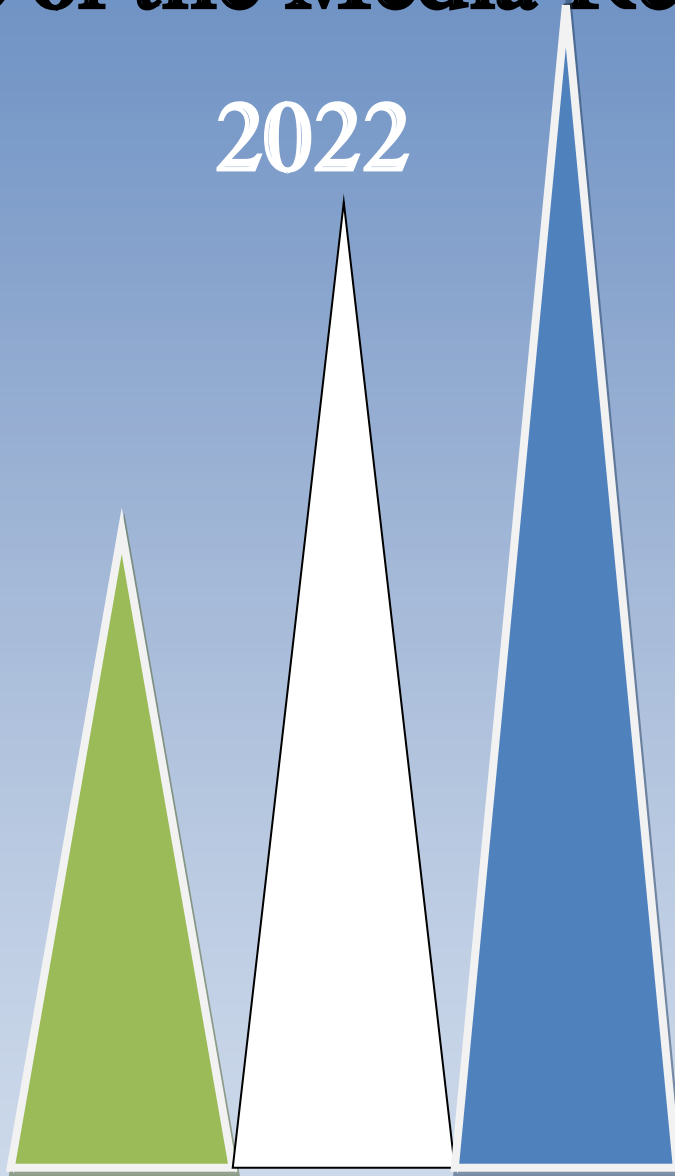


# Sierra Leone

## State of the Media Report

2022



**Sierra Leone**

**State of the Media Report**

**2022**

**IBRAHIM SEAGA SHAW (PhD)**

**Editor**

**FRANCIS SOWA (PhD)**

**Assistant Editor**

**A PUBLICATION OF THE MEDIA REFORM  
COORDINATING GROUP OF SIERRA LEONE  
(MRCG-SL)**

**Led by**

**The Faculty of Communication, Media and Information  
Studies, Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone**

**With Support From**

**NED**

## State of the Media Report 2022

Copyright © 2022 Media Reform Coordinating Group-Sierra Leone  
(MRCG-SL) No. 145 Circular Road, <sup>SEP</sup>Freetown, SIERRA LEONE

Edited by: Ibrahim Seaga Shaw (PhD) and Francis Sowa (PhD)

Authors: Ibrahim Seaga Shaw (PhD), Francis Sowa (PhD), Khalil Kallon,  
Rosaline K. Amara, Chernor M. Jalloh, Isaac Massaqui (PhD), Victor  
Massaquoi, PhD and Sheku Putka Kamara.

## TABLE OF CONTENT

TABLE OF CONTENT .....	4
FOREWORD .....	5
INTRODUCTION .....	7
PART ONE: FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, FREEDOM OF INFORMATION AND MEDIA FREEDOM .....	
14	
1. Media Ecosystem in Sierra Leone: Operations, Regulations, Freedom and Capacity Building in 2022.....	14
Abstract.....	14
1.1 Introduction.....	14
1.2 Political economy of the media.....	14
1.3 The media landscape – the numbers.....	15
1.4 Media laws, regulations and freedom.....	16
1.5 Freedom of Expression and of the Press: Cases and Actions Taken.....	17
1.6 Internet Freedom and Digital Rights.....	24
1.7 Ownership, governance and management.....	25
1.8 National Media Viability and Investment Conference.....	26
1.9 Key Activities of national institutions and media organisations.....	26
1.10 Conclusion .....	29
2. The Quest for Media Freedom in Sierra Leone - Challenges and Opportunities .....	30
3. The Media After the Repeal of the Criminal and Seditious Libel Laws: Taking Advantage of the New Democratic Opening in Sierra Leone .....	39
4. How public authorities complied with the RAI Law in Sierra Leone in 2022? .....	47
PART TWO: MEDIA AND GOVERNANCE.....	
61	
5. The Starving Media in Sierra Leone: The Enigma of the Community Radio Stations.....	61
6. The contributions of the Africa Young Voices Television (AYV TV) and Radio Democracy FM 98.1 in the fight against corruption in Sierra Leone .....	68

## FOREWORD

### State of the Media Report: **An Academic & Professional Interrogation of Critical Questions in Sierra Leone (2022)**

My almost five years as Board Chairman of the MRCG has been an enthralling one – full of technical media work, exploration of potential media investment opportunities (to reduce media poverty), guiding professional trainings and expanding knowledge production - a key element in free expression.

The central philosophy of the MRCG is to strengthen quality journalism, promote media initiatives, coordinate media development and monitor the subtleties among the media, state and non-state actors. This publication provides the latest contribution in a line of fundamental knowledge production, from the Introduction to the last article. The MRCG takes media freedom, media development and, media safety and protection very seriously and their criticality are evidential.

This edition of the State of the Media Report (2022, Sierra Leone) has a central question: How do we expand opportunities for continued free expression and deepening our democratic participation, principally, in the rural areas of Sierra Leone?

The State of the Media Report initiative, a major activity of the MRCG, in the last five years, seeks to engage and critically interrogate specific media subjects and pliant variables, contributing to the teaching, practising and researching of media activities and texts from global and national perspectives, while at the same time, sharing international best practices.

Inherent in these researched and published works, are the challenges of community radio stations, the nuances of media performance and the distinctions of journalist safety. These works would strive for and would serve as a nationally and internationally relevant material for collegiate teaching and research for policy design purposes. Part of it responds to emerging global problem of safety, protection and professional conduct of journalists.

After reading, one would quickly recognise that the number and quality of the articles, in this publication, explain their robustness, analytical depth and diversity of views within the media setting.

As an Advisory Board, we would like to extend our gratitude to our funder (NED), SLAJ, members of MRCG, and media practitioners, contributors, partners and the Government of Sierra Leone for

the countless tangible efforts to create a free media space to operate while guaranteeing the safety of journalists, especially, women journalists.

*Victor Massaquoi, PhD*

*Chairman, MRCG-SL Advisory Board*

## INTRODUCTION

### State of the media: Freedom, Responsibility, and Sustainable Development

By

*Ibrahim Seaga Shaw (Ph.D.)*

*Chairman and Information Commissioner, Right to Access Information and Communication (RAIC),*

*Chairman of the Graduate Committee of the Faculty of Communication,*

*Media and Information Studies (CMIS), FBC, USL*

[Ibrahim.shaw@raic.gov.sl](mailto:Ibrahim.shaw@raic.gov.sl) web site [www.ibrahimseagashaw.com](http://www.ibrahimseagashaw.com)

There is a plethora of research that supports the view that freedom of expression and media freedom are the *sine qua non* for the realization of human rights and democracy in any society. It is also widely believed that media freedom and human rights are mutually supportive as it is almost mission impossible for one of them to be realized without the other. Thus, while media platforms serve as important checks on power and as indispensable bulwarks of human rights protection, they also rely on the protection provided by human rights to effectively play that role. Public authorities can only be called to order for their actions in promoting and protecting the human rights of their people if there is freedom of expression.

Free speech is not necessarily provided by government, but it is a fundamental human right, which owes its origin to life itself, as given by God—just as former US president Thomas Jefferson once declared: 'the God that gave us Life gave us Liberty at the same time (Verghese, 1998:31). The first formal request

for freedom of speech in recorded history was made by Sir Thomas More in front of the English Parliament and of King Henry VIII on 18 April 1523. However, one of the earliest and most striking defenses of freedom of expression came in 1644 when John Milton published his *Aeropatica* newsletter in defiance of a parliamentary attempt to block the publication of what was deemed a 'seditious, unreliable, unreasonable and unlicensed pamphlets' in England'. Milton argued that the facts must be considered from all sides for the truth to be established; that censorship is inimical to progress; and that truth will defeat falsehood in open competition in any public sphere with no single individual left to determine it (Shaw, 2012). Freedom of speech, which is fundamental to freedom of the press, has its roots in John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty*, in which freedom of speech is declared to be the basis for the discovery of the truth (Mill, 1859). 'The protection of freedom of expression is a key element to all modern human rights instruments' (Puddephatt, 2005:27). Article 19 of the

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) affirms:

*Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes the right to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers. (Article 19, 2002 cited in Puddephatt, 2005:27)*

Freedom of the press is often regarded as the fundamental component that holds in balance a delicate system of relations among the media, civil society, and the state. Media platforms have the moral obligation to provide citizens with the information they need to make informed decisions and to serve as vehicles for the transmission of all shades of public opinion. It is often argued that free speech should be enjoyed by everybody, not just journalists, or members of the elite political and corporate classes of society. It is for this reason that freedom of expression is considered to be more important than freedom of the press in well-developed democratic societies such as the United Kingdom. However, journalists remain the custodians of freedom of expression since they are the professionals traditionally entrusted with the responsibility as duty bearers to ‘challenge the manipulations and falsehoods of the ruling and corporate classes’

of society, in addition to their information dissemination, entertainment, and education roles (Shaw, 2012:30). Thus, with their enjoyment of freedom of speech and freedom of information, journalists have a social responsibility to criticize those in power ‘on behalf of citizens and society, effectively serving as their surrogates’ (Hohenberg, 1978, cited in Himmelboim and Limor, 2008:237 and shaw, 2012:31).

It is however important to note that since the days of the celebrated English journalist, John Milton, who published the *Aroepagitica* newsletter in 15<sup>th</sup> century Britain, journalists have encountered some very bumpy rides that seriously undermined their ability to enjoy their freedom of expression. Even with the repeal of Part 5 of the Seditious Criminal Law of the 1965 Public Order Act, which was inherited in Sierra Leone from British Colonial Rule, and which Milton defied in 1644, obstacles to freedom of expression, and by extension, free press, remain largely by ways of control by the ruling and corporate classes. It is therefore easy to see that journalism practice since the birth of the regime of freedom of expression has been fraught with control and survival; politicians and corporate leaders exerting control over journalists as they go about practicing their trade on one hand, and journalists tactically and carefully doing their very best to survive this control on the other hand. This scenario is more, or less, likened to what Vincent Mosco (2009)



referred to as political economy which he defined as the study of control and survival in public life. The key words in this definition are *control* and *survival*; control relates to how a community of people runs and manages its affairs, while survival refers to what people do on a daily basis for example production, distribution, and consumption to keep their society on the move. Moreover, while control relates to a political process as it involves community power relations, survival relates to an economic process as it involves economic power relations that shape or influence the production and reproduction, as well as the distribution and consumption, of goods and services. ‘The extent to which this definition provides the political economy approach with the power to encompass all human activity and processes underpins its standing as a more ambitious way of understanding this rather ambivalent approach’(Shaw, 2016:21).

Political economists are concerned about interactions, or tensions, between power relations—be they political or economic—that lead to the control or survival of human activity, which can involve some kind of production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services such as news items and commentaries that shed light on the use, or abuse, of political and, or, economic power to put it in the journalistic context. Political economy of journalism is therefore defined as the way in which journalists are influenced, or vice versa, by the political and economic

power relations within an agenda-setting context, and how that impacts on their social responsibility to serve as watchdogs, rather than mere lapdogs or cheer leaders, in the interest of the public (Shaw, 2016:23).

It is therefore this tension of the control of the information ecosystem by the political and corporate elites on one hand and the survival of those who seek to unshackle this control, including journalists, in the name of freedom of expression and media freedom on the other hand that has made it necessary for the 2022 State of the Media Report in Sierra Leone to focus on the political economy of freedom of expression, media freedom, and governance. The Report is divided into two broad parts with part one focusing on the freedom of expression, freedom of information, and media freedom while part two focuses on media development and governance.

#### Part One: Freedom of Expression, Freedom of Information, and Media Freedom

The main focus of this part one is the monitoring and reporting on the state of freedom of expression, freedom of information, and media freedom in Sierra Leone in 2022. It is made of four articles in all.

The first article in Part One by Francis Sowa, Kalil Kallon, and Rosaline Amara titled: ‘Media Ecosystem in Sierra Leone: Operations, Regulations, Freedom and

Capacity Building in 2022’ provides a critical and comprehensive overview of the media landscape in Sierra Leone in 2022. In the area of operations, the article, inspired by the theory of the political economy of the media, explained that by 31<sup>st</sup> December 2022, there were 531 registered and licensed media institutions in Sierra Leone, although only about 60 per cent of them were fully operational which seems to suggest an increasing instability and volatility in an otherwise very pluralistic media landscape in Sierra Leone, especially when compared to other countries in the West African subregion. The situation looks even worse when it comes to the print media where out of 242 registered newspapers only 138 were operational while only 10 out of 24 registered magazines were operational. This dwindling number of media outlets points to a grim picture; this gives the impression that media poverty has taken a heavy toll on the country’s media landscape. That is why the media viability and investment conference organised by the Ministry of Information and Communication to address this problem is largely considered as perhaps the most welcome news for media development in the country in the year under review.

On the front of freedom of expression and media freedom, about 13 cases of harassment of journalists and others were recorded in the year under review. At least two of these cases involved politicians of the main opposition

party who were detained for making statements on air, which the police interpreted as having the potential to incite violence enough to disrupt public order. The Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ) issued statements condemning the actions of the perpetrators of these harassments and called for cases where journalists or others suspected to have crossed the freedom of expression line to be referred to the Independent Media Commission instead of subjecting them to harassments. The good news is that in addition to the fact that there were only few cases of harassment when compared to previous years, the year under review ended with no journalist in jail for criminal or seditious libel. This shows that the Repeal of Part 5 of the Criminal and Seditious libel is having a positive impact, which tremendously improved the country’s press freedom ranking in the world in the year under review. However, the nature of the reported harassments, especially those perpetrated by state security personnel, shows that the security and safety of journalists as they go about their work is increasingly becoming a worrying trend in Sierra Leone. The article also reported some very interesting developments in media policy development and capacity building with the support of the Ministry of Information and Communication, IMC, SLAJ and the MRCG.

The second article under part one by Chernor Mamadou Jalloh titled: ‘The Quest for media

Freedom in Sierra Leone-Challenge and Opportunities' critically and epistemologically reflects on the obstacles that stand in the way of achieving press freedom in Sierra Leone, as well as the opportunities that exist to turn things around in the immediate post-repeal of Part 5 of the Criminal Libel law. The article paints a positive picture of the press freedom landscape in Sierra Leone following the Repeal of Part 5 with the country ranked 46<sup>th</sup> out of 180 countries in the world in the Reporters Without Borders ranking for 2022. The author calls for the need to strengthen legal protections, promote professional standards, enhance journalist safety, build capacity, address media ownership concentration, and engage civil society and international support to foster a free and independent media that contributes to accountability, transparency, citizen participation, and democratic governance.

The third article in Part One by Isaac Massaquoi titled: 'The Media After the Repeal of the Criminal and Seditious Libel Laws: Taking Advantage of the New Democratic Opening' in Sierra Leone offers a critical reflection on the apparent failure of the Sierra Leone media to take advantage of the new environment of press freedom ushered in following the Repeal of Part 5 to develop their media institutions and practice responsible journalism. The author refers to arguments made by journalists and media scholars that the existence of the seditious and criminal

libel laws was the main impediment to professionalism and the capital investment required to strengthen the capacity of the industry for qualitative professional performance. The article argues that moderate but noticeable progress has been made since Sierra Leone took its first steps into democracy in 1996 but that following the repeal of the obnoxious criminal and seditious libel laws, the media must now reconfigure themselves and redefine their mission and modus operandi to take advantage of the new environment and play their fourth estate function in the overall development aspirations of the country.

