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SIERRA LEONE

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Sierra Leone has experienced profound social, economic, and political changes over the past 15 years. After one-party rule, characterized by tribalism, nepotism, corruption, and political harassment, Sierra Leone entered what the UN called Africa's most brutal civil war. During that war (1991-2002), thousands were killed and maimed. Thousands more sought exile in neighboring countries. The country's socio-economic fabric was destroyed.

Sierra Leone relies on donor support for more than half of its expenditures, mainly from the British government and European Union. Direct foreign investment is almost nonexistent. To raise revenue, the government has increased taxes on mostly Asian and Middle Eastern-owned businesses, which have passed the burden to average citizens.

By the end of the war, journalists were divided. They supported the rebels, the government, or remnants of the defeated Sierra Leone army and their allies in the three military juntas that took power during the war. Some journalists fled abroad. High school dropouts became journalists and editors overnight at newspapers begun by unscrupulous politicians to settle scores, obtain appointments, or gain lucrative contracts. The media lost their credibility.

In the years following the war, much was done to restore the image of Sierra Leone journalism. Media institutions were rehabilitated, and personnel were trained. The recent election of a new Sierra Leone Association of Journalists executive, led by local BBC correspondent Umaru Fofana on a platform of change and quality journalism, has signaled hope.

As the MSI shows, the international attention that Sierra Leone received from the biggest-ever UN peacekeeping mission and the support of foreign governments and international organizations led the then-ruling Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) to promote free speech. In most cases, the media became free to write or say anything about the government.

Many newspapers are published daily, and community radio stations have emerged. International interest in the media as a check on government has spurred development and created more news sources. However, journalism has suffered; people have flooded the profession for jobs or to fulfill political agendas. Media owners' business skills are weak, and effective management is almost completely absent, particularly at newspapers. The proprietor plays the role of business manager, editor, reporter, etc. Sierra Leone has only three reasonably well-managed newspapers—*Awoko*, *Concord Times*, and *Standard Times*.

SIERRA LEONE AT A GLANCE

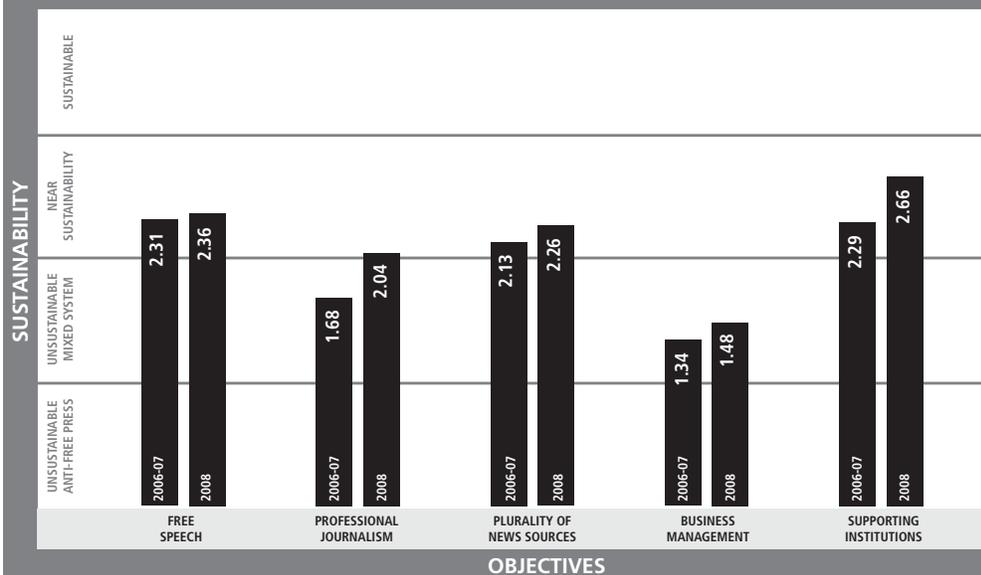
GENERAL

- > **Population:** 6,440,053 (July 2009 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Capital city:** Freetown
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Temne 30%, Mende 30%, Creole 10%, other 30% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Religions (% of population):** Muslim 60%, Christian 10%, indigenous beliefs 30% (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Languages (% of population):** English (official, regular use limited to literate minority), Mende, Temne, Krio (*CIA World Factbook*)
- > **GNI (2007-Atlas):** \$1.537 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2008)
- > **GNI per capita (2007-PPP):** \$660 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2008)
- > **Literacy rate:** 35.1% (male 46.9%, female 24.4%) (2004 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **President or top authority:** President Ernest Bai Koroma (since September 17, 2007)

