

*The media do not provide sufficient and objective information that sets an agenda, speaks truth to power, and holds leadership accountable.*



## SIERRA LEONE

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Sierra Leone has struggled with unemployment, drugs and small-arms trafficking, a high illiteracy rate, and endemic poverty; it is also still unstable politically. The media were partly blamed for actions—and inactions—that spurred the civil war that left more than 50,000 Sierra Leoneans dead and some 40,000 more as refugees. As a result, the media continue to suffer extremely low credibility.

A weak and untrained media gave rise to unprofessional and compromised news firms immediately after the war, and many have stubbornly remained. Journalists are largely untrained, operating within a poor market and an environment characterized by repressive laws that criminalize libel and do not embrace the freedom-of-information law. The media do not provide sufficient and objective information that sets an agenda, speaks truth to power, and holds leadership accountable. Though the media are free to uphold the fundamental objectives contained in the 1991 constitution and highlight the responsibility and accountability of the government to the people, the panelists believe the media have thus far failed to do so.

National elections on November 17, 2012, returned the incumbent president, Ernest Bai Koroma of the All People's Congress (APC), to office with a first-round victory at 58 percent of the vote. His nearest challenger, former military ruler Julius Maada Bio of the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP), polled 37 percent, with eight smaller parties sharing the rest of the votes. APC and SLPP were the only two parties to win seats in parliament, with the APC holding a comfortable majority. Bio rejected the result, alleging ballot stuffing and other violations. Foreign observers did not go that far, though the EU noted that the APC used state resources to its advantage, including heightened media coverage.

On September 25, 2012, the Independent Media Commission (IMC) suspended the licenses of three newspapers—the *Awareness Times*, the *Senator*, and the *Independent Observer*—for one month and fined them each SLL 2 million (\$450) because their editorial pages attacked each other after the former two papers dropped support for the SLPP and Bio. The IMC said it took action to stop all three editors from trading obscene language after two warnings. While the immediate cause of the newspapers' suspension appears personal, the underlying cause was political.

The *Independent Observer* is the only newspaper to have complied with the ruling so far. The *Awareness Times* challenged its suspension before the High Court in Freetown, which will rule on the case in January 2013. Its publisher, Sylvia Blyden, departed the paper in December 2012 and announced her imminent return to politics. It is widely expected in Freetown that she will be given a job in the new APC government.

# SIERRA LEONE AT A GLANCE

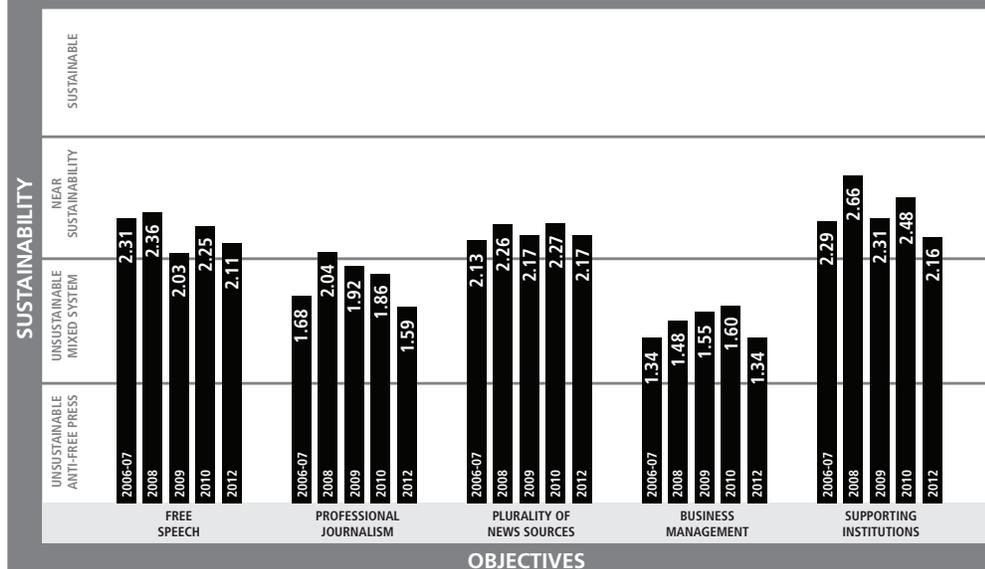
## GENERAL

- > **Population:** 5,485,998 (July 2012 est., *CIA World Factbook*)
- > **Capital city:** Freetown
- > **Ethnic groups (% of population):** Temne 35%, Mende 31%, Limba 8%, Kono 5%, Kriole 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 (2011-Atlas):** \$2.069 billion (World Bank Development Indicators, 2012)
- > **GNI per capita (2011-PPP):** \$850 (World Bank Development Indicators, 2012)
- > **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: 74 registered newspapers, 25 regularly published, 15 dailies; Radio Stations: 42, of which 32 are community radio stations; Television Stations: 2
- > **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: 2.11