The fourth article in Part One by Ibrahim Seaga Shaw titled: 'How Public Authorities Complied with the RAI Law in Sierra Leone in 2022' mostly draws on desk research and literature review to provide a critical overview of how public authorities complied with the RAI law in 2022. It makes the argument that freedom of information cannot succeed in a society where free speech is threatened. Moreover, it argues that it is not just the adoption of this law that is important but rather its implementation and integration into the cultural psyche of Sierra Leone. It goes further to assert that monitoring and reporting on the state of compliance with this law by public authorities is therefore one of the core obligations of the RAIC. The article notes that Sierra Leone has made a steady progress in the implementation of its Access to Information

Law despite challenges such as the culture of secrecy in the public and civil service, which is often used as an alibi to deny access to information. In fact, in many cases, it is within this context of culture of secrecy that some public authorities sometimes invoke the exempt provisions of the RAI law as reason, albeit sometimes wrongly, to justify their denial of access to information.

## **Part Two: Media Development and Governance**

The two articles in Part Two focus on the development trajectories and challenges of the media and their role in promoting transparency, accountability, and good governance in Sierra Leone.

The first article in Part Two by Victor Massaquoi titled: 'The Starving Media in Sierra Leone: The Enigma of Community Radio Stations' provides a critical overview of how community radios in Sierra Leone are struggling to survive because of media poverty, poor management and governance strategies. The study explored three critical questions on the assumption that the media is poor: a) what is the management status of existing media houses across the country? b) how effective is the media governance system? c) what is the quality and reliability of program production for public or community consumption? The pre-data collection activities included review of existing files and other data of media houses,

while employing specific theoretical frame(s) to facilitate the description, interpretation and explanation of the collected qualitative data. Media Management, Governance and Capacity Building concepts and theories were reviewed and applied. The observable findings were subjected to robust analysis – one of the findings is the existence of a weak governance system in almost 70%, over 70 of the over 100 Community Radio stations in Sierra Leone. The study concludes that Community Radio Stations in Sierra Leone are poor, in all the four management indicators – HR, Finance, Physical Asset and ICT, struggling but improving in community radio program development.

The second article in Part Two by Sheku Putka Kamara titled: 'The Contributions of the African Young Voices Television (AYV TV) and Radio Democracy FM 98.1 in the fight against corruption in Sierra Leone' explores the role of the media in the fight against corruption in Sierra Leone drawing on the agenda-setting theory and two popular electronic media platforms (one TV and one radio) as case studies and employing qualitative and interview research methods. Among other things, the findings of the study suggest that while the media has been doing a 'good job' in exposing and reporting 'some amount' of corruption, the lack of, or the absence of, editorial independence tends to question the effective functionality of the very media outlet. The article argues that when a

certain media institution is dependent on a certain politician, or business mogul, for survival for instance, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to call out that mogul or politician. As such, the idea of the 'you cannot bite the finger that feeds you' will tend to take centre-stage.

To conclude, we can see from all the four articles in Part One and two articles in Part Two that a lot indeed happened in 2022 in terms of freedom of expression, freedom of information, media freedom, as well as governance, operations, policy and business management developments of the media in Sierra Leone largely thanks to the repeal of Part 5 of the Criminal Libel Law. However, looking at cases of harassment of journalists and other obstacles to press freedom such as concentrated media ownership, media poverty, increasing self-censorship, low capacity, weak media governance structures etc., one can see that the control and manipulation of the media landscape by the powerful political and corporate elites is increasingly making it difficult, if not impossible, for media practitioners and the rest of the public to survive and continue to hold them to account for their actions. Thus, with all the increasing liberalisation of the media landscape in the immediate post repeal of Part 5 period, media practitioners on one hand and political/corporate elites on the other hand still had to negotiate the contours of control and survival in the context of the political

economy of the media in going about the production, distribution, and consumption of media products in 2022.

## References

- Hohenberg, J (1978) *The Professional Journalist*. New York. Holt Rinehart Wilson.
- Himmelboim, I and Limor, Y (2008) Media Perception of Freedom of the Press: A Comparative Analysis of 242 Code of Ethics. *Journalism*. Vol. 9 No.3 pp. 235-265. London
- Mosco, V (2009) *The Political Economy of Communication*. London: Sage.
- Puddephatt, A (2005) *Freedom of Expression*. In Rhoda Smith and Christine Van Den Anker(Eds). *Essentials of Human Rights: Everything you need to know about Human Rights*. London. Hodder-Arnold.
- Shaw, I.S (2012) *Human Rights Journalism: Advances in Reporting Humanitarian Interventions*. Palgrave Macmillan. Basingstoke, England.
- Shaw, I.S (2016) *Business Journalism: A Critical Political Economy Approach*. Routledge. Taylor and Francis Group. London and New York.
- Verghese, B.G (1998) 'Freedom of Expression' In Asad Latif (Ed) *Walking the Tight Rope: Press Freedom and Professional in Asia*. Asian Media, Information and Communication Centre. Jurong Point.

## **PART ONE: FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, FREEDOM OF INFORMATION AND MEDIA FREEDOM**

### **1. Media Ecosystem in Sierra Leone: Operations, Regulations, Freedom and Capacity Building in 2022.**

By

Francis Sowa (Ph.D.), Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Communication, Media and Information Studies, FBC, USL and National Coordinator, Media Reform Coordinating Group (MRCG), Khalil Kallon, Executive Secretary, Independent Media Commission (IMC) and Rosaline K. Amara, Head of Programs, Media Reform Coordinating Group (MRCG)

#### **Abstract**

*This section of the Report examines the media ecosystem in Sierra Leone in 2022. The key aspects covered are the operations, regulations, freedom, and capacity building and the media's contributions to national development during the period under review. The article is informed by theoretical constructs in the political economy of the media. The methodology used were documentary and archival search and observation. The review shows the various changes in the operations and regulation of media institutions in the country.*

#### **1.1 Introduction**

In 2022, significant steps were taken to improve the media ecosystem in Sierra Leone. One of the major highlights was the convening of first ever Media Viability and Investment Conference, and the development of regulations dealing with media ethics and

professionalism. In 2022, more media houses were registered and given licenses to operate. However, most media houses are unable to cope with the current economic situation in the country, hence, they are mostly off air, or publish on few occasions. Several factors account for this situation, which are addressed in this section.

#### **1.2 Political economy of the media**

Political economy of the media deals with the media survival, control and management. The study of the political economy of communications is no longer a marginal approach to media and communication studies in many parts of the world. For instance, the Political Economy Section of the International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR) has grown dramatically over the last decade or so, attracting numerous scholars from all over the world (Wasko, 2014). So political economy of the media

(PEM) addresses issues of media ownership, survivability, organization and production of media content. As new scholars direct their attention to studying PEM, an even broader range of issues and themes have emerged. Wasko (2014) addressed the following themes; Commodification/commercialization, Diversification/synergy, Horizontal/vertical integration and concentration. These themes describe media and communication resources as a commodity, sold with the aim of making profit, and the level of competition in the market.

The issues covered in this article are within the province of the theoretical constructs of the political economy of the media. This includes the survival and organisation of the media ecosystem, which – within the context of Sierra Leone – is shaped by a statutory institution, the Independent Media Commission (IMC), which gives licenses for the operation of radio, television and Direct-to-Home services, and registration for the operation of newspapers and magazines.

By 31 December 2022, there were 531 registered and licensed media institutions in Sierra Leone. They fall into various categories: newspapers and magazines, radio, television and Direct to Home (DTH) services. Among them, 214 radio stations were active/operational and 14 inactive/non-operational; 18 Television stations active and 4 not active; 7 DTH active and 4 not active,

and 138 newspapers active and 104 inactive, and 10 magazines active and 14 inactive. Radio and television stations are further categorized into public, commercial, community, and religious institutions.<sup>9</sup> Newspapers and magazines are not categorized into specific types. In January 2022, the IMC started the re-registration and renewal processes, and by the end of the year, 11 newspapers, none for magazines, 17 radio stations and 2 local television stations also had re-registered.

### 1.3 The media landscape – the numbers

Specifically, within the period of one year the following media institutions were registered:

Table 1: Registered media institutions in 2022

Category	Year 2022	Number registered or licensed
<b>Radio</b>		
Public Service	2022	0
Community	2022	3
Commercial	2022	13
Religious	2022	1
Relay/rebroadcast	2022	0
Teaching	2022	0
<b>Total</b>	2022	<b>17</b>
<b>Television (Terrestrial)</b>		
Public Service	2022	0
Community	2022	0
Commercial	2022	2
Religious	2022	0
Relay/rebroadcast	2022	0

Teaching	2022	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Direct-to-Home (DTH)</b>		
Television	2022	0
<b>Print media</b>		
Newspaper	2022	11
Magazine	2022	0

Source: IMC Data 2022

#### 1.4 Media laws, regulations and freedom

There are various laws used to regulate the country's media ecosystem. These laws are established in the constitution, statutes and codes of the institutions that are set to implement them. Sierra Leone, as a country, has specific and other statutes (Acts), regulations, policies and institutions governing the media landscape. The major laws used to regulate the media are the Constitution of Sierra Leone 1991 (Section 25 (1) and Section 11), the Independent Media Commission Act 2020, the Defamation Ordinance 1961, the IMC Media Code of Practice, and the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ) Code of Ethics. During the period under review, the Independent Media Commission (Print and Electronic Media) Regulations, 2022 (Statutory Instrument No. 11 of 2022) and the Independent Media Commission Elections (Coverage and Reporting) Regulations, 2022 (Statutory Instrument No. 17 of 2022) had been developed and were awaiting enactment by parliament. The Independent Media Commission (IMC) is the regulatory body charged with the responsibility of registering newspapers and licensing radio and television

stations. The National Communications Authority (NatCA), formally National Telecommunication Commission (NATCOM) allocates spectrums/frequencies based on recommendations of the IMC.

The year under review witnessed some changes in the media laws, regulation, and media freedom in the country. Key among them is the National Communications Authority Act 2022, which was enacted by parliament. It repealed and replaced the National Telecommunications Commission Act of 2006 (as amended). The Independent Media Commission (Print and Electronic Media) Regulations, 2022 and the Independent Media Commission Elections (Coverage and Reporting) Regulations 2022 were laid in parliament for the 21 required statutory days. The Right to Access Information Regulations 2022 were also enacted by Parliament. The Regulations are to ensure right to access information, and outline various codes guiding the coverage and reporting by media institutions.

The National Electronic Communication Authority Act 2022 contains provisions on the allocation of frequency spectrum to radio and television stations. The Ministry of Information and Communications (MIC) in the transformation of the Commission to an Authority, worked with key sector leads and stakeholders to ensure that the ICT/telecommunications sector have a



predictable environment for the management of ICT/telecommunications as part of an overarching reform strategy to be able to be up to speed with new and emerging trends in the industry.

The National Communication Authority Act of 2022 provides for the licensing and regulation of electronic communications operators and other new developments in the ICT/telecommunications sector to fit in the present-day telecoms industry across the world. The National Communication Authority Act, 2022 introduced twenty-seven (27) new Parts, some of which were embedded in other Parts in the Telecommunications Commission Act, 2006.

The National Communication Authority Acts, 2022 provides for the protection of licensees and consumers in terms of complaints and conflict resolutions. Part VII, sections 27 to 32 of the National Communication Authority Act, 2022 provides how the authority can settle dispute and resolve conflicts between licensees and consumers. Part XX, sections 103 and 104 of the Act provides that the authority may impose obligation on any licensees found to be involved in any anti-competitive behavior.

### **1.5 Freedom of Expression and of the Press: Cases and Actions Taken**

Within the period under review (2022), MRCG and its constituent bodies produced the eighth and ninth editions of 'Press Freedom, Information, Internet and Digital Rights in

Sierra Leone'. These editions are built upon the foundation of previous editions and did extensive follow up on unresolved cases from the police, judiciary and the victims. From the first to the ninth edition, the MRCG had monitored 62 cases; 43 of which were concluded, settled, resolved, dropped or abandoned, because of lack of progress; 5 were in court and 14 under police investigation. In 2022, the MRCG monitored 22 cases/issues that have to do with arrest, detention, intimidation, physical and verbal assault, attack, and issues of cyber-attacks.

#### **The case of Amadu Lamaran Bah- Head of Digital Media - AYV**

On 10 January 2022, Amadu Lamrana Bah, Head of Digital Media of the Africa Young Voices (AYV) and President of the Sierra Leone Reporters Union was intimidated and humiliated by Airport officials allegedly acting on the orders of 'someone' at the Lungi International Airport ([https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=10158799418837523&id=747117522](https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=10158799418837523&id=747117522)). The intimidation was as a result of a Facebook post by the journalist on series of difficulties they had encountered at the airport on their flight to Cameroon for the Africa Cup of Nations. MRCG 11 January 2022 press alert and SLAJ 12 January 2022 press release condemned the harassment and intimidation on the journalist and called for the safety and security of journalists at all times. SLAJ vehemently condemned the behaviour of the airport

officials, including Air Maroc, and said it found it unfortunate that the journalist was targeted because of his opinion, as it demanded an investigation into the matter. “This is outright intimidation and harassment and constitutes a serious attack on free speech and press freedom. No journalist, or individual for that matter, should be targeted for expressing their views. Authorities must learn to accommodate genuine criticism as part of their responsibility to the public,” said SLAJ President, Ahmed Sahid Nasralla (<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=4704290019620373&set=a.116924098357011&type=3>). The journalist later boarded the flight to Cameroon.

#### **The case of Solomon Joe – A journalist of KISS 104 in Bo**

On 7 February 2022, two officers from the Criminal Investigations Department (CID) in Freetown went to Bo and ‘ordered the arrest’ of Solomon Joe, a journalist of KISS 104 FM in Bo for a broadcast concerning a transaction between two businessmen in Bo. After a statement was obtained from him in Bo, he was taken to Freetown where he spent one night in police custody. On 8 February 2022, the journalist was released on conditions that he retracted his story and apologized to the businessman, conditions the journalist did not adhere to because he ‘stood by his story.’

#### **Invitation of Sidi Yayah Tunis after a program on Radio Democracy 98.1 FM**

On 8 February 2022, the acting spokesperson of the main opposition All Peoples Congress Party (APC), Sidi Yayah Tunis, was invited and detained at the CID in Freetown for alleged ‘inciting utterances’ he made during a program on Radio Democracy 98.1 FM on Monday 7 February 2022. The Inspector General of Police, Ambrose Sovula, said Mr. Tunis was invited because his utterances were deemed as ‘inciting statements’ that had the tendency to disrupt or undermine the safety and security of the State. Mr. Tunis was later released on bail and the matter subsequently ended.

#### **The case of Alusine Antha – a journalist of Eagle Africa FM 91.3**

On 17 February 2022, journalist Alusine Antha of Eagle Africa FM 91.3 was physically assaulted by seven youths in the Waterloo Community, Western Area Rural District. The journalist said he had gone to the community to cover a story dealing with a land issue when seven youths physically attacked and assaulted him. He said his mobile phone, tape recorder and money in his possession were forcefully taken away from him during the incident. He reported the matter to the Waterloo Police Division. The police had arrested the seven suspects and charged the matter to court. The matter came up on 19 February 2022 at the 14 Waterloo Magistrate Court but owing to the

absence of the suspects, it was adjourned to 14 March 2022.

### **Media coverage of the proceeding of suspended Auditor-General**

On 17 March 2022, SLAJ in a press alert called on the Judiciary of Sierra Leone to allow media access to cover the opening session of a tribunal set up to investigate the suspended Auditor-General, Mrs. Lara Taylor-Pearce and her deputy. This was as a result of a complaint from some journalists who were reportedly denied entry to the proceedings. SLAJ President, Ahmed Sahid Nasralla, said in the interest of transparency, the tribunal should be open to all media and not just a selected few so that the public would follow the process. In response to the alert, the Communication Unit of the Judiciary in a press release said the SLAJ allegations were ‘untrue and inaccurate and stated thus: “Lawyers, civil society representatives, family members, some unknown members of the public and other professional bodies were accredited to be in attendance. 50 persons were only allowed due to the limited sitting capacity. With this in mind, priority was given to the Court Reporters Association and they were catered for.”

### **The case of Mohamed Khan – Interim Chairman of Teachers Solidarity**

On 26 April 2022, the SLP arrested Mohamed Khan, the Interim Chairman of Teachers Solidarity, just outside AYV’s premises after

he had appeared on the ‘AYV’s Wake Up Salone TV program’ as a guest to discuss teachers’ concerns and their conditions of service. The police said Khan was arrested for inciting teachers to withhold their services from the State using an illegal platform called ‘Teachers Solidarity’ while the Government of Sierra Leone and the Sierra Leone Teachers Union are engaged in negotiations’. AYV and SLAJ were concerned that such an act of arrest by the SLP has the potential to scare off potential critical guests that AYV Media and other media houses may want to invite to their programs. SLAJ called on the SLP to respect people’s right to free expression at all times and to adopt less hostile ways of holding citizens accused of incitement other than arresting them.