MEDIA-SPECIFIC

- > **Number of active print outlets, radio stations, television stations:** Print outlets: 35; Radio stations: 49; Television stations: 2
- > **Newspaper circulation statistics:** Top three by circulation: Awoko Newspaper (privately owned), Concord Times, (privately owned), Premier News (privately owned)
- > **Broadcast ratings:** Top three radio 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:** 13,000 (2007 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: 2.36

Most panelists described as “adequate” the provisions guaranteeing free speech in the 1991 constitution of Sierra Leone. They referred to section 25 (1) to justify their position: “Except with his own consent, no person shall be hindered in the enjoyment of his freedom... the said freedom includes the freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart ideas and information without interference, freedom from interference with his correspondence, freedom to own, establish, and operate any medium for the dissemination of information, ideas, and opinions and academic freedoms in institutions of learning.” The panelists also noted section 11 of the same constitution, which seeks to empower media work, saying “the press, radio, and television and other agencies of the mass media shall be free to uphold the fundamental objectives contained in this constitution and to highlight the responsibility and accountability of the government to the people.”

However, it was noted that part (5) of the Public Order Act of 1965 seriously inhibits the freedoms created by the 1991 constitution because it makes it possible for journalists to be jailed if found guilty of defamatory and seditious libel in a trial almost always held by a judge alone. This has led to a long campaign by the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ) to have the “anti-media” provisions in the Public Order Act repealed. The SLAJ has recently gone to the Supreme Court to argue for the repeal of the law on the grounds that it violates section 25 of the 1991 constitution. That case has been adjourned indefinitely. Lawyer Bene Kamara noted: “Most countries today have repealed provisions relating to criminal libel laws, but Sierra Leone, which is said to be democratic, has provisions in the laws that are related to criminal libel laws. That’s problematic.”

Kamara noted that Sierra Leone still maintains such “obsolete” laws on its books and that even though most Sierra Leoneans value free speech, as a consequence of the war, they have not reacted with sufficient outrage when violations against the media occur.

When journalists are taken to court, their only support comes from the SLAJ, which makes it a point of duty to stand by its members in such circumstances.

As to whether the judiciary acts independently in freedom-of-expression matters, Julius Spencer commented first on the SLAJ case that is currently before the court: “The Supreme Court has adjourned the matter *sine die*... the provisions of the constitution stipulate the time in which those matters

should be dealt with. The judiciary is not too independent; that is obvious. The judiciary has a way of side-stepping these issues if they believe that the government is not going to be pleased with whatever position they come up with.” That point is also noted by Sallieu Kamara: “The interference that is coming from the government is structured and organized. When the interest of the government is at stake, even if the government does not make any advances at the judiciary, they will do something to please the government.”

No government registration is required to access the Internet. The panelists could pinpoint no case of the government’s blocking Internet features, such as VOIP.

The Independent Media Commission (IMC) is the statutory body that regulates all branches of media—newspapers, radio, and television. Online journalism is just beginning to take off in Sierra Leone, so there is not much attention in that area.

The panelists agreed that the procedures for licensing are generally fair and competitive, and there is no preferential treatment for either private or public media. Joshua Nicol, a member of the IMC board, noted: “The only problem is the allocation of frequencies. The IMC does not allocate frequency to prospective broadcasters. That is being done by NATCOM, the National Telecommunications Commission. I know of certain situations where up till now NATCOM has yet to allocate frequencies to community radio stations even after the IMC had approved them to go on air.” He commented on the work of the IMC: “Decisions are devoid of

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.

political interference, and if we are to maintain our current independence we have to carry that on. But if we start compromising, there will be no end."

However, it was noted that during the regime of President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, the IMC granted and then withdrew a broadcast license from the OSI West Africa-sponsored West Africa Democracy Radio (WADR) under pressure from the government. Spencer argued that "the fear was that the radio would be used to antagonize Guinea and Liberia."