The general conclusion of the panelists regarding indicator 1, whether protections of free speech exist and are enforced, was that Sierra Leone has the necessary legal framework—a point buttressed by legal practitioner Abu Bakarr Binneh Kamara. Along with the other panelists, however, he noted that other laws still on the books take away these same rights: “There are legal guarantees enforcing the rights to freedom of expression in the constitution, but they are not justiciable... There are more than 20 laws in the statutes of Sierra Leone that limit freedom of expression. Sections 32 and 33 of the 1996 Public Order Act [POA] address civil defamation and criminal libel. Even the stalled Freedom of Information Law contains more than 40 provisions that will inhibit freedom of expression.”

Kamara commented further that under Section 28 of the POA, “truth and balanced commentary are the only defense to an action brought against journalists.” He noted that 99 percent of cases brought in court were decided in favor of journalists on appeal.

Elias Bangura, editor of the *For Di People* newspaper, disagreed. “I don’t think so. The truth is no defense. Journalists cannot walk free from a case against them by proving that what they feel or say is true. [This is because] independence is lacking in the judiciary,” he said.

#### 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.

*Betty Jessica Milton, of Awoko newspaper, recalled a recent attack on her colleagues. She said, “Police have obtained statements, but because the assailants were military men nothing has been done.”*

BBC reporter Umaru Fofana agreed in part, saying, “Judges only rule against the government in a matter that it is not interested in, meaning judges tend not to favor journalists. They are not even-handed in dealing with matters of freedom of speech.”

The panelists noted that there are two bodies responsible for the issuance of licenses to broadcast organizations. While newspapers require approval only from the IMC, broadcasters also need the National Telecommunications Commission (NATCOM) to approve their use of the spectrum. The standard practice is for the IMC to interview applicants waiting to start radio stations and then make a recommendation to NATCOM.

Williette James, a lecturer in the mass communications department at Fourah Bay College, said the IMC’s registration process is fair but that its fees for broadcast are much higher than those for print (community radio stations pay the equivalent of \$250 for an annual registration fee, while newspapers pay \$50). James also noted that bureaucracy at NATCOM causes delays. Fatmata Kamara-Jalloh, of Africa Young Voices Media Company, noted, “Even after interviews, the issuance of licenses to radio stations is delayed, and sometimes these delays can be politically motivated.” NATCOM staff are government employees and can make things difficult for media that are critical of the government.

Fofana said some media organizations have sidestepped IMC procedures in the past and have gone on the air anyway. He alluded to the case of Star Radio, which was already registered to operate in Freetown and applied to establish other radio stations in the three provincial capitals of Bo (Southern), Kenema (Eastern), and Makeni (Northern). Shortly before that, however, NATCOM had put a moratorium on the issuance of new licenses, and the IMC put the application on hold in compliance with that. However, Star Radio somehow managed to get frequencies for three provincial stations without IMC approval. The IMC has asked NATCOM for clarification; however, the latter has played down the issue, and the IMC is reluctant to damage its relations with NATCOM (one of its funding partners) by pressing the issue publicly.

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The panelists believe that there is no difference in the way taxes are administered for media organizations, compared with other businesses. New media groups enjoy tax breaks, and there is no value-added tax on newsprint; however, radio stations pay duty on equipment brought into the country. Bangura noted, however, that generally newspapers do not pay taxes voluntarily, and the National Revenue Authority (NRA) is reluctant to take on the media.

He said the media must be careful because whenever they “offend tax institutions or the government, the [NRA] will calculate backlog taxes and force them to pay.” The general impression was that media organizations avoid taxes, but the knowledge that the NRA could come after them keeps them in line as far as reporting on the NRA is concerned.

