. Satellite news service provided by DSTV is available all over the country. Taking income levels into consideration, only upper-middle-class people in urban centers and those in the business of showing English Premiership Football in

MULTIPLE NEWS SOURCES PROVIDE CITIZENS WITH RELIABLE AND OBJECTIVE NEWS.

PLURALITY OF NEWS SOURCES INDICATORS:

- > A plurality of affordable public and private news sources (e.g., print, broadcast, Internet) exists.
- > Citizens' access to domestic or international media is not restricted.
- > State or public media reflect the views of the entire political spectrum, are nonpartisan, and serve the public interest.
- > Independent news agencies gather and distribute news for print and broadcast media.
- > Independent broadcast media produce their own news programs.
- > Transparency of media ownership allows consumers to judge objectivity of news; media ownership is not concentrated in a few conglomerates.
- > A broad spectrum of social interests are reflected and represented in the media, including minority-language information sources.

popular video houses can afford to subscribe to DSTV, paying about \$400 every three months.

The panelists were unanimous that the government has always controlled the state broadcaster, and even though the new SLBC promises a lot, the local and international goodwill it enjoys will soon evaporate if it continues as a mouthpiece of the government alone. James said she notices a “spillover” of reporting patterns from the old SLBS to the new institution, even though she believes that the new station needs time to settle and start winning the confidence of the people.

Barwoh pointed to recent activities marking the third anniversary of President Koroma coming to power, stating that the national television station “is all about the government...they never have time for public-interest programming.” He added that it will never succeed in being a true public-service broadcaster if it continues on this course.

Ahmed Kallon expressed concern that funding will be a crucial issue for the SLBC, adding that the statutory instrument creating the new institution should properly secure the funding of the station. He made the point that “if the SLBC starts looking for money to run itself like commercial broadcasters, the public interest will be affected.”

The Sierra Leone News Agency (SLENA) is now being restructured after falling on hard times because of budgetary constraints and the subsequent departure of trained and qualified staff. A new set of journalists have been appointed to start the rebuilding process. At full strength in the early 1980s and mid-1990s, SLENA stories were mostly used by the state broadcaster free of cost. In addition, there are international news agencies, like Reuters, AP, and AFP, that have local correspondents based in Freetown.

Discussing the question of whether independent media produce their own programs, panelists pointed out that radio stations in Sierra Leone have no choice but to produce their own programs because they have no money to buy expensive programs from private production houses. The quality of such radio programs and the volume depend on the availability of equipment and the capacity of the journalists.

The Cotton Tree News, or CTN—a news service jointly run by Fourah Bay College and the Swiss-based Foundation Hironnelle network—dominates high-quality news production in Sierra Leone. However, the project is facing serious budgetary shortfall and is now actively seeking donor support to run for another two years beginning in January 2011.

Media ownership is becoming a question of major concern to the IMC. At present, a stakeholder committee constituted by the IMC is finalizing guidelines to avoid cross-media

Media in Sierra Leone depend almost entirely on advertising; newspapers receive almost 90 percent of their budget from advertising. The cover price of newspapers hovers around SLL 1,000 (\$0.22). A one-minute radio jingle costs SLL 3,000 (\$0.68).

ownership that is likely to affect diversity in news gathering, processing and packaging, and delivery. While newspaper ownership is diverse, there are people—politicians and businessmen—who fund the setting up of newspapers to achieve their political and business objectives.

In terms of foreign investment, there are no foreign-owned newspapers in Sierra Leone, but Capital Radio is owned by British and Sierra Leonean businesspeople. It operates in Freetown and some parts of the southern region. However, significant grant money has gone into the setting up of community radios from foundations like Open Society Institute for West Africa, OSIWA, Radio Nederland, and the British government.

There is no resistance to the inclusion of any social interest in the media in Sierra Leone. It is only self-censorship and the fear of speaking out that prevents groups like gays and lesbians, for example, from appearing in the media more frequently. Journalists are also wary of reporting on female genital mutilation, particularly in the rural areas, where initiators are powerful and the practice is widespread.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Sierra Leone Objective Score: 1.60

In recent times, efforts are being made in many news organizations to improve the management side of the business from the one-man-show management model of the past to well-structured institutions. Many of them have no resident accountants or human-resource personnel but would normally contract such personnel when needed. The panelists pointed out that there is still “no clear line between the management and editorial boards,” particularly for newspapers.

Many community radios are not run on a sustainable basis, according to the panelists, because of overdependence on foreign grants in light of heavy operational overheads. The stations are located in poor rural communities with no electricity, further complicating their efforts.

The bulk of the journalism graduates have gone into public relations and marketing, at banks and other organizations. Only a handful have gone into the media proper.

Private media are generally financed by advertising revenue and sponsorships. The state broadcaster should be well funded under the new SLBC arrangements, with funding from the UN Peacebuilding Fund, but there are questions about whether the funding will be insulated from government control.

Community media depend on grants and a clutch of agreements with NGOs to advertise their programs in exchange for money or equipment. In a relationship like this, editorial policy is definitely slanted in favor of the NGO.

What started as a vibrant advertising market has suffered some reverses, with many freelance advertisers eating into the market of their better-organized counterparts. The culture of advertising is lacking, according to James. All the advertising agencies are based in Freetown, and the agencies are largely Sierra Leonean.