On the selection of board members, it was unanimously agreed that even though attempts were made to politicize the last selection (May 2008), the process was largely free, and that with more journalists now sitting on the board of the IMC, the government's influence would continue to decrease.

Entry to the media market is open, and the panelists found no particular restrictions, even for non-media businesses. It was noted that previous requirements for legal documents that cost quite a bit of money have been dropped and replaced with a simple business registration form. Kelvin Lewis was particularly concerned about the National Revenue Authority's tax regime as it relates to newspapers. "We are being asked to pay sales tax based on the cover price written on the newspaper," he said. "They think that's the price we sell to vendors; that is not the real price. We sell for less, but we still pay sales tax on what is written on the papers. We seem to have been in a privileged position, but that seems to be vanishing very quickly now with the new NRA [National Revenue Authority] boss. We now operate like any other business." There are no tax breaks. In the mid-1980s, there was an attempt to remove taxes from newsprint, books, and stationery, but that did not last long. Williette John said, "Even when we don't make profits, they ask us for all sorts of receipts. It's not fair."

The panelists agreed that journalists suffer when the interest of the security forces collides with the need for journalists to report stories on police brutality in times of civil demonstration or general police corruption. Lewis noted: "Press photographers are targeted always. They see you everyday; they know you are a journalist. You are properly identified, yet they don't want you to take pictures of the president. They jostle them; they take their camera... almost on a daily basis."

Umaru Fofana said: "I know for sure that journalists who have gone against the [authorities] have been punished, but it's difficult to mention cases on the contrary. The only one is the case of the *Awoko* newspaper." About five years ago, some police officers attacked a journalist from the *Awoko* newspaper who was taking pictures of a police officer brutalizing a civilian in the course of an arrest. The journalist

was attacked, and his camera was confiscated. Fofana said the most senior police officer on the scene was "demoted in rank; that was a one-off thing. But I think generally I can say that [journalists] don't operate under any hostile environment, at least not when they compare it to what used to obtain during the war days." Nonetheless, the *Awoko* newspaper journalist involved, Sylvester Suaray, has since fled the country.

As to whether journalists would normally receive justice in such circumstances, Spencer noted a recent case in which journalists trying to cover a demonstration by opposition supporters outside the State House in Freetown were brutally assaulted and their cameras and mobile phones seized. The matter was widely reported, and a press blackout was ordered by the SLAJ. The government eventually got involved, and the matter was settled, with the journalists receiving compensation. Spencer said journalists have not always taken the right actions to end such impunity: "When such instances occur, the journalists go and accept money. They do not insist on the matter being investigated. So you can't quite blame the authorities."

The Sierra Leone government is in the process of tabling a bill in parliament to make the national broadcaster a proper state-owned institution answerable to no political party but to the people. This has been a long, drawn-out affair, and none of the panelists believe the government is really sincere. As to the present situation of the public broadcaster, Fofana said: "Their independence is as questionable as their efficacy is in tatters... and I am not saying that the minister of information will sit down in his office and literally dictate a news item to the guys at SLBS [the state broadcaster], but tradition is that they will always fall back on them if they did something the government didn't like. So [SLBS staff have] always been extra-careful in terms of ensuring that they don't bite the finger that feeds them."

Koroma mentioned this case in point: "Journalist Fayia Amara, who now writes for the *African Champion* newspaper, was sacked from the SLBS on the authority of the resident minister in the Eastern region a few months back. The journalist reported, unedited, the minister being booed by opposition supporters at a program attended by the president of Sierra Leone, Ernest Bai Koroma." For Spencer, the whole problem around the question of the editorial independence of the SLBS has to do with the government's attitude: "There is still the belief among government officials that the public broadcaster belongs to government and therefore should only put out things that are positive for government. If anything that is not positive goes out, the staff are chastised. It cuts both ways: Those people working in those institutions have learned from experience that they should not touch

anything that is negative to government, and even when they make the effort to do that, they get chastised. They are under strict restrictions, but they have more access, particularly in covering the State House.”

Libel is both civil and criminal in Sierra Leone, but Bene Kamara notes that “people prefer to go criminal because they find it very difficult to institute proceedings under the civil law for libel. You must have between SLL 10 and SLL 15 million (\$3,400–\$5,000) to pay a lawyer in a civil matter; in a criminal matter, the state takes over the prosecution. Journalists who are found guilty are imprisoned. More often than not this happens when the case is between the government and a journalist.”