<https://www.facebook.com/100063807305798/posts/382693913867516/?app=fbl>). Police said after Mr. Khan’s questioning at the CID, he was later released on the same day. On 28 April 2022, the SLP also arrested and detained Lahai Jah and Joseph C Kailie at the Bo West Police Station for convening ‘a protest without police clearance’ according to Deputy Media and Public Relations of the SLP, Superintendent Samuel Saio Conteh. The Sierra Leone Bar Association’s (SLBA) 28 April 2022 press release expressed ‘serious concern’ on their arrest and detention ‘after allegedly requesting a clearance to convene a meeting of “The Teachers Solidarity Movement.” The Association condemned SLP’s action stating that it contravened

Section 17 (1) of the Constitution of Sierra Leone Act No. 6 of 1991 and also undermined freedom of expression guaranteed in Section 25 of the same 1991 Constitution. The SLBA urged the police to release the teachers with immediate effect. The two teachers were later released.

### **The case of Gibril Gottor – a freelance journalist in Kambia**

On 29 April 2022, journalist Gibril Gottor who resides in Kambia District, Northern Sierra Leone reported to SLAJ and the SLP of an ‘assassination attempt’ on him and his family through a ‘suffocating smell of petrol’ in their house. According to Gibril, the family discovered a plastic bag in the ventilation pipe on their roof dripping petrol, and their back door painted with the highly inflammable liquid. The journalist and civil society activist said the incident occurred at a time he was investigating major corruption activities involving some business tycoons, military personnel, and a host of other influential people in the district. SLAJ in its 30 April 2020 press release called on the Sierra Leone Police for their swift intervention to ensure the safety and security of the journalist (<https://www.facebook.com/100063807305798/posts/383887097081531/?app=fbl>). Gibril told the MRCG that the police were yet to institute investigation into the matter. “The police told me to return home saying they will do a patrol at my house. But I refused because I did not see any evidence of their patrol. My family and I are still sleeping somewhere else

for our safety,” the journalist said. In May 2022, Chief Superintendent of Police at the Kambia Local Police Unit, Abu Bakarr Magona, told the MRCG that they had deployed personnel to patrol Gibril’s house, but cannot provide him with personal security as they do not have enough manpower to do so. Police said the matter was under investigation.

### **The case of Sorie Saio Sesay – a journalist of Okentuhun Radio, FM 94.0**

On 26 May 2022, journalist Sorie Saio Sesay, who works for Okentuhun Radio, FM94.0 in Karene, North-West Region of Sierra Leone, was arrested and detained by police in Makeni for allegedly ‘publishing false information’ on social media about an incident between the SLP and commercial bike riders in Makeni. A press alert from SLAJ Northern Region indicated that the journalist, ‘Sorrie said he mistakenly forwarded the said information from one WhatsApp forum to his own WhatsApp group’ which has ‘high ranking officials of the SLP.’ SLAJ President, Ahmed Sahid Nasralla, urged the police ‘to stop arresting journalists for what they publish whether the information is false or true’ and asked them ‘to refer such cases to the IMC or SLAJ Disciplinary Committee for appropriate actions.’

(<https://www.facebook.com/100001182651239/posts/5112954542087250/?app=fbl>). SLAJ’s press alert of 28 May 2022 said it was ‘worried about the health and well-being’ of

the journalist who was refused bail and spent two nights in police custody in Makeni before he was escorted to Freetown and detained at the CID. He was released on bail on 31 May 2022 with the intervention of SLAJ. Sorie told the MRCG that even though the police had released him, the CID still had his phone. The Director of Crime Service at the CID headquarters in Freetown, AIG William Fayia Sellu, said that the Cyber Unit of the SLP was still investigating the content of the phone of the journalist as a way of following procedures, and once the investigation was completed and nothing found, his phone would be returned and the matter resolved.

### **The matter of Justice FM**

On 28 April 2022, the Independent Media Commission (IMC) in a press statement stated that as part of its mandates temporarily shut down the operations of Justice Radio in Freetown for 10 hours. On 27 April 2022, the IMC received a complaint from its Monitoring, Research and Projects Unit (MRPU) against Justice FM Radio in connection with its program, ‘Justice Show’ which was aired on 27 April 2022. The decision of the IMC Complaint Committee was connected to an alleged unprofessional conduct, proprietorship and management issues that posed serious confusion to the operations and activities of the radio station. The ban was lifted that same day. The IMC’s Complaint Committee findings showed that the station manager was aware that what was

aired on the program was unprofessional and a breach of some of the provisions in the IMC Media Code of Practice and the IMC Act of 2020, and posed a threat to public order and security. The Complaints Committee recommended that a fine of Le1, 000,000 (One Million Leones) be levied on Justice FM Radio for breach of the accuracy, truth and impartiality provision in Section 3, Principle 6 of the IMC Media Code of Practice, and that the station should temporarily suspend the ‘Justice Show’ until IMC conducts a monitoring and inspection visit to assess their editorial and technical capacities to manage such a program professionally. The IMC Board at its meeting held on 4 May 2022 endorsed the recommendations.

### **The case of Abdulia Gbla – CEO of Gbla TV Online**

On 28 June 2022 Abdulai Gbla, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Gbla TV Online wrote a letter of complaint to the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ) regarding an alleged ‘physical assault’ on him by a Member of Parliament (MP), Hon. Abdul Muniru Lansana of Constituency 121. Mr. Gbla in his complaint said “he [Hon. Lansana] physically assaulted (pushed) me in the Well of Parliament and knocked my gadget (Samsung Galaxy Note 20 ULTRA) on the floor with the intent of destroying it to prevent me from videoing a scuffle that the All-Peoples Congress (APC) and the Sierra Leone Peoples Party (SLPP) MPs were having in the Well of

Parliament immediately after the Parliamentary proceedings at about 7:09 PM, on the 28th June 2022.” Hon. Abdul Muniru Lansana in response told the MRCG that he ‘did not assault’ the journalist as he had alleged, but rather ‘hit his phone to stop filming the incident’ after he had previously asked the journalist not to film since the parliamentary sitting had been adjourned. He said the journalist had entered a place in the ‘Well’ where only dignitaries and accredited persons were allowed and not journalists. Abdulai Gbla told MRCG that after the Executive of SLAJ had met with the Clerk of Parliament, Hon. Paran Umar Tarawally on 5 July 2022 nothing had been done by Parliament to further investigate the matter and none of the parties had reached out to him. SLAJ President, Ahmed Sahid Nasralla, told MRCG that they were yet to have another meeting with the Clerk of Parliament on the issue, but confirmed that investigations were still ongoing, and that they have asked the journalist to exercise some patience. In November, the SLAJ President Ahmed Sahid Nasralla told the MRCG that the leadership of SLAJ had again contacted the Clerk of Parliament on the matter, but he was yet to get an update from him on the status of the investigation.

### **The case of Maada Jesse Jengo – Journalist of VOPAD FM 96.5 in Waterloo**

On 2 July 2022, Maada Jesse Jengo, a journalist working for Voice of Peace and

Development Radio (VOPAD) FM 96.5 in Waterloo, Western Area Rural was physically assaulted by ‘four officers of the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF)’. Maada told the MRCG that on his way to work on a commercial motor bike, they ran into a ‘Black Jeep’ with registration number ‘ANK 156’ parked in the middle of the road at 5-5 Gas Station in Waterloo that denied them access. He said four officers disembarked from the jeep and started beating him and the bike rider after they had remarked against the actions of the soldiers to park in the middle of the road. He said during the „severe beating“ by the officers, his phone, tape recorder and money got missing. SLAJ’s 4 July 2022 press release condemned the act of the RSLAF officers for assaulting the journalist and called on the Sierra Leone Police (SLP) and RSLAF to investigate the incident and to take appropriate actions against the perpetrators. “The action of those soldiers is totally unacceptable in a democracy. An attack on any journalist is an attack on press freedom. I, therefore, urge personnel of the RSLAF to respect the MoU we have with the security sector to protect and support one another's role in our democracy,” said SLAJ President, Ahmed Sahid Nasralla. <https://www.facebook.com/slaj.sierraleone>.

The RSLAF in a press release dated 8 July 2022, said the ‘soldiers have been identified and an investigation into the allegations’ was ongoing in ‘accordance with military procedures.’ RSLAF assured SLAJ of its ‘commitment for mutual cooperation and

cordial relationship in the discharge' of their duties. The Station Manager, VOPAD radio, Joseph Lamin, told the MRCG that the perpetrators had held a meeting with the management of the radio, the journalist's family and some Waterloo community stakeholders to settle the matter amicably. He said during the meeting, they agreed that the perpetrators would refund the journalist's items that got missing during the incident and his medical bills. He continued that the perpetrators had paid half of the agreed amount, but have not showed up 10 or called for any further arrangements, noting that he would soon take the matter with the RSLAF. Director of Public Relations and Information, RSLAF, Col. Abu Bakarr Bah, confirmed to MRCG that, both parties had agreed to settle the matter. He assured that the RSLAF would ensure full compliance from the perpetrators. The Station Manager updated MRCG in November that, the officers who were involved in the matter had apologised to the journalist and his family, adding that the officers promised to refund the medical bills of the journalist, pay for the items that got missing during the incident and also do a public apology through the Radio. (<https://www.facebook.com/slaj.sierraleone>).

### **The case of BBC Correspondent in Sierra Leone, Umaru Fofana**

On 12 August 2022, the BBC Correspondent in Sierra Leone, Umaru Fofana posted on his Facebook about a death threat he had received

from some 'unknown members' of the public. Mr Fofana told the MRCG that in as much as he took the threat seriously; he would not allow such to negatively affect his professional practice to judiciously serve the interest of his country and its citizens (<https://www.facebook.com/100050433761914/posts/pfbid02yBpoBfWagq6ByRonAqHnULr9c8LZsJDfau2cQTHsVVzPZBoqas9JmXsUNNBS16GPI/?>).

In an enquiry with the police by MRCG, they said that the matter was not reported to them. The MRCG reiterated that there have been concerted efforts by the media stakeholders to strengthen the safety and security of journalists in their line of duty, and such death threats have no place in a democratic country which should guarantee freedom of expression.

### **The case of Emmanuel Christian Thorli – Managing Editor of Night Watch Newspaper**

On 11 September 2022 the Managing Editor of Night Watch Newspaper, Emmanuel Christian Thorli, was assaulted and beaten in Waterloo by some staff of Njala University. The fracas reportedly ensued from a tribute reportedly given by the journalists at the New Life Ministries International Fellowship Church to his late colleague Ralph Simeon Sesay, who was the former Editor of Night Watch Newspaper. An aspect of the tribute did not go down well with staff of the university, and the journalist told MRCG that he was



ordered by the staff to return to the church and withdraw it. The Assistant Public Relations Officer, Njala University, Ayuba Koroma, denied the allegation, stating that the journalist was not assaulted by any staff of the University, but confirmed that the University staff peacefully told the journalist to return to the Church and withdraw his tribute. He, however, said that the University had instituted an investigation into the matter. The Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ) in a press release dated 12 September 2022, condemned the alleged assault on the journalist and called on the administration of Njala University to speedily investigate the unfortunate incident and to take appropriate actions. The MRCG in a press alert on 12 September 2022 joined SLAJ to call for an immediate investigation into the alleged assault on the journalist. ([https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story\\_fbid=pfbid0BMtttZGaCMVEzrEcBiU3eDvWTHowfhq2RhZJ1hJcayrGygVEEQTMm2VCJUrhJCsl&id=100001182651239](https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=pfbid0BMtttZGaCMVEzrEcBiU3eDvWTHowfhq2RhZJ1hJcayrGygVEEQTMm2VCJUrhJCsl&id=100001182651239)). In a follow up on the matter with the management of Njala University, the Acting Public Relations Officer said the matter was under investigation. This was also confirmed by SLAJ President Ahmed Sahid Nasralla. However, the Managing Editor told MRCG that since the matter was reported to the Police for investigation no one had updated him on the progress of the matter, nor had the management of the university reached out to him. In a follow up with the police, they told

MRCG that, the journalist was supposed to go with officers to Njala Campus in Mokonde to do further investigation, but the journalist was yet to do so.

### **The case of Ady Macauley Esq, former Anti-Corruption Commissioner**

On 6 October 2022 the former Anti-Corruption Commissioner, Ady Macauley Esq., was arrested and detained at the Criminal Investigations Department (CID) as a result of his legal opinion in relation to issues of protest and assembly, which he expressed on the Africa Young Voices Television (AYV) program called 11 ‘AYV on Sunday’ on 10 July 2022. He was released on bail, and the matter is now at the Directorate of Public Prosecution awaiting legal advice.

### **1.6 Internet Freedom and Digital Rights**

Since the enactment of the Cyber Security and Crime Act 2021 there have been arrests made pursuant to breach of its provision(s). The Act, among other things, provides for the prohibition, prevention, detection, prosecution and punishment of cybercrimes; and protection of privacy rights.

On 22 June 2022, President Julius Maada Bio commissioned the implementation of Sierra Leone’s first Cyber Investigative Directorate (CID) that gives the Sierra Leone Police (SLP) the capability to investigate and prosecute cybercrime and crimes committed using the internet. The CID’s cyber forensic system was set up to fight crimes.

<https://snradio.net/sierra-leone-institutes-1st-cyber-investigative-directorate/>



On 10 August 2022, the country's internet was shut down for about two hours during the day, following protests and civil unrests in Freetown and other parts of the country. Zoodlabs Sierra Leone, a technology and smart utility infrastructure company in Sierra Leone, stated in a press release published on their Twitter page that, the internet shutdown in the country was because of an emergency technical maintenance on some of their international routes (<https://twitter.com/ZoodlabsS/status/1557432953541722118?s=08>).

The MRCG on the same date issued a press release where it called on all journalists and media practitioners to ensure their safety while covering and reporting on the protests. (<https://www.facebook.com/222675042410618/posts/pfbid0VW7wAGPgVdRjt54JRQMj7ZsRo3xuLjekipX7FaMWBGTvj5Hvwith16cAX7QCsqdwMI/12>).

The National Cybersecurity Coordination Centre in collaboration with the Ministry of Information and Communication (MIC) and the Security Sectors in a press release dated 11 August 2022 stated that Section 49(1) of the Cybersecurity and Crime Act, 2021 indicates that anyone who aids in the act of [cyber terrorism], "which in this instance is the spreading of incendiary information on social media platforms to destabilize the State also commits the same offence." The release that

came after the August 10 2022 protests, also noted that "government has now put mechanisms in place for a robust monitoring of the social media spaces and platforms that can be accessed by Sierra Leoneans." The release warned that "anyone who is caught in the sharing of such information shall face the full consequence of the law

### **1.7 Ownership, governance and management**

The ownership, governance and management of media institutions have been serious issues of concerns. The year under-review saw some changes in governance and management of media institutions. The types of ownership largely remained the same in the IMC Act 2020. They are a body corporate established by an Act of Parliament or registered under the Companies Act 2009 (Act No. 5 of 2009), a partnership registered under the Partnership Act 1890 and a sole proprietorship.<sup>21</sup>

The 2022 data about radio ownership show that 15 radio stations are companies, 2 are sole proprietorships and no partnership. In the area of Television ownership, there is no partnership, sole proprietorship. The 2 registered TV in 2022 are under company. For the Newspapers, 5 are registered as sole proprietorship, 4 as companies and there are 2 without specific status.

## 1.8 National Media Viability and Investment Conference

The government, media stakeholders and partners organised the first National Media Viability and Investment Conference on the 21 and 22 April 2022. The aim of the conference was to promote and call for a viable media ecosystem that works in the public interest with the essential tools to advance democracy, prosperity and stability. The BBC Media Action and various national media organisations, including the MRCG and SLAJ contributed to the success of the conference.

Among the papers presented was ‘Private sector investment and public sector support for the media in Sierra Leone: A binding constraints analysis’ by Dr. Francis Sowa. In his paper, he gave a vivid analysis of constraints and challenges of the media and prospects of media investment. At the end of the conference, seven key recommendations were made.