Media in Sierra Leone depend almost entirely on advertising; newspapers receive almost 90 percent of their budget from advertising. The cover price of newspapers hovers around SLL 1,000 (\$0.22). A one-minute radio jingle costs SLL 3,000 (\$0.68). Newspapers do not make money from the sale of the papers. Circulation is low.

The government gives no money to private media by way of subsidies, the panelists confirmed. As noted in last year's MSI, the IMC has called on the government to support community radio stations in rural areas, but even that has not materialized.

There are no such ratings officially produced in Sierra Leone. All media groups make their own claims about circulation and reach. Previous MSI studies have noted, though, that they believe circulation is very low.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Sierra Leone Objective Score: 2.48

As noted in previous MSI studies, there are still no trade associations for media owners. The Newspaper Publishers Guild, set up a few years ago, has collapsed. In the past, MSI panelists have suggested that a broadcaster's association might be created as a branch of the SLAJ, but there is no progress to report on that front.

The SLAJ is the legally recognized professional body for both broadcast and print journalists. At present, the Women in the Media, Sierra Leone, WIMSAL, the Reporters Union, and the newly resuscitated Guild of Newspaper Editors are all affiliates of SLAJ, seeking the welfare of their members under the banner of the SLAJ. The main effort of the SLAJ, apart from conducting training for young journalists, is advocating for legal reforms and providing legal support for members sued for libel and defamation.

There are very few NGOs actively supporting media in Sierra Leone—most prominent among them is the Society for Democratic Initiatives, which is heavily involved in advocacy

INDEPENDENT MEDIA ARE WELL-MANAGED BUSINESSES, ALLOWING EDITORIAL INDEPENDENCE.

BUSINESS MANAGEMENT INDICATORS:

- > Media outlets and supporting firms operate as efficient, professional, and profit-generating businesses.
- > Media receive revenue from a multitude of sources.
- > Advertising agencies and related industries support an advertising market.
- > Advertising revenue as a percentage of total revenue is in line with accepted standards at commercial outlets.
- > Independent media do not receive government subsidies.
- > Market research is used to formulate strategic plans, enhance advertising revenue, and tailor products to the needs and interests of audiences.
- > Broadcast ratings and circulation figures are reliably and independently produced.

SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS FUNCTION IN THE PROFESSIONAL INTERESTS OF INDEPENDENT MEDIA.

SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS INDICATORS:

- > Trade associations represent the interests of private media owners and provide member services.
- > Professional associations work to protect journalists' rights.
- > NGOs support free speech and independent media.
- > Quality journalism degree programs that provide substantial practical experience exist.
- > Short-term training and in-service training programs allow journalists to upgrade skills or acquire new skills.
- > Sources of newsprint and printing facilities are in private hands, apolitical, and unrestricted.
- > Channels of media distribution (kiosks, transmitters, Internet) are private, apolitical, and unrestricted.

with media-rights issues. Other local and international NGOs launch sporadic projects aimed at supporting the media through training.

Only Fourah Bay College of the University of Sierra Leone offers a journalism degree, through its communications department. A few journalists have been trained abroad on bursaries, and about 30 percent have returned home. The bulk of the journalism graduates have gone into public relations and marketing, at banks and other organizations. Only a handful have gone into the media proper.

The demand for acceptance in the journalism school is high. In the 2010 intake, only 85 candidates made it through the stringent entry process. About one hundred were rejected.

Local and international groups organize short-term training courses, mostly in basic journalism and radio production. All levels of the profession are taken onboard for the trainings. Media managers take very little interest, however, nearly always sending low-level staff in their places. In Sierra Leone, journalists who attend such training programs are paid per-diem and transport allowance; otherwise attendance would be extremely poor.

This is very true in Sierra Leone. But one panelist, Barwoh, recalled a particular worrying incident when he published articles critical of a powerful mining company African Minerals: the management of *Standard Times* stopped printing the paper Barwoh edits, *The Global Times*. Barwoh argued that while the “facilities are in private hands, journalists can still face difficulties depending on how they report on the political and commercial interests of the entrepreneur.”

Newspapers are distributed exclusively by an association of vendors—a well-organized body, panelists agreed. All newspapers are based in Freetown, but the vendors’ association has members across the country. Newspapers are always several hours late to reach rural areas; depending on where you live, it sometimes takes a few days to get your papers.

All radio stations have their own transmitters. The Internet is operated by private businesspeople, and the government makes no effort to control it. There is absolutely no politics in this, said panelists; it is purely business-driven.

List of Panel Participants

Kelvin Lewis, managing editor, *Awoko*, Freetown

Sheikh Bawoh, editor, *Global Times Newspaper*, Freetown

Francis Sowa, station manager, Radio Mount Aureol, Freetown

Michael Kanu, barrister, Freetown

Sarah Rogers, station manager, Voice of Women, Matru Jong

Williette James, lecturer Fourahbay College, Freetown

Betty Sesay, producer, Radio Mankneh, Makeni

Sahr M’Bayo, Initiative for Mobile Training of Community Radio Stations (INFORMOTRAC), Freetown

Ismail Koroma, assistant secretary general, Sierra Leone, Association of Journalists

Alina Kallon, Media Magic Advertisers, Freetown

Rod Mac Johnson, correspondent, Agence France-Presse, Freetown

Emmanuel Saffa Abdulai, director, Society for Democratic Initiative, Freetown

Ahmed Kallon, station manager, Eastern Radio, Kenema

Halimatu Fofanah, journalist, *Exclusive*, Freetown

Moderator and Author

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