The burden of proof rests with the prosecution, but Spencer is sure about the attitude of judges in such trials: “Judges are normally biased, and in any matter that has to do with the government, that generally is the position. In terms of judges not being fair, it doesn’t exist or it hasn’t existed [to date]—partly because the judges themselves are afraid that if they rule against the government, they are going to be sacked.” On the crucial question of the state’s taking over the prosecution in a libel matter, he argued: “If you are a private individual, somebody libels you. The likelihood for the state to prosecute the matter is very slim, and even if they prosecute the matter, they will not treat it seriously.”

Journalists can always use justification or fair comment in their defense in defamatory libel cases, but in a seditious libel trial, “truth is no defense,” according to Bene Kamara.

Public information is not easily accessible to journalists, particularly information regarding issues like the award of government contracts or cabinet conclusions on key issues. The consensus of the panelists was that journalists know how to access public information, but the government is not legally bound to give information: there is no access to information law. Media professionals are in the middle of a long advocacy campaign to get the parliament to pass a freedom of information bill drawn up by a civil-society group called the Society for Democratic Initiatives and supported by many other groups, including the SLAJ.

The new All People’s Congress government pledged during its campaign to pass the law. One year into its rule, the issue is still dragging on.

Access to international news is unrestricted, and journalists can get news easily by accessing the Internet. The government does not block access to any international news source. The only problem is that Internet access is expensive; one hour in an Internet café costs SLL 3,000 (\$1). For the average Sierra Leonean, that amount could go toward food.

The only restriction that journalists face in terms of accreditation is that only state media are allowed to cover the State House on a day-to-day basis, while other journalists are called in from time to time. Otherwise, the government has no control over who works as a journalist, except that foreign journalists must be accredited by the Ministry of Information. The government does not influence entry into the journalism school, and journalists are free to organize themselves and fight for their interests.

OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

Sierra Leone Objective Score: 2.04

Williette John was not sure that Sierra Leone journalism had quite turned the corner. Regarding the indicator on balanced and well-sourced reporting, she said, “You have journalists who do not bother to have all sides to a particular story. When they have information, they just go ahead and publish and they then will tell you, ‘All efforts to contact this particular individual proved futile.’” Joshua Nicol agreed, saying that the future of journalism in the country is in very serious jeopardy: “They are influencing the young journalists. It’s a vicious cycle; they come into the system and they get socialized and then they move on to become editors. But the problem lies with the individual newspapers. There are certain newspapers with ethical standards that will not allow their reporters to come in with ‘blood stories,’ as they are normally called. If there were in-house rules and regulations that would reinforce the IMC code of practice, the journalists would follow the rules. Market forces don’t decide the survival of newspapers in Sierra Leone. Because of this unethical behavior, people are afraid of being blackmailed.”

Lewis looked at the issue from another standpoint: “There is a culture of silence, which works against journalists. People refuse to talk even when things are clear and noncontroversial. We have been fighting for some expert voice from the university; they simply don’t want to talk. These are the problems we suffer.”

The SLAJ collaborated with the IMC to draw up the Media Code of Practice for Sierra Leone, which was passed in parliament and is now enforced by the IMC. The code is in broad agreement with other international journalistic codes of practice. However, people in authority always complain about journalists’ side-stepping the ethical code in favor of money. For Koroma, declining journalistic standards can also be credited to the welfare problems affecting journalists in the industry. “Not all reporters are paid,” he said. “I have worked for a newspaper for three years; I don’t think my

name is on a payroll. If I am investigating a story, it happens that the person I am investigating gives me SLL 300,000 to SLL 400,000 (\$100–\$125), which, in fact, is not given to me yearly or monthly. What do you expect me to do? It's to accept the money and forget about the story."

Koroma's point is further supported by Sallieu Kamara, who says: "Reporters expose sources [that] pass documents to them just to make money." On the same issue, Fofana noted: "Sadly, it's most prevalent in the print media. Many of our colleagues have deliberately decided not to respect these ethics."