They are:

1. The Government of Sierra Leone should continue to show the political will necessary to drive media market reforms
2. The existing legal and regulatory framework for the media needs to be reviewed
3. The media should commit to re-engineering the industry in order to boost the potential for attracting

private-sector investment and public subsidies

4. The Government should take affirmative action to promote community media and the public service broadcaster, the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC)
5. A national policy on advertising should be introduced.
6. Government and development partners should commit to a national fund for public interest media
7. Stakeholders should seek to address the existing gender imbalance in the media industry

## 1.9 Key Activities of national institutions and media organisations

The MRCG seeks to strengthen democratic dialogue and accountability, consolidate peace and ensure development through professional, independent and sustainable media, based on the right to freedom of expression and of the press. With support from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), the African Transitional Justice Legacy Fund (ATJLF) and Minority Right Group (MRG) and the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA), the Secretariat was able to implement the following activities in the year under review.

In January 2022, MRCG joined the Security Sector of Sierra Leone in conducting a risk

mapping for the 2023 electoral cycle. This exercise mapped and assessed the threat for the 2023 elections.

In March 2022, the MRCG with funding support from ATJLF rehabilitated and commissioned the 'Kumrabai Ferry Peace Monument' in Mile 91 Tonkolili District which has a narrative relating to peacebuilding in Sierra Leone under the project title 'Engaging the Media and Communities to Change the Narrative on Transitional Justice Issues in Sierra Leone'. During the commissioning of the said monument, the MRCG also engaged the community on transitional justice (TJ) and the importance of peace in the country.

On 19 March 2022, the MRCG conducted a community engagement on TJ issues in Mile 91, a conflict prone community particularly during elections. The community engagements were done together with a local radio station, Radio Gbaft, which has a history connected to the war and peacebuilding. The station broadcast highlights of the community engagements. With the Radio Gbaft monthly TJ radio programs, Sierra Leoneans were reminded of the atrocities committed during the civil war to help prevent reoccurrence.

Between April to October 2022, the MRCG with support from ATJLF trained journalists across the country on TJ issues, mechanism and reporting. The aim of the training was to

capacitate journalists on TJ issues and the truth and reconciliation report (TRCs) that was published after Sierra Leone peace talk. From October 2022 to January 2023, the MRCG with support from ATJLF also conducted four months mentorship training for journalists to reactivate their interest to report on TJ issues. At the end of the four months coaching programs, the journalists from across the country produced and published TJ stories on various media platforms.

On 29 July 2022, The MRCG launched the 'Transitional Justice Manual: A Handbook for Media Practitioners in West Africa' at SLAJ Headquarters in Freetown. With support from ATJLF, the Manual would serve as a resource guide for journalists, CSOs and researchers working on TJ in the sub region.

On 8 December 2022, MRCG with support from the Africa Transitional Justice Legacy Fund (ATJLF), Media Reform Coordinating Group (MRCG) held Editors and Station Manager's Forum on Transitional Justice (TJ) issues in Sierra Leone. The forum was to discuss with editors and station managers about reporting on transitional justice issues. The TJ manual handbook was shared among the editors and station managers to serve as a guide in producing and reporting TJ stories in Sierra Leone.

On 18 May 2022, the Sierra Leone Reporters Union (SLRU) with support from MRCG,

through NED's grant organised a symposium for reporters on the theme: "Media Poverty and the Future of Reporters in Sierra Leone." The symposium, which brought together reporters from across Sierra Leone, discussed issues affecting reporters across the country.

On 6 July 2022, The MRCG and Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) convened a one-day "Forum on Safety of Journalists and Media-Security Relations in Sierra Leone." With funding support from the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Ghana and UNESCO IPDC, the forum attracted participants across the country including journalists, CSOs, the security sector (SLP, RSLAF and ONS) traditional leaders, and Government officials among others. With open discussion on Safety of Journalists Situation in Sierra Leone, the consultant presented a "Comprehensive National Framework for the Safety of Journalists in Sierra Leone" which the participants contributed to. The forum was climaxed with the formation of the Sierra Leone National Coordination Committee for the Safety of Journalists.

In August 2022, MRCG and MFWA launched Right to Access Information Manual and conducted training on Investigative and Anti-Corruption Reporting for journalists in Sierra Leone.

On 2 August 2022, MRCG organised a forum on the adoption of the National Framework on

the Safety and Security of Journalists in Sierra Leone. The adoption of the Framework is to ensure the safety of journalists. The forum was graced by representative from Ministry of Information and communication, IMC, ONS, RSLAF, SLAJ, SP and MFWA.

In October 2022, MRCG trained journalists, citizen groups, and heads of civil society and youth activists on the Right to Access Information (RAI) law in Sierra Leone. The training which was facilitated by Mr. Kemo Cham was to capacitate participants with the knowledge on the use of the Right to Access Information Law to promote, democracy, freedom of expression and good governance.

With support from NED, MRCG on 26 August 2022 organised a workshop to review and finalise the draft Policy on Safety of Journalists in Sierra Leone at the Negus Nagas Complex, Grafton village, Western Rural District. The workshop assembled heads of national journalists' associations and organizations. The Policy on the Safety of Journalists is part of several initiatives aimed at providing a conducive environment for media practitioners in the country; an environment in which media practitioners are safe and feel confident in executing their tasks in society. The Policy seeks to promote the safety of journalists in Sierra Leone; to comply with international standards on safety of journalists in the country; to ensure that the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed

between the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ) and the Security Sector Institutions is implemented; and to provide a generic template which media institutions can use to develop their own policy on the safety of journalists.

On 5 December 2022, MRCG launched its 2018-2021 State of the Media Report. The report covered the current state of the media ecosystem in Sierra Leone ranging from laws regulating the media, its viability and freedom. Dr. Victor Massaquoi the newly appointed Chairman of the Independent Media Commission on Friday the 25th February 2022, officially took over office in a handing over ceremony organized at the Commission's headquarters, 54 Siaka Steven Street, Freetown which was well attended by Commissioners and staff of the Commission.

In his handing over statement, the outgoing Chairman George Khoryama outlined the achievements and challenges his administration faced while he was Chairman of the Commission. He stated, among other things, that his administration engaged media practitioners on the repeal of Part V of the 1965 Public Order Act that criminalized libel; the enactment of the IMC Act 2020; and engagement of media practitioners on compliance issues, through training of radio station managers and newspaper editors across the country. He said the IMC in collaboration with NASSIT organized a nationwide

sensitization and training tour on compliance with the provisions of the new IMC Act 2020 that required media owners to pay NASSIT contribution for journalists employed by media houses.

### **1.10 Conclusion**

The year under review witnessed different developments within the media landscape in Sierra Leone. There were successes in creating an enabling legal environment for the media as evident in the repeal of Part 5 of the criminal libel law. The country made progress in global press freedom rankings. However, other challenges to media development remain. They include poor media infrastructure, including lack of financial, technical and logistical supports to aid the work of the media institutions.

### **Sources**

Media Reform Coordinating Group (MRCG) Reports, 2022  
Independent Media Commission (IMC) Data 2022  
Reports on the National Media Viability and Investment Conference.  
Wasko, J. (2014). International Journal of Media & Cultural Politics Volume 10 Number 3 © 2014 Intellect Ltd Article. English language.

## 2. The Quest for Media Freedom in Sierra Leone - Challenges and Opportunities

*Chernor M. Jalloh (CMJ)*

*Lecturer of Governance & Development Studies*

*IPAM -University of Sierra Leone*

### **Abstract**

*One of the main obstacles to journalism worldwide is lack of, or limited, media freedom. Based on relevant cases, this paper explores issues that threaten journalistic freedom in Sierra Leone. And as a result of the repeal of the criminal seditious libel Law act of 1965, the study explores the challenges and opportunities of “Media Freedom in Sierra Leone.” This is accomplished by reviewing scholarly papers, reports and case studies to provide a comprehensive analysis of the subject. The analysis shows that press freedom in Sierra Leone is paradoxical, until recently only largely existing in theory—that is, in the constitution—and not in actuality. The study suggests that since press freedom in Sierra Leone is enshrined in the country's constitution, there should be statutory support for this. Additionally, to prevent impeding press freedom, journalists should be permitted access to government sources and records as long as doing so would not destabilise the larger society.*

**Key words:** Press & media freedom, Journalism, Rule of law, Human Rights, Journalist, Government

### **Introduction and Study Background**

The search for media freedom in Sierra Leone has been a significant concern in the country's democratic development. A free and independent press is essential for promoting transparency, accountability, and public participation in governance. Sierra Leone has a complex history with regard to media freedom [1]. Prior to its independence in 1961, the media landscape was limited and heavily influenced by colonial powers. The post-independence period witnessed some improvements, but media freedom was often constrained by political pressures and censorship. The civil war that ravaged Sierra Leone from 1991 to 2002 had a profound impact on media infrastructure and the safety of journalists. Since then, the country has undergone media reforms and legislative changes to enhance press freedom [2].

According to Reporters Without Borders (RSF), the 2022 World Press Freedom Index indicates that the press in Sierra Leone is 'somewhat free' [3]. It was ranked 46<sup>th</sup> out of 180 countries, moving up 29 from 75<sup>th</sup> position in 2021. The repeal of restrictive media laws has also contributed to Sierra Leone's progress in media freedom [4]. This

section provides an in-depth background, research objectives, questions and methodology for analyzing the challenges and opportunities surrounding media freedom in Sierra Leone.

### **Research Objectives & Questions**

The study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the legal framework, challenges, and opportunities for enhancing media freedom in Sierra Leone, while also examining the implications of media freedom for democratic development. Thus, the specific objectives of this research paper include:

- a) to examine the current state of media freedom in Sierra Leone and analyze the challenges faced by journalists and media organizations;
- b) to identify the obstacles to media ownership and pluralism in Sierra Leone;
- c) to explore the potential opportunities for enhancing media freedom and strengthening the role of a free press in democratic societies;
- d) to investigate the role of media freedom in promoting accountability, transparency, and public participation in Sierra Leone's democratic development; and,

The research questions guiding the study include:

- 1) What is the current state of media freedom in Sierra Leone, with a

focus on the legal framework, challenges to media freedom such as intimidation and violence against journalists, government interference and censorship, limited access to information, and the role of self-censorship?

- 2) What are the opportunities for enhancing media freedom in Sierra Leone, specifically in terms of strengthening legal protections and legislative reforms, promoting professional standards and ethical journalism, enhancing journalist safety and protection, building capacity and professional development, and engaging civil society and international support?
- 3) What is the role of media freedom in democratic societies, particularly in promoting accountability and transparency, serving as a catalyst for social change, and influencing public perception and trust in the media?

These research questions guided the investigation into the historical context, current state, challenges, opportunities, and implications of media freedom in Sierra Leone.

### **Methodology**

The study is based on desk research; all references are publicly available and traceable

(unless otherwise specified). The majority of the resources consulted and used for the study come from documentations and reports of civil society organisations that focus on journalists' rights, media freedom, and freedom of expression, as well as the monitoring mechanisms in which they take part. Scholarly writings and news reports have also influenced the analysis.

### **Current State of Media Freedom in Sierra Leone**

Sierra Leone has made significant progress in developing a legal framework that supports media freedom [5]. The Constitution of Sierra Leone guarantees freedom of expression and the press. Article 25 of the constitution specifically protects the right to freedom of speech and the press, subject to restrictions that are necessary in a democratic society [6]. Additionally, the Independent Media Commission (IMC) Act of 2000 established the Independent Media Commission, which aims to regulate media practices, promote professionalism, and protect the rights of journalists [7]. However, there are concerns regarding the enforcement of these laws and regulations. The IMC has been criticized for its lack of independence and for being susceptible to political influence [8]. The implementation of the 1965 Public Order Act has also raised issues, as it provides authorities with broad powers to restrict the media and suppress dissenting voices [9]. Before its historic repeal in 2020, the government used

this act to limit public gatherings and demonstrations, including those organized by journalists, which hampers their ability to exercise their right to freedom of expression [10].

### **Challenges to Media Freedom**

First, Journalists in Sierra Leone face intimidation, threats, and physical violence as they carry out their work. This poses a significant challenge to media freedom and the safety of journalists [11]. Some journalists have been attacked or harassed for investigating and reporting on sensitive issues, including corruption, human rights abuses, and political misconduct [12]. These acts of violence create a climate of fear and self-censorship among journalists, impeding their ability to report freely.

Second, government interference and censorship remain challenges to media freedom in Sierra Leone. There have been instances where media outlets have faced pressure and threats from government authorities due to their critical reporting. The government has used various tactics, including legal intimidation, advertising revenue manipulation, and regulatory actions, to suppress dissenting voices and control the media narrative [13]. The government's control over state-owned media outlets, such as the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC) [14], raises concerns about biased reporting and limited access to diverse



viewpoints [15]. Journalists and media organizations critical of the government often face reprisals, including threats of legal action, arbitrary arrests, or revocation of operating licenses [16].

Third, limited access to information is a significant obstacle to media freedom in Sierra Leone. Journalists often face challenges in obtaining official documents, government data, and information related to public affairs. The limited access to information is particularly evident in areas such as public procurement processes, financial transactions, and government decision-making. This limited access hampers journalists' ability to provide comprehensive and accurate coverage of important issues, hindering the public's right to know.

Fourth, Journalistic safety measures and protection for journalists are inadequate in Sierra Leone. Journalists often lack proper training and resources to ensure their safety while covering sensitive stories. Besides, authorities seldom act against perpetrators of violence against journalists. As a result, many journalists do not use security protocols [17]. The absence of effective mechanisms to address the safety concerns of journalists hampers media freedom and discourages investigative journalism.

These challenges to media freedom in Sierra Leone require concerted efforts from the

government, civil society, and international organizations to address and mitigate. The promotion of a free and independent press, ensuring the safety of journalists, strengthening legal protections, and fostering a culture of transparency and accountability are crucial for the advancement of media freedom in Sierra Leone.

### **Challenges to Media Ownership and Pluralism**

One of the major challenges to media ownership and pluralism is the concentration of media ownership in the hands of a few powerful individuals or entities [18]. In many aspects of the media or communications industry, including print, online, advertising and telecommunications, research shows a growing concentration of ownership. For academics across the globe, media concentration has become an issue [19]. This concentration can lead to a lack of diverse voices and perspectives in the media landscape, limiting the representation of different societal groups and viewpoints [20]. Studies have shown that concentrated media ownership can result in biased reporting, self-censorship, and limited coverage of critical issues [21]. In Sierra Leone, media ownership concentration has been observed, with a few influential individuals or entities controlling significant media outlets. [22].

Another challenge to media ownership and pluralism is the lack of funding and economic

viability. Many media outlets struggle to generate sufficient revenue to sustain their operations, which can lead to financial dependence on external entities, compromising their editorial independence [23]. In Sierra Leone, media organizations face challenges in generating revenue from advertising and subscriptions, as well as accessing financial support for journalistic projects. Limited funding hampers the ability of media outlets to invest in quality journalism, conduct investigative reporting, and provide diverse content [24].

Furthermore, the digital divide and limited access to information present additional challenges to media ownership and pluralism.

In Sierra Leone, there is an unequal distribution of internet access, with urban areas having better connectivity than rural regions [25]. This digital divide restricts the ability of marginalized communities to participate in the digital public sphere and access diverse sources of information. Lack of access to digital platforms and online resources further exacerbates the concentration of media ownership, as traditional media outlets maintain dominance in reaching audiences [26].

### **Opportunities for Enhancing Media Freedom in Sierra Leone**

One opportunity for enhancing media freedom in Sierra Leone is to strengthen legal protections and enact legislative reforms that

support a free and independent press. This includes ensuring the enforcement of constitutional guarantees of freedom of expression and the press, as well as reviewing and amending laws that could be used to suppress media freedom, such as the Public Order Act 1965. Repeal of Part 5 which relates to seditious criminal libel of this Act in 2020 has however considerably improved the press freedom situation largely evident in the fact that no journalist is in prison and/or in court for practicing his, or her, profession as a journalist. Journalists are taking advantage of this unique opportunity.

Promoting professional standards and ethical journalism is another opportunity for enhancing media freedom in Sierra Leone. Media organizations, in collaboration with journalism schools and training institutions, should prioritize the development of codes of conduct and ethical guidelines for journalists [27]. The SLAJ Code of Ethics is intended to address the moral dilemmas that face journalism in Sierra Leone [28]. It is influenced by other codes of ethics and global best practices, and it follows most of their guiding principles. Its goal is to make sure that when performing their duties, its members uphold the highest ethical standards, professional competence, and decency [29].

Enhancing the safety and protection of journalists is essential for fostering media freedom in Sierra Leone. The government

should develop and implement mechanisms to investigate and prosecute those who perpetrate violence against journalists. Specialized training programs and workshops on safety measures, conflict reporting, and digital security should be provided to journalists.

Building the capacity and professional development of journalists is crucial for enhancing media freedom in Sierra Leone. Journalists should have access to training programs, workshops, and mentorship opportunities to enhance their skills in investigative journalism, data journalism, digital media, and multimedia reporting.