Over the past year, many journalists have been assaulted by police officers or presidential bodyguards. Fofana said “photojournalists are probably the most endangered because they usually have incontrovertible evidence. We have seen a police officer who aided and abetted the killing of journalist Ibrahim Foday, and no action has been brought against him. The head of the police in the southern city of Bo ordered that some journalists be detained because he felt they annoyed the minister of agriculture.”

Betty Jessica Milton, of *Awoko* newspaper, recalled a recent attack on her colleagues. She said, “Police have obtained statements, but because the assailants were military men nothing has been done.” Ismael Koroma, secretary general of the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ), said, “Assault is a major crime against media practitioners, and it is frequent during politicking.” Several cases, including that of Foday—who was attacked and killed while investigating a land dispute in the eastern suburbs of Freetown—and the beating of journalists by presidential guards, have not been addressed. “Police are not doing anything to prosecute those responsible,” Koroma said.

Francis Sowa, station manager of Radio Mount Aureol, agreed that political figures and their supporters often are behind violence against journalists who criticize them. But he also noted, “When there are assaults against journalists, there is always a public outcry. A radio journalist was attacked by a youth leader in the studio in Mile 91 north of the country. The community rallied behind the journalist, and the Independent Radio Network intervened.”

Civil-society activist Sahr Mathias Bendu agreed that the public is always “concerned whenever there is an attack against a journalist. A radio station in Freetown, Voice of the Handicap 96.2 FM, held a program around attacks against journalists, and people complained by calling in to the program.” But he added, “I don’t like journalists taking

money as compensation from their assailants whenever they are attacked and beaten.” On occasion, at least, the police have given such compensation to a journalist assaulted by a police officer.

Lawyer Kamara drew the attention of the panel to a situation where magistrates “ask journalists out of the court premises... sometimes summoning them and chastising them or ordering that they be taken to detention. It is illegal and must be addressed by the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists. A magistrate who felt a particular publication was against him had therefore asked that the journalist be detained.”

Regarding whether the editorial independence of state media is protected, it was noted that the state broadcaster, the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC), has come under a lot of scrutiny during the recent election campaign, as many believe its role was crucial in terms of being able to hold the balance among the parties. The general impression among the panelists was that the current management of the SLBC was unable to deliver impartial coverage of all party activities.

Fofana noted that the deputy station manager for the SLBC in Makeni served on the ruling party’s electoral college, which selects candidates for elections. SLAJ challenged the political neutrality of SLBC, leading the official in question to go on air to criticize SLAJ, saying he sees nothing wrong, as the government pays the salaries of SLBC staff. SLAJ’s recommended board member for the Makeni station, media entrepreneur and panelist Julius Spencer, was rejected “clearly because of political reasons,” Fofana claimed. “The board is compromised. SLBC is permanently attached to the State House, clearly churning out subjective accounts,” he concluded.

Civil-society activist Bendu said his community “did not know how their representative was chosen to the SLBC board. Besides, he is now a politician but has refused to [resign] even when the other civil-society groups have asked him to do so.” Sowa believes the “SLBC has disappointed the drafters of the law that set it up. Section 12 (2) is being breached. Section 10 (2) on independence is being flouted. On the board is a civil-society-movement representative who is now a politician. SLAJ has spoken against that arrangement, but no action has been taken. Their news programs are badly structured, and you see people from outside moderating sensitive programs at the SLBC,” he said.

Esther Kanny Kargbo, deputy station manager of SLBC in Bo, Southern Province, agreed that the station’s “independence is in question. Those of us who work for SLBC in the south take directives from Freetown. We are not allowed to operate autonomously. We are told what to do and what not to do,

yet Freetown is doing what is obviously professionally wrong. We operate in a vacuum. We have only three core staff, five volunteers, and more than 15 people who are not being paid at all. The core staff are underpaid," she said.

Kamara-Jalloh, who worked for the SLBC until 2011 but now works for Africa Young Voices radio, noted, "The deputy director general at SLBC is a retired inspector of primary schools. The recruitment process is not fair for people who are perceived to be sympathizers of the opposition or are critical of the government." Kamara-Jalloh noted that another SLBC board member continues to serve despite vocal support for the ruling party.

Ransford Wright, coordinator of Independent Radio Network, noted that Minister of Information and Communications Ibrahim Ben Kargbo has "a very strong influence on SLBC. Definitely if he had let go...there would have been some independence. SLBC does not pay license and spectrum fees, they pay no tax, yet they charge the highest rates for commercial advertising," he said.