Regarding self-censorship, for many journalists at the state media, the real concern is losing their jobs and, as described above, they choose to self-censor. As far as safety is concerned as a reason to self-censor, there are very few cases of serious physical harm done to journalists, except during the civil war (1991-2001), when many foreign and local journalists were killed. Spencer agrees that there is "some censorship, depending on the issues. Obviously there are sensitive issues, so as a journalist you have to be careful how you cover them."

In Sierra Leone, one such issue would be doing anything critical about secret societies that are dominant in traditional settings. Paramount chiefs still have the power to banish people from their chiefdoms. In 2007, Chief Rashid Kamanda Bongay of Kakua chiefdom in the Bo district of southern Sierra Leone banished journalist Kelvin Newstead for making "disrespectful remarks" about the then-ruling party, the SLPP, on a satirical program called Mr. Owl, which is broadcast on KISS FM in Bo. The order was rescinded when the SLAJ and other human-rights groups protested.

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).

All of the panelists agreed that by and large journalists cover all key events, such as the general election, parliamentary sessions, big court cases, and so on. The only difficulty is that media accreditation for state visits and such events is sometimes restricted to only a few media houses by the State House Press Office and Ministry of Information. Photographers are generally harassed and taken out of their positions in the name of security. During the war years, journalists had to clear their stories with defense officials before publication.

The national broadcaster is very limited in its coverage, however. It reports mostly on the president and high ministers and is limited to only two major evening bulletins a day that are repeated in the mornings.

The panelists unanimously agreed that pay for journalists is "abysmal" and that the first step in improving the quality of journalism would be to address pay and other concerns of journalists regarding payments into national social security. Spencer says this mirrors the problem in the industry: "Some of them don't even get paid at all. So certainly there is encouragement, in fact, [to engage in] corruption. I do not believe that journalists get paid fair wages, [let alone] good wages."

There is generally a good balance of news and entertainment in newspapers, but entertainment dominates on radio. Most broadcasting stations carry fixed bulletins, and there are no 24-hour news channels. Radio stations have been set up to play music the whole day. The fear is that a lot of news-related programs might drive audiences to other stations.

The panelists agreed that the state of equipment and facilities depends largely on the radio or television station or newspaper in question. It was generally agreed that under the Cotton Tree News (CTN) project, which is jointly operated by the Mass Communication Department of Fourah Bay College in Freetown and Foundation Hironnelle, the university radio station, Radio Mount Aureol, is the best-equipped. It has sophisticated digital studio and field equipment. The worst-equipped is the national broadcaster, SLBS. In terms of news output, Radio Mount Aureol-CTN is the best. The range of issues covered, as well as the quality and depth, are commendable. Community radio stations that have received significant donor funding in recent times are also doing well with equipment and news programs.

There is very little niche reporting in Sierra Leone. There is a radio station (Radio Kalleone) and newspaper (*Kalleone*) dedicated to sports reporting, but even they run endless stories and gossip about the English Premiership, Italian Series A, and Spanish La Liga football downloaded from sport websites.

David Tam-Baryoh said, "Niche reporting is not lucrative in Sierra Leone. Every time you have a big workshop, say on financial reporting or HIV-AIDS, the participants form a group. After a few weeks, it dies." For example, the HIV-AIDS Reporters Association, Association for Journalists on the Extractives, and Journalists Monitoring Rural Development have all had very little impact on those areas of reporting.

OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

Sierra Leone Objective Score: 2.26

Private broadcast organizations are mostly based in Freetown, the capital, and the second city, Bo. Only one newspaper, *Sweet Bo*, is published outside Freetown with very limited circulation.

Nicol said, "Let's take print, for example; most of the newspapers are based in Freetown, and print runs per edition are very limited. In the last survey done, only three or four newspapers were printing, I think, up to 3,000 copies per edition. How can you distribute 3,000 copies per edition throughout the country? As for radio, we don't have anything like a national broadcaster that has national geographic coverage. Community radios do exist, but news is increasingly being dominated by a few people in the communities around whom everything revolves."

Internet access is almost nonexistent outside Freetown. The vast majority of the masses get all local news on radio stations, while the elites buy newspapers. Additionally, all radio stations use SMS text messages for talk shows and news alerts. There are two satellite television stations operating in Sierra Leone, DSTV and GTV. They both charge nearly \$200 for three months after initial installation costs of up to \$500. This puts the service beyond the reach of the average Sierra Leonean.