Engaging civil society organizations and seeking international support is an important opportunity for enhancing media freedom in Sierra Leone. Civil society groups can play a crucial role in advocating for media freedom, monitoring violations, and holding the government accountable.

### **The Role of Media Freedom in Democratic Societies**

Media freedom plays a crucial role in promoting accountability and transparency in democratic societies [30]. An independent and free media serves as a watchdog, holding those in power accountable for their actions and decisions. Through investigative journalism, the media uncovers corruption, exposes wrongdoing, and sheds light on issues that would otherwise remain hidden. The media acts as a bridge between the government and

the public, providing critical information and analysis on public affairs. This enables citizens to make informed decisions, actively participate in democratic processes, and demand transparency from their leaders. By scrutinizing government actions and policies, the media helps ensure that public officials are answerable to the people they serve [31].

Media freedom also serves as a catalyst for social change in democratic societies. By giving a voice to marginalized communities, the media can shed light on social issues, advocate for human rights, and contribute to positive societal transformations [32]. Through in-depth reporting and storytelling, the media brings attention to social injustices, discrimination, and inequalities. By providing a platform for diverse perspectives and challenging the status quo, the media stimulates public discourse and fosters a culture of open dialogue. This can lead to increased awareness, empathy, and collective action towards addressing social issues and advocating for change [33].

### **Public Perception and Trust in the Media**

Public perception and trust in the media are crucial for a functioning democracy. A free and independent media is expected to be a reliable source of information, providing accurate and unbiased reporting. However, trust in the media has been declining in recent years, with the spread of disinformation, misinformation, and "fake news" [34]. It is

important to differentiate between credible journalism and misinformation spread through social media platforms. Misinformation can erode public trust, distort public opinion, and undermine the democratic process. Building trust in the media requires a commitment to journalistic ethics, fact-checking, and transparent reporting practices.

### ***Limitations of the Study***

The analysis primarily relies on secondary sources and may not capture the complete picture of media freedom in Sierra Leone. Furthermore, the rapidly evolving media landscape and political dynamics require continuous monitoring and analysis.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this research highlights the state of media freedom, current challenges, and opportunities for enhancing media freedom in Sierra Leone from a conceptual and theoretical perspective. The study emphasizes the need to strengthen legal protections, promote professional standards, enhance journalist safety, build capacity, and engage civil society and international support. By addressing the concentration of ownership, funding limitations, digital divide, and self-censorship, Sierra Leone can foster a free and independent media that contributes to accountability, transparency, citizen participation, and democratic governance. While further research is necessary, this study provides valuable insights for advancing media freedom in Sierra

Leone and nurturing a diverse and inclusive media landscape that fosters democratic development.

### **References**

1. Sylvanus Spencer (chapter 11), Expanding the Space for Freedom of Expression in Postwar Sierra Leone; [https://www.berghahnbooks.com/downloads/OpenAccess/KnoerrUpper/KnoerrUpper\\_11.pdf](https://www.berghahnbooks.com/downloads/OpenAccess/KnoerrUpper/KnoerrUpper_11.pdf)
2. Sierra Leone Country Report 2022, <https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/SLE>
3. RSF's 2022 World Press Freedom Index: a new era of polarisation, <https://rsf.org/en/rsf-s-2022>
4. African Media Barometer Nigeria (2019), <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/africa-media/16246.pdf>
5. Hopes for Media freedom in Niger & Guinea (2011), <https://rsf.org/sites/default/files/niger>
6. RSF- Reporters Without Borders (2021) Guinea, <https://rsf.org/en/country/guinea>
7. Monitoring Press Freedom and Enhancing reforms of Media laws in Sierra Leone (2020); <http://mrcgonline.org/media/attachments/2020/08/20/press-freedom-report-final-copy-2020-1.pdf>
8. *Article 25. (1) Protection of freedom of expression and the press* <http://www.sierra-leone.org/Laws/constitution1991.pdf>
9. The Independent Commission Act 2000, <http://www.sierra-leone.org/Laws/2000-12.pdf>
10. Freedom House (2022), Freedom in the World – Sierra Leone Country Report;

- <https://freedomhouse.org/country/sierra-leone>
11. The Public Order Act, 1965 - Sierra Leone;  
<https://pdf4pro.com/amp/fullscreen/the-public-order-act-1965-sierra-leone->
  12. Amnesty International. (2020). "Sierra Leone 2020." Amnesty International Report. Retrieved from <https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/africa/sierra-leone/report-sierra-leone/>
  13. MFWM (2020) Safety of journalist in Sierra Leone – A Study on the State of Journalist’s policies and Practices in Media Houses in Sierra Leone; <https://safetyofjournalistsinafrica.africa/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/safety-p>
  14. Media Reform Coordinating Group (MRCG, 2021), Monitoring Press Freedom and Enhancing Reform Of Media Laws In Sierra Leone; <http://mrcgonline.org/media/attachments/2022/01/17/ned-sixth-edition--press-freedom-report-2021>
  15. Koroma, S.B. (2023). Turbulence in Journalism in Sierra Leone: Past and Present. In: Journalism Cultures in Sierra Leone. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-31093-5\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-31093-5_2)
  16. Mustapha M. K. Sesay (MRCG, 2014), SLBC and its Public Service mandate - State of the Media report; <http://mrcgonline.org/media/attachments/2018/12/08/state-of-the-media-report-2014.pdf>
  17. Sierra Leone media guide by BBC, March 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-14094381>
  18. Ahmed Sahid Nasralla, (MRCG, 2014) Government, the media & Control – State of the Media report; <http://mrcgonline.org/media/attachments/2018/12/08/state-of-the-media-report-2014.pdf>
  19. UNESCO (2017), Safety guide for journalists: a handbook for reporters in high-risk environments; <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000243986>
  20. Manizja Aziz (2020), Journalism Without Fear or Favour World Press Freedom Day 2020; <https://kq.freepressunlimited.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Background-paper-25-01.pdf>
  21. UNESCO (2002), Un plan of action on the safety of journalists and the issue of impunity; [https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/un-plan-on-safety-journalists\\_en.pdf](https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/un-plan-on-safety-journalists_en.pdf)
  22. Search for Common Ground (2005), Media Sector Mapping in Sierra Leone; <https://www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/08/state-of-the-media-2016.pdf>
  23. C. E. Uzuegbunam (2020), Concentration of Media Ownership; <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/339201224>
  24. Hindolo Tonya Musa – State of the Media (2016) The Need for Fair Distribution of the Available Radio Frequencies in Sierra Leone, <http://www.mrcgonline.org/media/attachments/2018/12/08/state-of-the-media-2016.pdf>
  25. Dunaway, J. (2012). Media Ownership and Story Tone in Campaign News. *American Politics Research*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1532673X12454564>
  26. Radika Kumar & Niels Strazdins (2021), the Digital Infrastructure Divide in the Common Wealth; <https://production-new-commonwealth-files.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2023-05/>

27. Trappel, J., & Meier, W. A. (2022). Soaring media ownership concentration: Comparing the effects of digitalisation on media pluralism and diversity; <http://norden.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1641183/FULLTEXT01.pdf>
28. Bernadette Cole (2010) Media Ethics and The Practice of Journalism in Sierra Leone- Part 1; Awoko Publication  
<https://awokonewspaper.sl/media-ethics-and-the-practice-of-journalism-in-sierra-leone-part-1/>
29. Ibrahim Bangura (2022), The political economy of the media in Sierra Leone and the potential for private-sector investment  
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediaaction/documents/primed-research-political-economy-media-bangura.pdf>
30. Michael Yao Wodui Serwornoo (2019), An Examination of Journalistic Codes of Ethics in Anglophone West Africa; [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/330642754\\_](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/330642754_)
31. [https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/ideas\\_for\\_news\\_organisations\\_en\\_0.pdf](https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/ideas_for_news_organisations_en_0.pdf)
32. Wafula Nyongesa (2021), Role of Media in Promoting Accountability and Transparency in Kakamega County Government – Kenya, <https://www.arcjournals.org/pdfs/ijmjm/v7-i1/2.pdf>
33. Wafula Nyongesa (2021), Role of Media in Promoting Accountability and Transparency in Kakamega County Government – Kenya, <https://www.arcjournals.org/pdfs/ijmjm/v7-i1/2.pdf>
34. James Deane (2016), The Independent media curbing corruption in Fragile Settings, <https://downloads.bbc.co.uk/mediaaction/policybriefing/curbing-corruption-in-fragile-settings-report.pdf>

### 3. The Media After the Repeal of the Criminal and Seditious Libel Laws: Taking Advantage of the New Democratic Opening in Sierra Leone

*Isaac Massaquoi (PhD)*

*Faculty of Communication, Media and Information Studies, FBC, USL*

#### **Abstract**

*The media in Sierra Leone are at a crossroads. Since the repeal of the criminal and seditious libel laws contained in the Public Order Act of 1965, this vital organ of democratic governance appears to have gained a new lease of life. Crushed under draconian laws and regulations – manifested in politically motivated arrest, trials and detentions and in some cases violent attacks on journalists and their production equipment, the media had become unprofessional, largely pliant and out of step with its counterparts even in West Africa in terms of how much they contributed to the development of Sierra Leone. Journalists and media scholars have always argued persuasively that the existence of the seditious and criminal libel laws was the main impediment to professionalism and the capital investment required to strengthen the capacity of the industry for qualitative professional performance. This article argues that moderate but noticeable progress has been made since Sierra Leone took its first steps into democracy in 1996, but that following the repeal of the obnoxious criminal and seditious libel laws, the media must now reconfigure themselves and redefine their mission and modus operandi to be in a position to take advantage of the new*

*environment and play their fourth estate function in the overall development aspirations of the country.*

*Key words: Draconian laws, Fourth Estate, Capital Investment, Professionalism, reconfigure, qualitative performance, repeal*

#### **Introduction**

The euphoria that greeted the repeal of the seditious and criminal libel provisions in the Public Order Act of 1965 has died down and media practitioners appear to have been caught in a state of total unpreparedness for the new environment of freedom with all the accompanying possibilities for media stabilization, expansion, growth and impact on the democratic architecture of Sierra Leone.

The Sierra Leone media, the first to evolve in West Africa, came through fifty-five years of unnecessarily draconian regulatory systems manifested in statutory and non-formal means of control by the fledgling multi-party political system that succeeded colonial rule and a brutal one party dictatorship that lasted nearly two decades.

It is instructive that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report (2004) produced at the end of Sierra Leone's civil war points at how the failings of the media under Joseph Saidu Momoh and his

predecessor may have contributed to the fanning of the flames of the civil that would eventually consume his directionless leadership.

The article argues that the repeal of the criminal and seditious libel provisions of the Public Order Act of 1965 provides a fresh opportunity for the Sierra Leone media to freely assume their role in the nation's democracy.

### **Theoretical Framework**

It is important to establish the theoretical construct from which the main arguments in the article should be understood. For this article therefore, the Social Responsibility Theory is considered appropriate.

### **Social Responsibility Theory**

This theory emerged from the conclusions of what became known as the Hutchins Commission in the United States which had a specific mandate to attempt to establish a proper role for the press in a democratic society

The theory puts forward the idea that in a democracy, the concept of freedom of the media must be justified and even defended by the extent to which it positively impacts society.

Christians et al (2009) identify different versions of the theory with "varying degrees of strength". According to them:

A minimalist version expects the media themselves to develop a self-regulatory mechanism of regulation, based on voluntary promises in response to demands from the public or the government. The development of professionalism is thought to play a key part in this process. A more interventionist approach embraces press subsidies and laws to ensure diversity and innovation, as well as the founding of publicly owned media, especially public service broadcasting.

Christians et al (Ibid) argue that "the genius of the social responsibility tradition has been its ability to find a balance between freedom and control, self-regulation and public regulation, respect for both national culture and cultural diversity, personal needs and community needs, relatively high cultural quality and mass comprehension".

Against this background then, it stands to reason that this article is anchored on sound theoretical foundation, bringing together the intrinsic professional underpinnings that defined journalism since its origins.

### **Methodology**

Because of the nature of the topic under consideration and what this article seeks to achieve within the prescribed time frame, convenience sampling method is being employed. A number of media scholars and



practitioners have been selected because they are knowledgeable on the subject matter and are available and motivated enough to be interviewed.

Convenience sampling that is normally employed for a qualitative research of this nature is open to bias and the possibility of respondents with an axe to grind showing up. Against these possible limitations steps have been taken by means of solid desk review to improve credibility.

### **The Media Landscape in Sierra Leone**

Sierra Leone has one of the most vibrant media scenes in West Africa. The landscape changed dramatically following the end of the civil war in 2000 because from a country with less than five newspapers, some owned and directly operated by the government the other squeezed into submission by government regulations and the prospect of their journalists being thrown into prison using the seditious and criminal libel laws.

At the end of 2022, the Independent Media Commission, the state sponsored media regulator had registered 111 Commercial, 41 Community, 7 Public Service broadcasting stations, 50 Religious 13 Teaching and 6 International relay stations.

The IMC also has 242 newspapers on the books. All but 10 are based in the capital, Freetown. So in terms of newspapers, they are

published in Freetown mainly because the infrastructure to publish can be found only in the capital and the bulk of the readers are middle class people based in Freetown and regional headquarter towns. Only about a dozen of them with an average of 12 pages are published daily with an overwhelming focus on political reporting.

### **Media Education in Sierra Leone**

It is fair to say that media education has taken off in a significant way in Sierra Leone. Prior to 1993 and for more than a decade later, the core of media practitioners were people trained in other areas of the humanities who either developed an interest in journalism or went into the field as a stop gap measure while waiting for a much more rewarding job offer to appear. Owing to the fact that under the one-party system of Siaka Stevens in particular, the media were constantly under attack, it was understandable that the few professionals around who were trained abroad drifted into other occupations. Indeed, the Truth and Reconciliation Report (2004) which attempted to put on record the antecedents of the civil war in Sierra Leone noted that:

The continued attacks on the media drove many qualified and experienced people away from the profession, decimating the calibre and capacity of the so-called 'Fourth Estate'. ..A culture of debate and principled reporting still remains unattainable for most media practitioners in Sierra

Leone. In consequence, the average Sierra Leonean has no confidence in the media, either for newsworthy stories or for informed, objective editorial opinion (Ibid).

When the University of Sierra Leone started media education in 1993, the small unit offering diplomas and certificates was attached to the Language Studies department with less than a dozen students, mostly practitioners who had attended several short courses organized by institutions like Thomson Foundation (now Thomson Reuters). Today thousands have graduated from what is now the Faculty of Communication, Media and Information Studies. Other media training institutes have proliferated over the same period.

### **The Post-Repeal Environment**

The media in Sierra Leone have entered a crucial period in their existence as a fundamental pillar of the nation's democratic architecture. After more than a century of agitation about heavy-handed statutory control of media, severely limiting freedom to receive and impart knowledge by way of media and so helping facilitate and in some cases shape the national conversation, the criminal and seditious libel provisions of the Public Order Act of 1965 have been repealed. Although civil provisions in the same Act remain in force, sending journalists to prison on account of their work is no longer legally possible in Sierra Leone.

Signing the repealed act into law at a State House ceremony, President Bio (2020) noted that:

“The criminal libel and seditious libel laws chilled free speech, undermined the free expression of civil liberties, and denied space for legitimate investigative journalism. Governments should be open to more scrutiny, not less. Equally so, what we need is not to criminalise perceived irresponsible behaviour but to create a space for citizens to experience the alternative – responsible, objective, investigative, and the professional reporting of events (Ibid).

The single most important issue confronting the media today is how to operate in this new environment to impact society in an increasingly powerful way than ever before and having regard to the technological advancement in communication in this century – the proliferation of social media applications making it possible for the emergence of what is known today as citizen-journalists, remain relevant in the business of information dissemination. In other words, the media are free to operate in Sierra Leone. What next?

There is a tendency for the media to attempt to position themselves as the saviours of mankind and in this period of intense competition for ratings and resources, to be more concerned about these things than

holding on to the mission of the media. Former British Prime Minister Tony Blair (2007) noted that in response to the changing context of today's media operation, the media "increasingly and to a dangerous degree is driven by "impact". Impact is what matters. It is all that can distinguish, can rise above the clamour, and can get noticed. Impact gives competitive edge. Of course, the accuracy of a story counts. But it is secondary to impact" (Ibid).

In his seminal work titled *Public Opinion*, Lippmann (1922) advocated for the media to play their role, believing that there are other actors in a state with responsibilities to the people and he argues that:

The Press is no substitute for institutions. It is like the beam of a searchlight that moves restlessly about, bringing one episode and then another out of darkness into vision. Men cannot do the work of the world by this light alone. They cannot govern by episodes, incidents and eruptions. It is only when they work by a steady light of their own that the press, when it is turned upon them, reveals a situation intelligible enough for a popular decision. The trouble lies deeper than the press, so does the remedy."