On the question of whether the state media have better access to cover certain government information, Fofana said this is generally the case, though there are "no explicit laws" making it so. He said there is "no provision for the independent press at the State House." Bangura, who is also head of the parliamentary press gallery, noted, "SLBC is the only outlet allowed to cover certain aspects of parliamentary proceedings."

Regarding indicator 6, concerning libel laws, the subject is both a civil and criminal matter. According to lawyer Kamara, for both civil and criminal cases, the burden of proof is on the prosecution, and the standard of proof is proof beyond reasonable doubt.

Many Sierra Leoneans hold the judiciary in very low esteem, believing it is corrupt and serves the executive more often than not. Libel cases normally involve politicians or senior government officials. Ordinary people go to the IMC for redress. So it is not so much a question of whether judges and magistrates are bribed in such matters, but rather how they respond when an official is involved in a libel case. As stated already, they always back the government.

Regarding indicator 8, media outlets are completely free to access and use local and international news and news sources.

On indicator 9, considering entry into the journalism profession, it is free, and there is no attempt to restrict entry to any individual. The SLAJ requires its members to have at least credits in five subjects at the school certificate level,

*Spencer agreed, saying, "Though a media owner, I don't pay enough to keep reporters away from outside influence. Most media houses can't afford to pay real wages. Some don't pay at all."*

but those who do not have such qualifications can still work in the field. The government has no hand in deciding who works as a journalist.

Entry into the main journalism program at the University of Sierra Leone is determined by passing school certificate exams and the departmental entrance exams in English, and the government has no say in that—college regulations dictate it.

## OBJECTIVE 2: PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM

### Sierra Leone Objective Score: 1.59

Considering fairness, objectivity, and sourcing, all journalists in Sierra Leone are bound by the IMC Media Code of Practice, which came into effect in 2000. It was amended in parliament in 2007 and will undergo further amendments in the new parliament. The amendments will seek to increase the fines the IMC can levy and give the organization more teeth to enforce its rulings, which are largely ignored these days. Lecturer James argued, "When the rulings of the IMC are flouted, little or nothing is done." She described IMC fines as a "pittance." Spencer agreed and asked, "When journalists accept 'transport' after covering news conferences, how

## 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).

do you enforce the code? The IMC can't enforce anything against that."

The panelists said they were unaware of any newspapers that have their own individual ethical codes.

Regarding the level of reporting and sourcing, Milton believes that newspapers are "doing the worst. They don't crosscheck stories and fail to bring out facts. There is no proper research about what they write about." Sowa said the quality of reporting "is not all bad, depending on who is concerned. Most people write when they do not know what they write about; they don't consult. Sources are ignored, and perspectives are sold as news. Many stories have no facts; how can journalists fact-check them?"

On the question of consulting experts, Bangura, who said his paper is "perceived as pro-government," noted that many "experts decline newspaper requests for their contributions. They think their opinions don't matter...they just don't believe journalists."

Regarding indicator 2, the panelists noted that enforcing ethical standards is problematic because the IMC is the only organization doing it; with the number of registered newspapers standing at 60, with poorly trained editors and reporters, the problems can only multiply. In addition, individual media houses appear to have abandoned their responsibility to enforce ethical codes on their reporters.

Sowa said, "Enforcing the code is crucial to the survival of the IMC. Copyright issues are flouted and ignored; [there is] no proper credit or referencing in the event where print media cull other people's work...we need to internalize the IMC code."

Kamara-Jalloh emphasized the point that "fines imposed by the IMC are not an effective deterrent because they are lenient. Penalties must be reviewed. Wright believes "no journalists (in Sierra Leone) can say they don't take brown envelopes or cash gifts from people." Spencer said, "Monitoring is impossible internally because like the reporters, some editors are terrible. Paying journalists for coverage is a serious issue...nobody is taking the IMC seriously; therefore, people flout the code with impunity. Prosecuting matters through the court by the IMC is just difficult."

Regarding indicator 3, the panel was unanimous that self-censorship is seen among those media organizations trying to please those in power. The fear of losing jobs is pervasive, and in an economically difficult environment, the panelists said they understand why some journalists self-censor.