There is absolutely no restriction on citizens trying to access international news. Foreign news broadcasts from the BBC, VOA, RFI, and DW are freely available on FM frequencies in Freetown. Foreign print editions from Britain, in particular, are available but very expensive. The government has never made any attempt to block foreign news on the Internet.

The panelists were unanimous about the state of play at the state broadcaster. Lewis pointed out: "It goes without saying that the public media propagate the view of the political party in power. They always try to suppress news from the other party." Nicol said: "One fundamental thing that is absent regarding the state broadcaster is the lack of its philosophical underpinnings. What is SLBS out to do? What is its mandate? Nothing exists to tell you what it is about, so it's

left with the director general or the minister of information or the permanent secretary to issue proclamations or policy statements from time to time. I believe the government should take a bold stand. They will not miss anything; they will only miss news from the State House. Close it (SLBS) down and within six to nine months rebrand it and then re-launch the institution."

Spencer painted a very bleak picture: "The station is totally incapacitated; most of the good staff have left. Those who are there are not being given proper guidance, and it's a complete mess."

On the question of the station's doing or not doing educational and cultural programs, David Tam-Baryoh argues that personnel problems loom large: "In 2003, we [Center for Media Education and Technology, C-MET] did research on SLBS. Out of 247 workers, we discovered that only about 35 were real journalists; all the others were sweepers and other people. Also, there could be self-censorship... by not doing this or that program or discouraging the other political party not to share its own view. It's not that anybody is coming from up there [the government] to tell them don't allow it. They [SLBS staff] are conditioning their minds."

There are no independent news agencies in Sierra Leone. The only government-owned agency is in very poor shape and is unable to sustain itself in the face of drastic cuts in government subsidies. No media organization subscribes to established news agencies like Reuters, AP, or AFP.

All broadcast media produce their own news programs, except for a good number of community radio stations that

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.

depend on the NGO Search for Common Ground's Talking Drum Studios' syndicated programs for more than half of their program output. Even then, most of the community stations have no news broadcasts. Sometimes they carry one or two "community news" items. News items on more established stations are usually dominated by press releases from embassies and NGOs.

There was no dissenting view on Spencer's position regarding the ownership of media in Sierra Leone. He said, "There are few cases of shadow ownership; generally the official ownership of media institutions is public information. You can get that easily from the IMC. Obviously there are some media institutions that are being financed by certain individuals or groups or interests, and a lot of the time that is not publicly known. But if you read or listen to them, if you are intelligent, you will know that this one is biased in this way."

Cases of shadow ownership are found mostly at newspapers. Politicians set them up to promote their own image or to settle scores with political opponents. Most newspapers are owned by their editors, who are mostly young university graduates who cannot find jobs in other sectors of the economy.

On the significance of foreign investment in Sierra Leone media, panelists discussed this in the context of support by international donors and NGOs. Sallieu Kamara said: "It's a benefit because now we have several community radio stations around the country. Before the establishment of Eastern radio in Kenema, the state broadcaster [SLBS] did not allow broadcasts in any language outside the region. With community radio, all of that has changed."

Nicol added, "I think the investment has been a benefit to communities; it has opened up the respective communities. People are now participating in democratic debates, although things are not that rosy in terms of sustainability of these media institutions. But within the communities where they exist, people see it as a prized possession."

The panelists unanimously agreed that there is no active resistance to coverage of social issues in the media from any quarter. Sierra Leone has no problems with minority languages or groups. The four major languages—Mende, Temne, Limba, and Krio—plus the official language, English, are used in broadcasts, but other languages have their own share of program time. It may not be equal, but there does not appear to be any deliberate move by either the government or other groups to keep it so. All newspapers try to portray a national character, and they publish in English.

OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Sierra Leone Objective Score: 1.48

The panelists were divided about the management of media institutions as profit-generating businesses. Spencer said: "The majority of media institutions are not being run as proper businesses. They don't have proper accounting systems, let alone accountants. They don't have personnel policies. It's just one individual who's in charge, and he decides what to do. He collects the adverts money and uses it the way he wants... but a few are being run like proper businesses."