While the two Washington Post Journalists, Woodward and Bernstein take a lot of credit for the downfall of President Richard Nixon,

Schudson (1995) argues that contributions by journalists was part of what other individuals did and "there would have been no presidential resignation had it not been for Judge John Sirica, the Ervin Committee, the existence and discovery of the White House tapes and other factors...Moreover, the journalistic contribution itself was dependent on government officials who risked their careers by leaking to the press." So the incipient arrogance and sense of pride sweeping through the media, post repeal should be tempered in the light of the crucial importance of other sectors of society in the delivery of qualitative journalism to make a change.

Approaching journalism from the angle of unbridled adversarialism towards government and public life in general has not worked throughout the history of the Sierra Leone media and has no chance of working this time either. Rosen (1999) suggests that journalists should develop an approach to their work that addresses people as citizens, potential participants in public affairs, rather than victims or spectator, help the political community act upon, rather than just learn about its problems and improve the climate of public discussion, rather than simply watch it deteriorate."

Blay-Amihere (1986) says the African press cannot afford the luxury of being collaborative and facilitative of the state even as:

The press everywhere in Africa seeks to play a genuine developmental role, development here defined broadly as the needs and aspirations of the people, and not narrowly as the designs of regimes who want to prolong their rule by all means possible. And so the press strives not to be appendages of governments, but as a fourth estate in the true sense of the word, ready to assist all governments and forces which keep faith with the people.

Attractive as this line of thought might look, it fails the introspection test. A quick inward look at the media establishment itself speaks of an institution that is deeply flawed and is too shy to point accusing fingers at themselves.

Media poverty is a concept that practitioners and media academics in Sierra Leone have been talking about over the last five years since the idea was first conceptualized by M'Bayo (2014). According to him, as a developing nation, the socio-political and economic problems associated with the state are also reflected in the institutions of society". His media poverty thesis notes that:

"In almost every aspect of life, poverty is pervasive, and media operations – ownership, management, and professional practice – are conditioned by this environment. Hence, some of the intractable problems of the media in Sierra Leone may be attributed to

what I call as media poverty – the lack of access to resources needed to produce good quality stories: Information, limited access to technology, limited research skills, poor remunerations, corruption in the media, journalism, illiteracy, and so on" (Ibid).

The point has to be made therefore that the way media institutions are being run today makes them financially weak and unattractive to any serious private capital investment and unless the business model is re-adjusted to reflect the current challenges facing the industry. Addressing the annual presidential media cocktail the president of the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists, SLAJ Ahmed Sahid Nasralla (2022) told the gathering that "the print media, especially, is literally dying...the government has to devise a method of supporting the media."

Direct government support for newspapers is not uncommon, especially in French West Africa but it opens up a completely new area of study especially as it may affect the independence of Sierra Leone journalism in the pursuit of the interest of the people. The call however, captures the enormity of the survival challenge facing the media.

1. Traditional media also now have to deal with the challenge posed to their survival by the many social media applications available to ordinary people we now call citizen-

journalists. These people are normally first to the news, they take nice pictures and get the story out and are not bound by the ethical and professional codes enforced by the IMC. Unless traditional media constantly change angles and increase speed, they find themselves basically reproducing what was read from a social media blogger's page yesterday.

In other parts of the world, news organizations have concluded that they must also engage the social media to stand any chance of staying in business. The media in Sierra Leone have shown signs of moving in that direction but the pace has to be accelerated. Many advertisers that traditionally used newspapers have now turned to social media without regret. That means a significant amount of revenue has been taken out of the accounts of struggling newspapers.

2. Sierra Leonean Journalists crowd around the same issues - mainly politics and sports, in fact political reporting normally takes a partisan perspective. Sierra Leone journalism should break out of the strangled hold of partisan political reporting and diversify into other extremely important sectors of life – like business and finance, entrepreneurship, technology and innovation. Some countries in the sub-region have newspapers and magazines covering those specialist beats but in the early years of attempting to diversify, newspapers would do well to include regular

columns covering these subjects instead of erroneously assuming that readers are only interested in politics, focusing on scandals and absolutely wild allegations of official impropriety for the purpose of sensationalism.

3. The democratic renewal promised by the opening up of the media space to the operations of community radio stations around the country - a process that intensified beginning in 2004 with the massive financial and material intervention by the Open Society Initiative for West Africa, OSIWA and the Dutch-sponsored Initiative for the Mobile Training of Community Radio, INFORMOTRAC has been largely squandered. Today, many community radio stations are only known as such by their registration papers at the Independent Media Commission, the statutory regulatory institution.

While the new players may have significantly helped in bringing the nation together again after the civil war, only a few of even those pioneering radio stations have remained loyal to their community ownership and orientation ideals.

### **Conclusion**

The repeal of the criminal and seditious libel law in Sierra Leone should never be considered as the end of the challenges facing the media. While a significant space for qualitative professional practice that puts the media in a powerful position to impact the

socio-political and economic trajectory of the country's development is now open, unless a complete re-orientation or re-definition of Sierra Leone journalism is done, this could easily become a wasted opportunity.

Hyden et al (2002) suggest that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century action has to be taken to put the Africa media in a strong position in relation to other forces in society to be effective in protecting democracy on the continent arguing that the media in the continent are lagging behind their counterparts in the liberal democracies of the West. They argue that "while improving the quality of training of media personnel in Africa may go some way towards strengthening this role, it is clear that it falls upon the latter to take up the gauntlet to fight for an expanded role for their institutions in democratization" (Ibid). That is the size of the task facing the Sierra Leone media.

## References

Blay-Amihere, Kabral, INDEX ON CENSORSHIP 7/87 Africa Press and Government in Africa 1986.

Christians et al (2009) Normative Theories of the Media, University of Illinois Press.

Kovach, Bill and Rosenstiel, Tom (2001) The elements of journalism – Three Rivers Press, New York.

Lippmann, Walter (1997) Public Opinion (New York: Free Press paperbacks).

M'Bayo Ritchard, Statement at the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ) Annual General Meeting 6th June 2014, Makeni Sierra Leone

Muller, Manuel (EU Ambassador to Sierra Leone) Press Freedom Walk, May 7, 2022, Freetown

Naralla, A.S, SLAJ President addresses Media Cocktail, Dec 2022 Country Lodge, Freetown  
Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report, 2004, Vol. 3.

The Right Honourable Tony Blair, Lecture on public life – Reuters Institute, Canary Wharf, London 12 June 2007.

The Right Honourable Lord Justice Leveson: An inquiry into the culture, practices and ethics of the press: November 2012 vol.1

Westley, B. (eds.) (1977) Journalism Monographs No. 49, Blanchard M, - The Hutchins Commission: The Press and the Responsibility Concept.

#### 4. How public authorities complied with the RAI Law in Sierra Leone in 2022?

*Ibrahim Seaga Shaw (PhD)*

*Chairman and Information Commissioner, Right to Access Information Commission, and  
Coordinator of the Graduate Programme, Faculty of Communication, Media, and Information  
Studies, Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone*

##### **Abstract**

*The purpose of the Right to Access Information (RAI) law of 2013 is to facilitate access to information (ATI) as a vehicle to enhance the accountability and transparency of public authorities in Sierra Leone in order to promote an open and democratic society, and to enable public debate on the conduct of those bodies. Information can empower people to hold government to account, prevent and combat corruption, and promote service delivery to improve the quality of lives and livelihoods among the underprivileged and marginalized. ATI is one of the most important mechanisms in helping journalists gather the facts and data necessary to fulfil their professional function. Freedom of information cannot succeed in a society where free speech is muzzled. That is why, as I argue in this paper, it is not just the adoption of this law that is important but rather its implementation and integration into the cultural psyche of Sierra Leone. The latter is at the centre of the mandate of the Right to Access Information Commission (RAIC), which was set up in 2014 to provide oversight on the implementation of the RAI law in the country. Monitoring and reporting on the state of compliance with this*

*law by public authorities is therefore one of the core obligations of the RAIC. Drawing mostly on desk research, this paper provides a critical overview of the extent to which public authorities in Sierra Leone complied with the RAI law in 2022.*

##### **Introduction**

The RAI Act 2013 provides for the establishment of the Right to Access Information Commission (RAIC) which came into existence and commenced full operations in July 2014 with the appointment of its first Commission headed by a Chairman and Information Commissioner, and four Regional Commissioners based in Bo, Kenema, Makeni, and Freetown.

The RAIC was founded on the principle of promoting transparency, accountability and good governance. The Commission operates on a platform of fundamental human right recognized by international human rights instruments, especially Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which provides for the right to seek, receive and impart information and ideas, through

various channels, regardless of borders. Its operations are also consistent with Article 9 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights, the American Convention on Human Rights, the European Convention on Human Rights, the Council of Europe Convention on Access to Official Documents (Tshwane Principles, 2013, p.7), as well as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESC). Right of access to information held by public authorities is a fundamental right consistent with Target 16.10.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) which calls for ensuring public access to information and the protection of fundamental freedoms in accordance with national legislation and international agreements cited above. The RAI legislation aligns itself with Section 25 of the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone which guarantees freedom of expression and of the press.

Drawing mainly on desk research and to some extent on literature review, this paper provides a critical overview of the state of compliance with the RAI law by public authorities in 2022.

For people to be in a position to monitor the conduct of those who govern them and to participate fully in the democratic space, it is imperative that they have access to information held by public authorities

(ibid). "Access to information is vital for the promotion of transparent and accountable governance. Access to information allows people to seek and receive public-held information which is critical for fighting corruption, making governments more efficient and helping people exercise their basic human rights" (MFWA, 2022).

However, it is important to note that access to information can only be denied if it is deemed to be exempt as provided for in Part 3 of the RAI Law such as information that relates to national security, privacy, third party information etc. But there may also be an exception to an exemption as provided for in Part 3 Section 12 Sub Section 2 of the RAI Act 2013 as well as in one of the Tshwane Principles (2013) which states that 'information may only be withheld where the public interest in maintaining the information's secrecy clearly outweighs the public interest in access to information' (Tshwane Principles, 2013, p.9).

But the exempt provisions in the RAI Law feature among the most recurrent alibis put forward by public authorities to deny access to information even when in some cases they are found wanting for hiding behind these exempt provisions to deny access to public information.



## **The state of compliance with the RAI Law in 2022**

RAIC's core mandate is to implement the RAI Act 2013 and in doing so facilitate access to information as a vehicle to promote transparency, accountability and good governance.

Achieving the successful implementation of the RAI law is by no means an easy job, especially given the rate of mass illiteracy in the country and the culture of secrecy, which had been the status quo before the enactment of the RAI Law. One way of measuring progress in the implementation of the RAI law is by monitoring and reporting on the extent to which public authorities are complying with their obligations as enshrined in it. Part 2 section 2 of the Act provides that everybody, no matter your status, tribe, social standing, colour, race, etc. have the right to access information held by public authorities. However, this right can only be enjoyed if the public authorities who hold the information requested comply.

RAIC's interventions to ensure compliance have been two-fold; the first is the baby-sitting, or use of the carrot, approach where the Commission provides capacity building and other forms of support to the public authorities to help them understand their obligations under the Act from the supply side and to members of the public, especially civil society to understand their rights to access

information on the demand side; the second is the use of the stick such as issuing orders and fines to compel the public authorities to comply with their obligations.

Two things have helped the Commission to monitor and report on compliance by public authorities with public access to information in Sierra Leone. First, it set itself the target of producing an annual report of its activities covering 2019 in accordance with Section 41 of the RAI Act for the first time since it was set up in 2014 and Sub Section 3 of that Section provides that such annual report should include reports of the status of compliance by all public authorities. Section 41 subsection 3 of The Right to Access Information Act 2013 states: "***The annual report shall also include an overview of the performance of all public authorities in implementing this Act.***" Subsection 4 states: "***To enable the Commission to comply with subsection (3), every public authority shall report annually to the Commission on the steps it has taken to implement this Act, including a report on the requests for information it has received and how these have been dealt with.***"

Second, it has since 2019 been participating in an annual UNESCO Survey. UNESCO is the UN agency mandated to monitor and report on compliance by member states of the United Nations with SDG 16.10.2 which speaks directly to Public Access to Information. This

Survey focuses on central information about adoption and implementation of the right to information (RTI) and was designed to help Member States provide the core data that UNESCO and the UNESCO Institute of Statistics are seeking at that moment to fulfil UNESCO's mandate (RAIC Annual Report, 2020).

### **Proactive disclosure of information and freedom of information request**

The Commission has in line with its mandate identified two broad areas of compliance: first, proactive disclosure of information (PDI) as provided for in Section 8 Sub Section 2 of the RAI Law which states that all public authorities are obliged by law to proactively publish the minimum of 22 classes of essential information about their institution, including on a web site platform, and that they should complete and/or update a Proactive Publication Scheme to be submitted to the Commission for assessment within the period of six years since the enactment of the RAI Law, or its coming into operation. Second, freedom of information (FOI) request as provided for in Part 2 Section 2 of the RAI Law which states that everyone has the right to access information held by a public authority on request with a deadline of 15 working days, 48 hours if the request relates to saving life, or securing the liberty of someone. This paper will now proceed to provide the state of compliance with PDI and FOI, as well as other

obligations under the Act, by public authorities in Sierra Leone in 2022.

### **Proactive disclosure of information**

In adopting a publication scheme, a public authority shall, as per Section 8 (3), have regard to the public interest—in allowing access to the information it holds; and in making information available proactively so as to minimize the need for individuals to make requests for information.

Section 8(5) of The Right to Access Information Act 2013 states that every public authority shall publish information in accordance with its publication scheme. Section 8(6) states that every publication scheme shall, within six years of the adoption of the first publication scheme by a public authority, cover all of the core proactive publication obligations set out in subsection (1).

At the beginning of every year, the Commission calls on MDAs to submit their PDI Schemes for its approval in accordance with Section 41 of the RAI Act. By a memorandum dated 12<sup>th</sup> January 2022, the Commission accordingly requested MDAs to submit their PDI Schemes to the Commission before 1<sup>st</sup> February 2022. The deadline was extended to March 25. In the Commission's assessment of PDI in 2021/2022, it noted that out of 29 public authorities that submitted their Proactive Publication Schemes (PPS), 3

were fully approved, 16 were given approval with observation because they were on the verge of being fully approved owing to the fact that they complied with 15 and above obligations, 6 were given conditional approval as they complied with between 10 and 14 obligations, and 4 were rejected as they complied with less than 10 PDI obligations.

Following is the list of the 29 MDAs that submitted their Publication schemes and how they were assessed:

The three MDAs whose PPSs were fully approved were: Statistics SL, Ministry of Social Welfare, and Right to Access Information Commission.

The 16 that were given approval with observation were:

1. Independent Police Complaint Board;
2. Office of the Attorney General and Minister of Justice;
3. National Commission for Social Action;
4. Ministry of Development and Economic Planning;
5. Environmental Protection Agency;
6. Standards Bureau;
7. Guma Valley Water Company;
8. Independent Media Commission;

9. Public Service Commission;
10. Sierra Leone Maritime Administration;
11. Pharmacy Board Sierra Leone;
12. Bo City Council;
13. Kenema District Council;
14. Pujehun District Council;
15. Makeni City Council; and
16. Political Parties Regulation Commission.

The six (6) that were given conditional approval were:

1. Local Government Service Commission;
2. Bo District Council;
3. Office of the Administrator and Registrar-General;
4. Ministry of Labour and Social Security;
5. Anti-Corruption Commission; and
6. National Fire Force.

The 4 that were rejected were:

1. Sierra Leone Local Content Agency;
2. National Commission for Democracy;
3. Sierra Leone Commercial Bank; and
4. Parliament of Sierra Leone.

For the 2022-2023 PDI assessment cycle, the RAIC issued a memorandum to all MDAs nation-wide that have never submitted PDIs to the commission and those that submitted in the 2021-2022 assessment cycle presented above but were either given conditional approval, or rejected, to submit their PDI PPSs on, or before, the 20<sup>th</sup> of February 2023 for assessment.