The panelists used the situation at the most recent media group in Sierra Leone as an example. Africa Young Voices (AYV) is owned by the head of the public-relations unit of African Minerals, an iron ore mining company. Two journalists were recently suspended from duty at *News Hunters*, one of the newspapers owned by the AYV group of companies. They had refused to publish a story that, according to them, was written in an unprofessional manner by a government media operative.

Spencer described AYV as "a front...it is not a professional establishment, and it should therefore not be surprising that they take such actions against their editors. There are very few media houses that are really truly independent. There is a resounding yes that business interests restrict editors and proprietors." Sowa said AYV "doesn't want to lose the big money they get from African Minerals and therefore are constrained [from writing] anything against them."

Technically, journalists are free to cover any topic they like. Though business interests may interfere in some cases, journalists generally cover security issues, particularly relating to the police. Recently, the media extensively covered the government's purchase of a large quantity of arms and ammunition from China, ostensibly for the police to prepare for possible riot control in the coming elections. The consignment cost almost \$5 million, and it included grenades and heavy-caliber weapons. The issue was in the news for weeks until the government and the International Military Assistance and Training Team (comprising soldiers from Britain, Canada, and the United States) announced that they had transferred the arms to the military.

The only restriction is when journalists try to cover secret societies, which are a key part of Sierra Leone's social construct. In one case in the east, four female journalists were rounded up by a group that carries out female genital mutilation. The journalists were trying to cover the story from the angle of the harm the practice does to women. It took the intervention of local elders and the SLAJ to secure their release. No harm was done to them, as they were themselves members of the society. They could have faced serious consequences had they not been members.

Politicians and the police are reluctant to act against the secret societies because the societies have strong political influence.

Regarding indicator 5, whether pay levels are high enough to discourage corruption, it was agreed that they are not. Many journalists in Sierra Leone must work without pay, and observers say the situation has a direct negative impact on how journalists behave in the field. Spencer agreed, saying, "Though a media owner, I don't pay enough to keep reporters away from outside influence. Most media

houses can't afford to pay real wages. Some don't pay at all." Bangura said one of his reporters once told him that "accepting money is part of the job and [that] his bosses before me took bribes."

Kamara argued, "Whether or not people are well paid, they just get corrupt." He said, "One editor told me that blackmailing is part of the game. I know of eight newspapers that do not pay salaries at all."

Trained journalists graduating from universities tend not to want media jobs, particularly in newspapers. They are mostly found working as public-relations and communications officers in NGOs and some government departments. Others are in banks working as marketing officers.

For indicator 6, panelists said there is more entertainment than news programming on local radio stations. A good number of radio stations can boast only of their breakfast programs and a few sponsorships; for the rest of the day, they play music. Ismael Koroma thinks this is the case because the "capacity to [produce programs] is lacking in media houses to focus on news, so many radio stations carry more entertainment than news."

Wright disagreed slightly, saying, "News and entertainment are balanced on radio. There may be challenges, but radio stations carry news as well as music. Five hours of music and two hours of news is balanced in terms of coverage. It all depends on why the station was set up in the first place. Resources and equipment availability also determine output." Spencer said, "It is cheaper to run entertainment than putting out news."

Regarding indicator 8, assessing the existence of niche reporting, recently many specialist reporting groups have formed, such as Journalists for the Environment, Journalists for Land and Water Resources, and Journalists for Attitudinal and Behavioral Change. They are not well established, however, and they seem to operate in an ad hoc manner. Fofana said, "Niche reporting has a long way to go. A media group on budget advocacy has been set up, but similar groups like Network of Development Reporters are dead just one year after they were set up because funds dried out for such purposes."

Spencer said, "Niche reporting is nonexistent in Sierra Leone because the objective of specialism training is not genuine. NGOs source money to train reporters who only go there to collect money at the end of the training."

The general conclusion among panelists is that the initial steps are encouraging but that more training, money, and organization should be put into the little effort being made, mostly by young journalists.

*Blogs are only getting started now, but Facebook is very popular among young people in the capital and in large urban settlements. This is despite the fact that only about 2 percent of Sierra Leoneans have access to social networking tools.*

### OBJECTIVE 3: PLURALITY OF NEWS

#### Sierra Leone Objective Score: 2.17

Regarding indicator 1, weighing the plurality of sources, it was noted that there are 60 newspapers and 35 radio stations in Sierra Leone. All newspapers are based in Freetown, the capital, and many of them have online editions. The news output on both platforms is quite limited, and not all views are given equal prominence. Political viewpoints are covered, but the ruling party at any one time takes the lion's share of news coverage space and airtime.