John touched on a fundamental issue. She said: "Most media houses cannot divorce management from the editorial staff; they are the same." Lewis was somewhat optimistic: "We are evolving, and we are getting there. I know for sure that a lot of us are now trying to ensure that we run our businesses more professionally and have been trying to bring in professionals for different areas, like accounting, and getting them to control our books."

Public media depend entirely on the government for operating costs, so they are not free of political interference. Private media are financed by multiple sources, but advertising and sponsorships are the most prominent; the diversity of funding sources is not enough to insulate the media from pressure by commercial interests. In Sierra Leone, there are widespread complaints that tariffs charged by mobile-phone companies are too high, but there is no concerted media coverage to get the companies to reverse the situation. Mobile-phone companies have the largest advertising budgets, and no media group wants to annoy them.

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.

Community media are the most susceptible because they operate in remote areas and must spend a lot of money on fuel. The communities that should run these stations are too poor even if they would be willing to do so. Thus, a local patron or interest must step in.

In the past year or so, the advertising business has taken an upward turn. As foreign businesses, including about eight banks from Nigeria and other places, have entered Sierra Leone, advertising agencies based in Nigeria and Ghana have accompanied them to serve their advertising needs. Growth in this area has been dramatic. On a successful radio station, advertisements can take up approximately 30 percent of broadcast time.

Media managers must use as many advertisements as possible to keep their businesses afloat. Such advertisements never really generate profits because payments are usually delayed and public-relations personnel in the commissioning institutions ask for some percentage of money as kickbacks from the media houses. Newspaper subscriptions are rare. Sometimes only offices and schools contract particular vendors to deliver some dailies.

The government does not subsidize private media organizations. It has committed itself only to giving SLL 40 million (\$14,000) to the SLAJ every year since 2006. There is so far no evidence that individual newspapers' and radio/television stations' editorial policies have been influenced as a result.

However, the Community Radio Network (CORNET), a network of 12 community radio stations, has asked the government to provide a subsidy to its members because of their "special circumstances." The panelists argued that those community radio stations play a vital role in the communities in which they operate but are too poor to broadcast for more than eight hours a day. The panelists said the government should not expect any favorable coverage for serving its own people through community radio.

Market research for media is non-existent in Sierra Leone, as is audience and audited circulation measurement. Every radio station estimates its audience based on the number of telephone calls it receives during live phone-ins. Editors assume that they understand the needs of their audience and then tailor programs in that direction. A recent survey done for UNICEF does not seem to have made much difference in new programs and emphasis.

OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

Sierra Leone Objective Score: 2.66

There are no broadcasters' associations. A guild of newspaper editors set up about five years ago exists in name only. Attempts are now being made to set up the Sierra Leone Association of Media Proprietors. The convener, Spencer, proprietor of Premier Media, has arranged at least one meeting to kick-start the process.

Community radio stations belong to two associations, CORNET and the Independent Radio Network. Both are involved in fundraising, training, and joint productions.

There is only one umbrella organization representing all journalists and media workers—the SLAJ. The SLAJ is the main advocate for media freedom and rights in Sierra Leone. It lobbies the government and international bodies, such as media watchdogs, for external lobbying and sometimes for legal support, including paying lawyers' fees for journalists on trial. It also advocates for legal reform of media legislation. When journalists are arrested or jailed, the SLAJ lobbies on their behalf and organizes programs to call attention to the need for media freedom and professionalism.

There are subgroups of the SLAJ, which advocate for the welfare of their members. These include Women in the Media, Sierra Leone and the Sierra Leone Reporters' Union. The Sport Writers' Association of Sierra Leone is the most active of subgroups set up for specific purposes. The activities of the others are very sporadic.

The most prominent NGO in recent times is the Society for Democratic Initiatives (SDI), which works with media houses

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.

to protect freedom of speech and media independence. It is currently involved with the Supreme Court case in which the SLAJ is asking the court to declare the criminal and seditious libel provisions in part 5 of the Public Order Act 1965 null and void. Before the SDI, the C-MET provided equipment and training mainly to newspaper houses in Freetown.