After several engagements and trainings with public authorities, the Commission received PDI PPSs schemes from 47 Public Authorities which were assessed. These 47 MDAs are listed by region and district and according to their PDI Compliance Status in TABLE 1 below:

**TABLE 1: 2022 -2023 PDI NATION-WIDE COMPLIANCE STATUS**

<b>NO</b>	<b>MDA</b>	<b>REGION</b>	<b>DISTRICT</b>	<b>COMPLIANCE STATUS</b>
1	Min of Env and Climate Change	Western Area	Western Urban	Approved
2	National Authorising Office	Western Area	Western Urban	Approved
3	Human Resource Management Office	Western Area	Western Urban	Approved
4	Min of Youth Affairs	Western Area	Western Urban	Approved
5	Civil Service Training College	Western Area	Western Urban	Approved
6	Cabinet Secretariat	Western Area	Western Urban	Approved
7	Local Govt Service Com	Western Area	Western Urban	Approved
8	Public Service Commission	Western Area	Western Urban	Approved
9	National Commission For Democracy	Western Area	Western Urban	Approved
10	Electricity Distribution and Supply Agency	Western Area	Western Urban	Approved
11	Ministry of Technical and Higher Education	Western Area	Western Urban	Approved
12	Office of the Administrator and Registrar-General	Western Area	Western Urban	Approved

13	Public Sector Reform Unit	Western Area	Western Urban	Approved
14	S Leone Water Company	Western Area	Western Urban	Approved
15	National Tourist Board	Western Area	Western Urban	Approved
16	Makeni City Council	Northern Reg.	Bombali	Approved
17	University of Makeni	Northern Reg.	Bombali	Approved
18	Port Loko City Council	Northwest Reg.	Port Loko	Approved
19	Kambia District Council	Northwest Reg.	Kambia	Approved
20	Bo District Council	Southern Reg.	Bo	Approved
21	Bo City Council	Southern Reg.	Bo	Approved
22	Kenema District Council	Eastern Reg.	Kenema	Approved
23	Kenema City Council	Eastern Reg.	Kenema	Approved
24	Kenema Govt. Hospital	Eastern Reg.	Kenema	Approved
25	Ministry of Social Welfare	Eastern Reg.	Kenema	Approved
26	Min. of Lands & C.Planning	Eastern Reg.	Kenema	Approved
27	Min of Basic and Sec. Edu	Eastern Reg.	Kenema	Approved
28	Ministry of Employment & Soc Security	Eastern Reg.	Kenema	Approved
29	Ministry of Agriculture & Food Security	Eastern Reg.	Kenema	Approved
30	National Revenue Authority	Eastern Reg.	Kenema	Approved
31	National Youth Commission	Eastern Reg.	Kenema	Approved
32	Kailahun District Council	Eastern Reg.	Kenema	Approved
33	Teaching Service	Eastern Reg.	Kenema	Approved

	Commission			
34	Sierra Leone Water Company	Eastern Reg.	Kenema	Approved
35	National Civil Registration Authority	Eastern Reg.	Kenema	Conditional Approval
36	National Social Security Insurance Trust	Eastern Reg.	Kenema	Conditional Approval
37	North East Provincial Office	Northern Reg	Bombali	Conditional Approval
38	Karene District Council	Northwest Reg.	Karene	Conditional Approval
39	Tonkolili District Council	Northern Reg.	Tonkolili	Conditional Approval
40	Falaba District Council	Northern Reg.	Falaba	Conditional Approval
41	Koinadugu District Council	Northern Reg.	Koinadugu	Conditional Approval
42	Ernest Bai Koroma University	Northern Reg.	Tonkolili	Conditional Approval
43	National Drug Law Enforcement Agency	Western Area	Western Urban	Rejected
44	Sierra Leone Investment and Export Promotion Agency	Western Area	Western Urban	Rejected
45	National Mining Agency	Eastern Reg.	Kenema	Rejected
46	Environmental Protection Agency	Eastern Reg.	Kenema	Rejected
47	Electricity Distribution and Supply Agency	Eastern Region	Kenema	Rejected

As indicated in TABLE 1 above, in the Commission's assessment of the 47 PDI PPSs received for the 2022-2023 assessment cycle,

34 were given approval with observation because they complied with between 15 and 19 out of the 22 minimum classes of PDI

obligations and therefore demonstrated to be on the verge of being fully approved; 8 (eight ) were given conditional approval because they provided at least half of the 22 minimum classes of PDI obligations; whereas 5 were rejected as they complied with less than 10 PDI obligations.

The 20 whose PPSs were approved with observation were: Road Maintenance Fund Administration; Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change; National Authorising Office; Human Resource Management Office; Ministry of Youth Affairs; Civil Service Training College; Cabinet Secretariat; Local Government Service Commission; Public Service Commission; National Commission for Democracy; Electricity Distribution and Supply Agency; Ministry of Technical and Higher Education; Office of the Administrator and Registrar-General; Public Sector Reform Unit ; Sierra Leone Water Company; National Tourist Board; Makeni City Council; University of Makeni; Port Loko City Council, and Kambia District Council.

The ones which were given conditional approval included Tonkolili, Karene, Falaba, and Koinadugu District Councils, EBK University, and North East Provincial Office.

The 2 (two) that were rejected were: National Drug Law Enforcement Agency; and the Sierra Leone Investment and Export Promotion Agency.

The five Public Authorities that the RAIC Compliance team held engagements with and took through the process of completing the PDI but did not submit by the deadline due to various reasons, including delay in sign off by the head of the institution are as follows: Legal Aid Board; Ministry of Transport and Aviation; Parliament of Sierra Leone; Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation; and National Telecommunications Authority.

It is worth noting that submission of PDIs to RAIC for assessment is only annual for those MDAs that have not submitted in the past, or submitted but were either given conditional approval, or rejected. Therefore, those MDAs whose PDI schemes were fully approved, or approved with observation in the 2021-2022 PDI assessment cycle were separately contacted by the Commission to update their schemes for the 2022-2023 assessment cycle, However, those that were either given conditional approval, or rejected, in the last 2021-2022 PDI assessment cycle were served with a memo and asked to re-submit together with those who submitted for the first time. It is encouraging to note that the National Commission for Democracy that had its PDI scheme rejected and the Office of the Administrator and Registrar-General that had its PDI scheme given conditional approval in the last 2021-2022 assessment cycle, respectively, had their schemes given approval with observation in the 2022-2023 assessment

cycle, which shows that these two institutions have made progress with their PDI obligations apparently because of their perseverance, hard work, and political will.

**Freedom of Information and Annual Compliance Report**

The Right to Access Information Commission (RAIC) in 2020 commenced the compilation of the Annual Compliance Report (ACR) which entails details of how public authorities have ensured they promote information access and set up units and departments that may help this. Section 41 (3 & 4) of the RAI Act of 2013 mandated the RAIC to keep a record of efforts made by public authorities and publish in their annual report in accordance with their obligations in the RAI Act.

A draft template designed to aid MDAs respond to their 2022 ACR was done and circulated to all MDAs. The template is intended to ensure that the MDAs have in place a means of assessing themselves in line with statutory obligations such as FOI, PDI, Records Management, Public Information, and ICT.

Below are the contents of the ACR Template:

- Name of Requester
- Date of Request Received
- Nature of Information Requested
- Response by Public Authority the Request (YES/NO)

- Was the Information Provided (YES/NO)
- Date of response (If any)
- Reason(s) for not responding to the request and/or providing the information
- **ADDITIONAL ACR TEMPLATE INFORMATION**
  - Total Number of Requests Received....
  - Total Number of Requests wherein the Information was provided.....
  - Total Number of Pending Cases .....
  - Total Number of Requests Denied.....
  - Total Number of FOI Complaints .....
  - Total Number of FOI Complaints Resolved.....

The RAIC issued out Annual Compliance Reports Template in a memo dated 31<sup>st</sup> January 2023 to over 150 Public authorities to complete and subsequently submit to the RAIC. This ACR template was revised to capture the data of female requesters and Number of Female Public Information Officers (PIOs). The idea was to also have a gender disaggregated data in the monitoring and reporting on compliance with the RAI law in Sierra Leone.



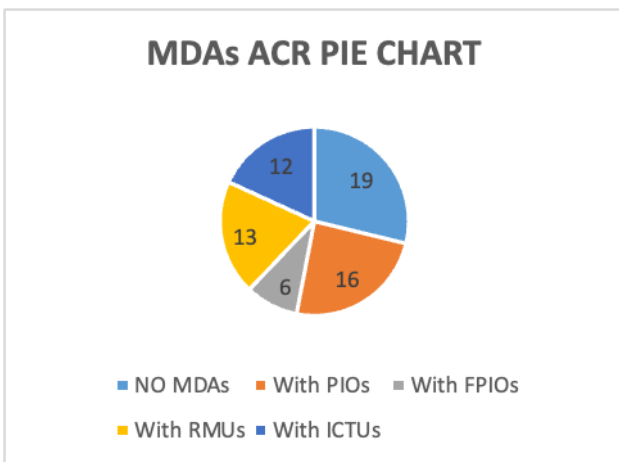
**Number of MDAs (NO MDAS)**

**MDAs with Public Information Officers (PIOs)**

**MDAs with Female Public Information Officers(FPIOs)**

**MDAs with Records Management Units (RMUs)**

**MDAs with Information, Communication, and Technology Units (ICTUs)**



The RAIC received a total of 19 Annual Compliance Reports (ACR) from various Ministries Departments and Agencies (MDAs) of which 16 have Public Information Officers, Six (6) of whom are females. Thirteen (13) MDAs reported that they have a records management department or unit whilst twelve (12) have Information Communication Technology (ICT) departments or units. It is important to note that the 18 MDAs that submitted their PDI publication schemes for the 2022-2023 period discussed earlier in this paper were among these 19 that submitted

their ACRs. The 19<sup>th</sup> one was Statistics Sierra Leone which did not submit a PDI publication scheme for the 2022-2023 period because the publication scheme they submitted in the 2021-2022 cycle was fully approved.

FOI Requests	Number of FOI Requests
FOI Requests Received	13,016
FOI Requests Provided	10,147
FOI Requests Pending	6
FOI Requests Denied	1
FOI Female Requesters	3500

*Figure 1: FOI Requests*

As we can see in FIGURE 1 above, from the 19 MDAs that submitted ACR templates, 13,016 Freedom of Information (FOI) requests were made across Public Authorities, of which 10,147 were provided to the requesters, (3500) of whom were identified as females. There are six pending FOI requests that are to be addressed and there was a single case of denial because the information requested falls under exempt information.

FOI Complaints	Number of FOI Complaints
FOI Complaints Received	12,932
FOI Complaints Resolved	9,119
FOI Complaints Pending	3,658
FOI Complaints Unresolved	3
FOI Female Complainants	1500

*Figure 2: FOI Requests*

As we can see in FIGURE 2 above, out of the 13,016 FOI requests received by MDAs, a total of 12,932 Complaints were made. 9119 of which were resolved whilst 3658 were pending at the time of the reporting. It should be noted that the resolved complaints were resolved through the internal complaint resolution mechanisms of the 19 MDAs under review. 3 complaints remained unresolved.

**FOI Requests/Complaints with RAIC Involvement and/or Intervention**

It should however be noted that in addition to these 13,016 FOI requests reported by these 19 MDAs in their ACRs for 2022, there were 101 others made nation-wide in which the RAIC was copied and, or, had its intervention sought. In the 2022 year under review, there were a total of 42 requests received in the Northern Region and 41 of them were successful with one (1) pending in the Karene District. A total of 25 requests were received in the Southern Region and 24 of them were

successful with 1 pending. A total of 17 requests were received in the Eastern Region and 15 of them were successful with 2 pending. The Western Area received seventeen (17) requests, ten (10) of which the Commission was copied. Out of the seventeen received by the Commission, seven (7) were escalated from request to complaint and there was one (1) information request made directly to the Commission by Ethnic Youth Development Organization. This latter request was transferred to the Ministry of Agriculture by the Commission as they are the public authority that holds the requested information as provided for in the RAI Act. With these 101 total information FOI requests processed nation-wide with the direct, or indirect, involvement of the Commission plus the 13,016 FOI requests processed by the 19 MDAs that submitted their Annual Compliance Report to the Commission, make the total FOI requests recorded for 2022 to stand at 13,117.

**FOI Requests and Complaints by Regions and Districts with RAIC Interventions**

**Northern Region**

Requests	42
successful	41
pending	1
Complaints	0

**FOI Requests in the Northern region are as follows by district:**

4 in Port Loko

12 in Bombali  
 15 in Tonkolili  
 5 in Kambia  
 2 in Falaba  
 3 in Karene  
 1 in Koinadugu  
**TOTAL 42**

**Southern Region**

Requests 25  
 successful 24  
 pending 1  
 Complaints 0

**FOI Requests in the Southern region are as follows by district:**

15 in Bo  
 3 in Pujehun  
 5 in Moyamba  
 2 in Bonthe.  
**TOTAL 25**

**Eastern Region**

Requests 17  
 Successful 15  
 Pending 2

**FOI Requests in the Eastern region are as follows by district:**

9 in Kenema  
 5 in Kailahun  
 3 in Kono  
**TOTAL 17**

**Western Area**

Requests 17  
 Complaints 7  
 Requests Successful 10  
 Complaints Successful 5  
 Complaints Pending 2  
 Request to Commission 1  
 Transfer 1

**FOI Requests and Complaints in the Western Area are as follows by district:**

14 in Western Urban  
 3 in Western Rural

**TOTAL, excluding request to Commission and Transfer, 17**

**Summary Breakdown of FOIs by Regions and as Reported in the ACRs**

Requests	without	RAIC
Intervention.....		13016
Requests	with	RAIC
Intervention.....		101
Total Number of Requests and Complaints		
.....13,117		
Total Successful FOI Requests with and		
without RAIC intervention .....10,237		
Complaints made with and without RAIC		
intervention.....12,939		
Complaints resolved with and without RAIC		
intervention.....9124		
Complaints Pending.....3664		
MDAs, a total of 12,932 Complaints were		
made. 9119 of which were resolved whilst		
3658 were pending		

To conclude, it is safe to say that Sierra Leone has made a steady progress in the implementation of its Access to Information Law despite challenges such as the culture of secrecy in the public and civil service which is often used as an alibi to deny access to information. In fact, in many cases, it is within this context of culture of secrecy that some public authorities sometimes invoke the Exempt provisions of the RAI law as reason, albeit sometimes wrongly, to justify their denial of access to information. The other challenge is of course lack of sufficient funding that would enable the Commission to undertake more popularization and capacity building activities that would help boost compliance.

## **Sources**

Right to Access Information Commission (AAIC) Annual Report, 2020

The Essentials of the Right to Access Information Act-Sierra Leone: A Training Manual for Journalists. 2022. Media Foundation for West Africa.

The Right to Access Information Act 2013

Tshwane Principles (2013) The Global Principles on National Security and the Right to Information. Open Society Foundation, USA.

## PART TWO: MEDIA AND GOVERNANCE

### 5. The Starving Media in Sierra Leone: The Enigma of the Community Radio Stations

*Victor Massaquoi, PhD*

*Associate Lecturer, Agricultural Communication & Media, Njala University*

*Adjunct Lecturer, School of Mass Communication, FBC*

*Chairman, Independent Media Commission (IMC)*

#### **Abstract**

*The Independent Media Commission (IMC) in Sierra Leone has been noticeably deficient in the production of usable academic knowledge bordering on media operations and professional performance, in the last 10 years. Thus, this study is part of the yearly management (monitoring) activities of the IMC, translated into an academic inquiry for the benefit of the media industry, policy makers, university students and the public, in general. And, so, this study seeks to answer three critical questions, on the assumption that the media is poor: a) what is the management status of existing media houses across the country? b) how effective is the media governance system? c) what is the quality and relatability of program production for public or community consumption? The pre-data collection activities included review of existing files and other data of media houses, while employing specific theoretical frame(s) to facilitate the description, interpretation and explanation of the collected qualitative data. Media Management, Governance and Capacity Building concepts and theories were reviewed and applied. The observable findings have been subjected to robust analysis – one of the findings is the existence of a weak*

*governance system in almost 70%, over 70 of the over 100 Community Radio stations in Sierra Leone. The study concludes that Community Radio Stations in Sierra Leone are poor, in all the four management indicators – HR, Finance, Physical Asset and ICT, struggling but improving in community radio program development. It is clear that the responsibility to ensure that the media industry become viable, operate professionally and observe ethical compliance, lies with the IMC, with the support of the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists.*

**Keywords:** *Community Radio Stations, Media Management, Media Governance, Capacity Building*

#### **Introduction**

In their seminal work, Melkote & Steeves (2001) posit that the media is key to a country's democratic credentials and critical to the practice and upholding of fundamental human rights, as provisioned in International Law, and in the case of Sierra Leone, recorded in the entrenched clauses of the national Constitution of Sierra Leone (1991). But its poor state affects media output and community participation.

Sierra Leone is a key player in the global media ecology. Regrettably, the media industry in Sierra Leone is resource starved! A view expressed by a highly respected collective of media intellectuals in Sierra Leone, supported by study results and observational analysis. The 2022 National Media Viability Conference in Freetown also confirmed similar conclusion, and verified by the IMC, in a robust study conducted in late 2022.