Citizens have absolute freedom to choose which news channel to listen to or which one to believe. Blogs are only getting started now, but Facebook is very popular among young people in the capital and in large urban settlements. This is despite the fact that only about 2 percent of Sierra Leoneans have access to social networking tools.

As for indicator 2, there are no government restrictions on citizens' access to international news sources. The BBC World

#### 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.

Service, Radio France International, and Voice of America all have re-broadcast stations in Freetown that run 24 hours.

There are satellite television stations operating with permission from the IMC and NATCOM. People in cities have more access to these facilities than those in rural settlements.

Foreign newspapers, mostly from the United Kingdom, are sold in supermarkets in Freetown. Access to them is restricted only by the inability of many to afford them.

Regarding indicator 3, state media have come under sharp focus since they were supposed to have been transformed into a public-service broadcaster, with the important task of reflecting the cultural, social, and political diversity of Sierra Leone. It was argued that following the closure of two political-party radio stations by the IMC, the new SLBC would operate in such a way that it would fill the information gap created by the closure of the stations.

But Spencer summed up the feeling among the panelists: "I am very disappointed with the SLBC. The radio station does not fill any gap." Fofana argued along the same lines: "Opposition views are not considered, and coverage is limited to the party in power. An anchor was taken off TV simply because he brought critical views to the station. Yes, they spend a lot of time reporting on the president. In a way, private media create some alternative, but they report news only when they take up issues around the government." Koroma said government influence on the SLBC means that "the way they report politics is biased." The SLBC's Kargbo, who works in the opposition-dominated south, agreed that state radio reflects government views but that pressure from militants sometimes pushes the broadcaster to report opposing views.

Regarding indicator 4, there is no independent news agency in Sierra Leone. The Sierra Leone News Agency (SLENA) is government-owned, and it is struggling to stay afloat after it collapsed in the late 1980s, when donor funds ran out. Its news bulletin is available to the general public, and the SLBC is the only news organization using SLENA's news output locally.

Private media organizations do largely produce their own programs, although they also broadcast syndicated programming done by independent producers and NGOs. But the point must be restated that radio stations have very few news programs and fill airtime with music.

Regarding transparency of ownership, Sowa said, "I feel many people do not know who owns certain media stations." Wright described many media organizations operating with a front: "You will have one person as the face, but it

is owned by many people. People hide because they don't want others to know that they have money or that they are political figures."

IMC documents on ownership are open for inspection, but there is the pervasive feeling that the names on those documents are not the true owners. The panelists agreed that owners hide behind these names so that they can exercise political influence via the media without public notice.

Regarding indicator 7, the Sierra Leonean media cover a broad range of issues, including gender, ethnicity, and religion. There is societal resistance to the coverage of sexual orientation, but this is not coming overtly from the government. Gays and lesbians in Sierra Leone do not see their views reflected in the media in a positive sense.

Concerns about coverage of ethnic minorities are comparably minor. From its base in Freetown, the SLBC broadcasts in the official language, English, and Krio, the lingua franca in Freetown and other cities. The SLBC broadcasts in four of the country's additional 16 local languages. The panelists agreed that community media outlets operate without discrimination.

Media organizations carry both local and international news. Radio stations carry news and current-affairs programs mainly from the BBC, which has a presence across the country. Newspapers also publish articles from foreign papers and websites. Radio stations in small cities broadcast in the local languages. But Kamara-Jalloh noted that there are complaints on the street due to SLBC's broadcast in only four local languages.

In Kenema, eastern Sierra Leone, the SLBC station manager, who hailed from the north, suggested that other northern tribes' languages must also be broadcast in the east, but the station's board resisted that. The same situation is taking place in the north, where southeastern tribes are restricted access to the station. Wright said, "Audience also plays a big role in determining the local languages that are broadcast in certain parts of the country. But in Freetown, Krio is dominant because many people understand it."

## OBJECTIVE 4: BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

### Sierra Leone Objective Score: 1.34

Regarding indicator 1, on the efficiency and sustainability of media outlets, newspapers in Sierra Leone are largely owned by journalists who manage to raise enough money to operate them, sometimes from family sources or friends. They

are normally referred to as managing editors. That position gives them both administrative and professional control. Community radio stations in the rural areas were largely set up by NGOs following the end of the war as a way of giving voice to marginalized communities. Panelists felt these two facts explain why efficient business management of media is a serious problem in the country.