Community Radio Network, the Dutch-sponsored group Initiative for the Mobile Training of Community Radio, and the Independent Radio Network are providing similar services to the many community radio stations operating in rural communities in Sierra Leone. These organizations depend almost entirely on external donors to carry out their projects. Sallieu Kamara expressed a serious concern about their real impact: "Because we always look outward to do these things, it undermines ownership. It is only when we have local ownership of these initiatives that you are able to sustain them."

The foremost media training institution in Sierra Leone is the Mass Communication School of Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone. The school is just over 10 years old and is unable to provide space for all the potential students seeking admission. Lewis expressed criticism of the curriculum. He said: "Theoretically, it's fine; the practical element is a little bit lacking, save for those who are in broadcasting, because they have the facilities of Radio Mount Aureol [the teaching radio station] and Cotton Tree News, a project managed jointly by Foundation Hirondelle and Fourah Bay College. Although they go on internships, the quality of the internships is in doubt; students don't want to study print media. They prefer public relations, advertising, broadcasting."

Spencer said: "The internship program is probably not well-managed, and it needs to be done properly. Institutions need to be accredited. The students should not be left to go and find where they want to go. There should be listed institutions where students can go for internships." John said: "We have a problem with the practical aspects of it; the students who go in for print media would graduate without knowing how to write proper news stories. For television, it's nil... the aspect of editing... we have equipment, but we don't have lecturers to train the students."

As to whether media outlets are satisfied with the graduates of the institution, Tam-Baryoh said: "If you ask me who would you employ—is it the man who has never known anything about media but went and got all the theories? Or the guy who probably was going around media houses and then went to study? I would say somebody who had peeped before into newspaper and radio."

There are many short-term training programs for media personnel throughout the year, and they are open to all. Most are organized by local groups in collaboration with international financial and technical support. The others are done exclusively by international organizations working for foreign governments, such as the Thomson Foundation, which works with the British government on media development in Sierra Leone. Most of the short-term training projects cover basic journalism and radio production; editorial and newspaper management are sometimes part of the package. Mariama Coker said the strategy of using workshops to train must be considered: "Most times when these trainings come, they get into the wrong hands... even at the local level; participants are attracted by the per diem that is paid at the end of the training exercise."

Lewis said the workshops should be scrapped: "What I think is essential is hands-on training. If you want to send a trainer, send the trainer into my office and the trainer works with my staff everyday... that would be effective and would help."

Nicol argued that short-term media training programs must be well structured with local concerns: "Without a home-grown, training-needs assessment, we will have this problem. Because when the trainers come with their money, we will say these are the needs of journalists—industrial reporting, court reporting, for example. So you go according to what we have planned, not what you want to give us. I think the SLAJ or any other institution should be empowered to make such decisions about what is needed in terms of training rather than having this workshop culture."

The panelists unanimously agreed that newsprint is in private hands and the government imposes no restrictions on its sale. Private printing facilities print newspapers, generally without political considerations. However, sometimes when seditious libel trials take place, because even printers and vendors can be held liable, the printers try to impose a form of censorship on certain papers. At least two newspaper houses (*Standard Times* and *Awoko*) now have their own printing facilities from which other papers benefit.

Newspapers are distributed by individual vendors organized into what is called the Newspaper Vendors' Association. There is no government interference. Transmitters are owned and operated by the radios themselves. Internet service providers are run mostly by Nigerian and British business groups. Once they pay their taxes, they operate freely. Ordinary Sierra Leoneans access the service through numerous Internet cafés springing up all over Freetown. The only restriction is the cost of the service.

List of Panel Participants

Mariama Coker, producer, Sky Radio, Freetown

Umaru Fofana, correspondent, BBC, Freetown

Tanu Jalloh, editor, *Concord Times*, Freetown

Phillip Koroma, producer, Eastern Radio, Kenema

Williette John, managing editor, *Salone Times*, Freetown

Sallieu Kamara, director, knowledge management and communications unit, Network Movement for justice and development, Freetown

Bene Kamara, legal practitioner, Freetown

Joshua Nicol, media trainer, Initiative for Mobile Training of Community Radio Stations (INFORMTRAC), Freetown

Mustapha Sesay, assistant secretary general, Sierra Leone Association of Journalists, Freetown

David Tam-Baryoh, executive director, Center for Media Education and Technology, Freetown

Julius Spencer, managing director, Premiere Media Advertising/Public Relations Agency, Freetown

Moderator and Author

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