Bangura noted, "A lot of media houses are not well managed, including my own. Most of what we do is multiple tasking. I write, edit, and [do] layout," but the financial end of the business is done by others. Spencer said, "There are no real management structures. Anybody does everything. There are a few [media houses] that are managed well."

When they file with the regulatory bodies, radio stations are asked to produce business plans to provide an idea of how they will make themselves sustainable. But Wright said those "business plans are usually presented only to get the radio stations registered or to get loans from banks, and they are abandoned immediately afterward."

On indicator 2, it was noted that media in Sierra Leone receive funding mainly from the following sources: advertising, sponsorships, and donations that come mostly from abroad. The SLBC is funded by the state, as guaranteed by law. The government exercises control over editorial policy through the Ministry of Information and Communication and the Board of Trustees.

Likewise, advertisers have control over the media. A big advertiser, such as Africa Minerals, is spared the media scrutiny

#### 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.

*The act that created the SLBC limits the amount of advertising it can run, but that portion of the act is completely ignored, the unfairness of which Fofana criticized.*

other companies go through. Editorial independence is not guaranteed because of dependence on a few advertisers.

Regarding indicator 3, the advertising market is small and very poorly developed, but media institutions rely heavily on advertising to sustain their operations. Sponsored coverage, whether entertainment or advocacy, takes up a significant portion of broadcast time and space in newspapers.

The act that created the SLBC limits the amount of advertising it can run, but that portion of the act is completely ignored, the unfairness of which Fofana criticized. Foreign advertising agencies are beginning to operate in Sierra Leone. Advertising is done in Freetown and is spreading to the urban centers around the country. The professionalism of agencies that produce advertising materials is questionable; they are mostly unethical and socially imbalanced.

On indicator 4, weighing whether advertising revenue is in line with standards, Bangura said his paper does not "have any policy on advertising. We can run up to 11 pages of the 12-page newspaper... As far as the proprietor is concerned, advertisement in itself is news."

Advertising is the lifeblood of all media institutions. There are no restrictions on where and from whom outlets can seek sponsorship, and it accounts for almost 90 percent of their revenue. Proceeds from newspaper sales are negligible.

On indicator 5, weighing official involvement in advertising, the government gives no subsidies to newspapers, but it does place a lot of advertising. Advertisements are taken out in selected newspapers by public-relations officers who expect to get kickbacks of between 10 and 15 percent. There is no evidence that the government manipulates advertising to control editorial independence.

Regarding indicator 6, there is no tradition of market research in Sierra Leone. The advertising market is small and weak, and no private-sector group has taken on this role. No broadcast ratings are conducted in Sierra Leone.

*Sowa, station manager for Mount Aureol, FBC's teaching radio station, wants to see more results: "While it is true that there are a number of workshops, they are not tailored to the needs of journalists. Organizations receive money from donors and train journalists on climate change, but no impact is created."*

## OBJECTIVE 5: SUPPORTING INSTITUTIONS

### Sierra Leone Objective Score: 2.16

Comparatively speaking, Sierra Leone's supporting institutions are stronger than other aspects of its media sector.

The government recognizes only one organization, the aforementioned SLAJ, as the representative of all journalists. In laws such as the Independent Media Commission Act of 2000, amended in 2007, SLAJ is clearly recognized as such. It is also recognized in the act as setting up the SLBC. SLAJ nominates its members to serve on both institutions' boards.

There are no broadcasters' associations, but for purposes of coordination in undertaking nationwide projects, community radio stations have two networks—the Community Radio Network and the Independent Radio Network.

In 2007, the government cut its \$10,000 operational grant to SLAJ. SLAJ now depends on membership subscriptions and donor support from mainly international organizations and

corporations in Freetown and abroad. There are no legal restrictions on their operations.

SLAJ serves all journalists when it comes to their welfare issues, in cases of labor disputes, when they are under pressure from the government, or in dealing with general training and professional needs. It also lobbies the government and parliament to get legislation passed. SLAJ is currently lobbying for the passage of the Freedom of Information Bill and the repeal of the Criminal and Seditious Libel provisions in the Public Order Act of 1965. So far, it has been unsuccessful. SLAJ is truly representative of its members, now numbering more than 600, with chapters in all regions of the country. More membership applications are being processed.

With the help of the United Nations Integrated Peace-Building Mission in Sierra Leone, the Guild of Editors (Newspapers) has been re-launched. It has been dormant for years and is about to elect an executive to take over from the interim body that has been running the organization. Such organizations are independent of the government and depend largely on the support of international bodies, such as the UN.

There are networks of journalists concerned with various areas of reporting, such as the environment, mining, HIV/AIDS, economy, and business. There are no restrictions on their operations.

At the moment, there is only one NGO with a media development portfolio, the Society for Democratic Initiatives. It advocates for the passage of the Freedom of Information Bill and opposes government interference in media operations. There are no legal restrictions on their operations.

On indicator 4, regarding degree programs, the panel concluded that the advent of the Mass Communications Department at the University of Sierra Leone's Fourah Bay College (FBC) has helped improve journalism a great deal, especially after the war, when journalists were mainly high school graduates, or even dropouts.

Apart from formal training, which covers the theoretical aspects of journalism and media, students gain practical experience. FBC's James, a lecturer in the department, said, "We give hands-on training to students and get them to understand attributions. Our courses are practical, and a modification was made in the structure of the curriculum recently." Teaching tools include a campus-run newspaper and radio station.

But Spencer thinks that despite the university's good work, there is still room to do better. He observed, "Although training in mass communications is good, quality has to be improved."

#### 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.

One issue, as previously mentioned, is whether students actually go into the field. The department was launched in 1993 and has churned out many professionals since then, but relatively few work in mainstream media. Some of them work in the banks, and some serve as public-relations executives and communications specialists with government ministries, departments, and agencies. Others have joined UN missions in and out of the country.

Regarding indicator 5, on the availability of short-term training, many organizations have and continue to set up training sessions on thematic issues. In the process, they create a platform for establishing professional media groups focusing on mining and extractive industries, human-rights reporting, and business reporting.

While the panel agreed that such efforts to capacitate journalists and media practitioners through short-term engagements are augmenting the university's offerings, some members feel the impact has not reached the heart of the problem of unprofessionalism.

Sowa, station manager for Mount Aureol, FBC's teaching radio station, wants to see more results: "While it is true that there are a number of workshops, they are not tailored to the needs of journalists. Organizations receive money from donors and train journalists on climate change, but no impact is created. Media professionals accept the offer with pay to train journalists even when they know that their services are not worth it."

Regarding indicator 6, the panel agreed that a lack of printing facilities is a general problem for the newspaper industry in Sierra Leone. Presses are few and far between in a country that has seen a ballooning number of newspapers in the past four years.

Spencer, whose firm Premier Media operates a printing press among its holdings, said, "There are problems with printing facilities. Some are scared not to fall foul of the criminal libel law, which does not exonerate printers from a crime allegedly committed by the newspaper that was printed by a printer."

Some members argue that there are no open political restrictions to the setting up of radio stations and newspapers, and the laws generally promote media plurality. As previously noted, however, some of them also observe that some provisions in the constitution amount to restriction in the way they regulate free speech.

The BBC's Fofana said, "Even vendors who sell and distribute newspapers could be liable in the case of libel brought against a newspaper he sells. Distribution is also a problem because vendors in the provinces are not reliable."

## List of Panel Participants

**Betty Milton**, senior reporter, *Awoko*, Freetown

**Umaru Fofana**, correspondent, BBC, Freetown

**Elias Bangura**, editor, *For Di People*, Freetown

**Tanu Jalloh**, business editor, *Politico*, Freetown

**Therese Mattu Munda**, reporter, Kiss 104 FM, Bo

**Fatmata Jalloh**, media manager, Africa Young Voices FM 101.6, Freetown

**Sahr Bendu**, director of communications and outreach, Foundation for Democratic Initiative and Development, Freetown

**Solomon Jamiru**, lawyer, Freetown

**James Tamba Lebbie**, lecturer, Mass Communications Department, Fourah Bay College, Freetown

**Sayoh Kamara**, public affairs secretary, Sierra Leone Association of Journalists, Freetown

**Bamidele Bailey**, advertising manager, SL-McCann, Freetown

**Ransford Wright**, media trainer, Independent Radio Network, Freetown

## Moderator and Author

**Isaac Massaquoi**, head of the Mass Communication Unit, Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone, Freetown

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