The media regulatory agency, the IMC, is noticeably deficient in the production of applied academic knowledge, in the last 10 years. This is evident, previously, in its inability to collect and manage academic knowledge materials, a clear noncompliance of the IMC Act of 2020, which requires the IMC to produce literature for public consumption and public policy decision. The production of this academic literature is the preliminary step to enhancing media development in Sierra Leone.

This study report is set out to do three things:

- a. Review the management capacity of community radio stations and recommend
- b. Review the effectiveness of the current governance system of community radio stations and recommend
- c. Review existing program quality and community participation in program development

### *Objective, Limitation and Research Questions*

The specific objective for this technical and academic exercise was to physically visit, observe,

engage and collect data, interpret, analyse and draw conclusions with recommendations for possible action(s). Furthermore, the study wanted to know the existing operational state of the media houses. This study was limited to radio, TV and newspapers, only. But for the purposes of this academic article, the reporting has been narrowed down to Community Radio stations.

### *Key Definition*

UNESCO defines community radio (broadcasting) as those, which are independent, not-for-profit, and governed by and in the service of the communities they serve. They form an important “third pillar” of media, alongside commercial and public broadcasters, and are a crucial part of a healthy, pluralistic media sector.

### **Theoretical Framework & Methodology**

Because this study is part of the yearly management (monitoring) activities of the IMC, it seeks to answer three critical questions: a) what is the management status of exiting media houses across the country? b) How effective is the governance system of observed media houses? c) What is the quality of program production for public or community consumption? The pre-data collection activities included review of

existing files and other data of media houses, while employing specific theoretical frame(s) to facilitate the description, interpretation and explanation of the collected qualitative data.

The comprehensive review done in this study is linked to the successful conduct of a systematic analysis of the extant literature surrounding media management, governance and program production. Sowa (2016) suggests that the relationship between 'Strategic Management Principles' and Media Sustainability, Profitability and Accountability is overt. Thus, drawing from that insight makes it apt for this study. And, so, the application of strategic management principles to media operations in Sierra Leone (especially Community Radio Stations) with all the layers of management assumptions, "will contribute to improved, sustainable, profitable and accountable media management systems".

Pringle (1995), Massaquoi (2009) asserted same, adding that there is sufficient evidence of extensive and deep-rooted poor management of Community Radio stations, sandwiched by systemic paucity of revenue, flowered by filtrated ineffective governance system and fuelled by unspeakable capacity

problems, which in turn lead to measured program production with little community participation.

The 2020 IMC Act was also reviewed and its mandate analysed and applied.

From a methodological standpoint, this was a combination of qualitative research techniques – ethnographic, field research, participant observation and case study.

Yin (1994) defines case study as an idiographic examination of an individual, group, organization or society. This fits the carved parameters of community radio stations as entities or organizations with specific objective(s).

This study conducted pre data pre-field data collection activities included review of existing data, while employing specific theoretical frame(s) to interpret the data collected. Media Management, Governance and Capacity Building concept and theories were reviewed and applied. The 2020 IMC Act was also reviewed and its mandate analysed and applied.

**Key Information**

<b>Qualitative Legend</b>	<b>Quantitative Description</b>
Media Houses (Radio, TV, Newspapers, Magazine ...) registered with the IMC (new ones have been approved)	501
Media houses visited, observed and collected data	288 media houses
Geography – regions visited	4 regions visited (except Western Area)
Tools to collect data	4 carefully designed tools
Units of analysis/variables	-governance, management, capacity building, technical assets ...

**Findings and Analysis**

This study was set out to do three things:

- a. Review the management capacity of community radio stations and recommend
- b. Review the effectiveness of the current governance system of community radio stations and recommend
- c. Review existing program quality and community

All three were accomplished. Reviewing and analysing the systems – compliance with the IMC laws, financial books, organizational policies, and program schedule and sheets, staff capacities and competencies, governance effectiveness, equipment and support system, one would quickly realize the following:

**1) Glaring Weak Governance System -**

in almost 70% (over 100 of the Community Radio stations). Three out of seven members of boards of community radio stations do not even know their oversight functions. The composition, as suggested by the IMC are being flouted, influenced by local authority or a popular politician from the area. The life cycle of Boards, as provided for in the law are being violated with impunity. Over 80% of the Board has expired. Deep division exist between boards and management and among board members. One of the key observations in 1991, during the African Leadership Forum, is to ensure



media and democracy work in concert to promote good governance, at the local level.

- 2) **Poor Management:** the current crop (over 65%) of managers of community radio stations have **very little training or previous practical management experience** hence over 65% of the stations, are in relatively poor management state needing serious management oversight, training and investment. This is linked to Pringle's (1995) suggestion that media organizations (community radio stations) fail because of poor management leadership. There are multiple accounts that cannot be accounted for thoroughly. Staff management is rudimentary. Most technical staff are area boys and girls with virtually no experience. Generated revenue is small and cannot meet the operational costs of the stations. Accountability and sustainability are far-fetched.
- 3) **One Transmitter:** Over 90% of the radio stations, especially those in the rural areas (community radio stations), **lack critical spare parts, especially transmitters.** As this report was being compiled, seven community radio stations are off air as a result of technical problem with transmitters.

Disappointing. These community radio stations are the bedrock and vehicles to nurture democratic culture in rural Sierra Leone. Going off air, means many things to these local communities: no voice for the "subaltern" as Spivak (1980) suggests. In addition to transmitter failure, some community radio stations are badly earthed – a system designed to protect radio stations from going off air due to thunder and lightning.

- 4) **Staff Capacity:** Central to the findings was the weak professional capacity of technical/professional staff in almost all the community radio stations. As Melkote & Steeves (2001) suggest, empowerment of communities must first be applied to empowerment of media organizations (community radio stations). The literature reviewed suggests that the visibly poor investment, unavailable spare parts, critical tools, equipment and ownership documentation, licence, registration and more are killing community radio stations. Organs designed to give voice to the poor female farmer in the interior of Sierra Leone.

One of unexpected findings is the inability or unwillingness of consumers to pay for TV content; especially in the rural areas is badly draining resources and affecting the

production of quality content. In media effects, Wilbur Schramm once said, if the media is poor it is reflected in its content and the drivers of professional outputs.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The collected Qualitative data were robustly interrogated to shore up the final document with the intellectual merits and professional stoutness the study deserves.

It is clear that the responsibility to ensure that the media industry is viable, professional, and ethical lies with the IMC, with the support of the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ).

This yearly data collection exercise is deemed appropriate as it helps the IMC, SLAJ, media houses, and by extension the people and the government to know what obtains. The fundamental human rights of any state are midwived by the media through gate keeping and public education and information.

The study concludes that Community Radio Stations in Sierra Leone are poor, in every respect. The responsibility to ensure that the media operate professionally and observe ethical compliance lies with the IMC, and with the support of SLAJ. This yearly data collection exercise is deemed appropriate as it helps the IMC, SLAJ, media houses, and by extension the people and the government to relatively fully understand the operational status of the media industry in the country. The fundamental human rights of any state are midwived by the media through gate keeping, public education and information sharing,

hence their inability to fulfil their development and democratic functions would be damaging to free expression, especially by rural women, and the nurturing democracy of the country.

### **Recommendations:**

1. Facilitate the development and training of governance structures of media houses (community radio stations)
2. Intensify media monitoring to ensure workable governance and management function
3. Media houses should address management issues through trainings
4. Speed up investment in media houses, for example, National Fund for Public Interest Media (NaFPIM)
5. Encourage media houses to go digital – produce consumable online content that comes with financial benefit for sustainability
6. In line with provisions in the 2020 Act, the IMC must ensure that key provisions are enforced and support given to media houses
7. Government must, and as a matter of urgency, improve the financial and material support for the IMC to do its work, especially now that elections are edging closer.

### **For Future Study**

Because the scope of this article is limited to community radio stations, I'd like to share, briefly, that additionally, 75% of the newspapers and magazines visited and observed are one reel away from closure.

Newsprints are expensive and other management and production processes are cumbersome. In addition, over 60% of the newspapers is run by one man.

## References

Africa Leadership Forum (1991). *The Media in Democracy: Dialogue 15*.

Barbie, E. (1998). *The Practice of Social Research, 8th edition*. New York, Wadsworth Publishing.

Hamelink, C.J. (2010). On being critical. *Communication, Culture & Critique. Journal of the International Communication Association*. Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 3-7.

Keane, J. (1991) *The Media and Democracy*. Cambridge, Polity Press. Massaquoi, V. (2009). Perspectives on communicating Critical Change in Sierra Leone, Maryland: Publish America.

Melkote, S. & Steeves, L (2001). *Communication for Development in the Third World*. India. Sage Publications.

Miller, D. *Deliberative Democracy and Social Choice* in Held, D., (1993) (ed.) *Prospects for Democracy: North South East West*. Cambridge, Polity Press.

Randall, V. (1993) "The Media and Democratisation in the Third World". *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 14 No. 3 625-646.

Schultz J (1998) *Reviving the fourth estate; Democracy, Accountability and the Media*, Cambridge University press.

Spivak, R. (1980). *Can the Subaltern Speak?* CA: Sage.

Splichal, S. (2015). Why be critical. *Communication, Culture & Critique. Journal of the International Communication Association*. Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 20-30.

The Independent Media Commission (2020). *Repealed and Revised Act*.

USAID (1999) *Policy, Democracy and Governance*, US Agency for International Development, Washington DC.

Warren, M.E. (1996) "Deliberative Democracy and Authority". *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 90 No. 1: 46-60.

Yin, R.K. (1994). *Case study research: Design and methods* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed). CA: Sage

## 6. The contributions of the Africa Young Voices Television (AYV TV) and Radio Democracy FM 98.1 in the fight against corruption in Sierra Leone

Sheku Putka Kamara

+23278273019 / +23299997089 – [shekupkamara13@gmail.com](mailto:shekupkamara13@gmail.com)

Managing Editor – Expo Times Newspaper/Expo Magazine and Part-Time Lecturer, Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone

### **Abstract**

*Any attempt to discuss the role of the media without looking at its monitorial and watchdog functions in society would likely be incomplete. Popkin, (2004) discussed that media are nowadays tools for sharing knowledge around the world. Analyzing the evolution of media in society, Popkin assesses their role in building connections between politics, culture, economic life and society. Barbara et al (2013) observed that electronic media are media that use electronics or electromechanical means for the audience to access the content. Using a qualitative approach, extensive interviews and the agenda setting theory of the press, this paper looks into the roles that AYV TV and Radio Democracy 98.1 have played in the fight against corruption in Sierra Leone.*

### **Introduction**

Like all nations the world over, there has been no shortage of media agendas in Sierra Leone. This largely makes a case that information is not much of a problem, but maybe quality information sharing could be. Whiles media

institutions have the ability to set the agenda and to stimulate public discussions on a range of issues, those very agendas are expected to be balanced and accurate enough. Fighting corruption requires numerous efforts and contributions and it does not just stop with the media and the newsmen. There is a plethora of research that supports the idea that corruption is a national menace. When President Julius Maada Bio was voted in 2018, he attempted to ‘wage a war’ and to ‘clamp down on corruption.’ He appointed the then Lawyer and Activist, Francis Ben Kaifala Esq as the Anti-Corruption Commissioner. Kaifala has been quoted on several occasions as saying ‘that the war and/or fight against corruption is winnable.’ In all of this, the media’s reportage of the very corrupt cases that tend to stifle the nation’s development has not been hidden. A clear case in point was during the Commission of Inquiry, which was set up in 2018/19 just after Bio had been sworn in. The media was greatly following the proceedings to an extent that arguably no information was left hidden. AYV and 98.1 as they are fondly known were some of the crucial mediums that left no stone unturned in bringing the facts and reports to the people. In the end, a precedent was said to

have been set because all persons that were believed to have looted state funds to enrich themselves and their families and accountancies were asked to pay back in like manner, if not in double folds. Others forfeited properties to the state much to the astonishment of a 'huge portion' of the citizenry. The media did not sleep during such times and that goes to show how they played a significant role in combating, if not eradicating, corruption in Sierra Leone.

### ***Methodology***

As a journalist and managing editor of a local newspaper and a magazine, the researcher holds the view that the absence of absolute editorial independence strongly negates the journalistic platforms of accuracy and balance. That said and where such is the case, fighting and or attempting to eradicate corruption would be cumbersome more so if the alleged corrupt persons are but a part of the powers and systems that be. So, aside the fact that this article made use of desk research, including literature review, participant observation as a data collection instrument, it also made use of personal and online interviews to get first-hand information from some journalists working for AYV and Radio Democracy 98.1. This aided the adoption of a qualitative research design that had the thrust of presenting data devoid of prejudices.

### **Reporting Corruption: A conceptual and theoretical framework**

Kanu (2016) discussed that the fight against corruption in Sierra Leone gained momentum, at least in terms of policy direction, following the enactment of the Anti-Corruption Act 2000 and the Amendment Act in 2008. It is considered one of the most robust anti-graft laws in the world and its promulgation is in recognition of the international and national resolve to fight the menace, owing to its devastating effects, especially in the Least Developed Countries (LCDs) of the world.

The Anti-Corruption Act of 2000, though viewed as a tremendous move towards curtailing corruption, was riddled with shortcomings. Practitioners viewed the Act as limited in the number of proscribed offences created, coupled with the lack of independence signified by the absence of prosecutorial powers. With the enactment of the Amendment Act in 2008, it is crucial to examine the opportunities it has created to eradicate corruption. Critical also to the national and global resolve is the consideration of challenges that may have sprouted.

Legislative change and institutional oversight are important cornerstones in the fight against corruption. However, no law will change society if it does not become part of a country's culture, if it does not have an effect on people's everyday lives. Corruption is not a legal issue alone. Corruption is also an issue of

society, of culture. In order to fight corruption, we need to change the culture that enables corruption, not only the laws that prohibit it. Corrupt practices are often embedded in institutional practices and everyday lives. They are perceived as fixed and uncontestable. Citizens are often not able to recognize corruption or to differentiate grand structural corruption—extensive unethical behaviour by public officials—from petty everyday corruption—minor deviations from the rules for the benefit of an individual or a small group of people—or simple inefficiency and incompetence. The result is a culture with entrenched corrupt practices and very few people to stand up and speak against them.

Citizens are not aware of their rights, are cynical about governments' propensity to abuse power, fear repercussions, or are simply not aware that corruption is a social, economic, and political problem. Media are an important pillar of culture. Media are also an important political player. Media influence our perceptions of what is right and what is wrong. They inform us about corruption and about solutions to this problem. They make politicians pay attention through wide-spread coverage. They also provide platforms for citizens to voice their opinions and demand accountability from those in power. In the modern media environment, the effects of traditional media on our norms and culture have been enhanced by new communication technologies. Cell phones and the Internet

have become an integral part of the media environment.

New information and communication technologies have become an integral part of today's media sphere. In many cases, traditional and new media reinforce each other and amplify each other's effects through what is called polymedia: Television takes up stories from the web and bring them to the attention of a larger audience. News stories from the traditional media are discussed online and create movements through online communities.

The media may not be traditional tools in the fight against corruption. However, they are crucial in achieving the cultural change that must accompany any legislative change to make laws and institutional changes sustainable. Media can amplify the effect of anti-corruption legislation by a) reaching and mobilizing a broader audience, b) motivating political leaders to act, and c) facilitating a cultural change that will improve the sustainability of change. Media are crucial in changing people's beliefs about the prevalence and legitimacy of corruption. The media's ability to change perceptions, norms, and behaviour is at the core of their relevance for the fight against corruption. Every society is built on norms. Norms are standards of expected behaviour and regulate the way we interact with each other.

Research has shown that behaviour is influenced mainly by our perception of norms: the norms that we expect for ourselves and the norms that we believe the people around us apply to their own behaviour. Whether people accept corruption, go along with it, or stand up against it depends on whether we are aware that corruption is wrong and whether we believe that other people think that corruption is wrong, too. If we assume that most people do not mind paying a bribe to a local official, or that most people think that there is nothing, they can do against government corruption, then we will tend to just accept it ourselves and not do anything about it. If, on the other hand, we get the impression that many people are against corrupt practices and are willing to challenge them, then we are also more likely to do something about corruption. Media coverage is a major factor in shaping our perception about norms. For instance, local news on television, on the radio, and in newspapers can pay particular attention to instances of corruption and give voice to people who complain about it. That way they can create the impression that corruption occurs often and that people are upset about it. Social media can amplify this effect in particular on social media and other online news platforms where citizens can report instances of corruption and initiate a discussion about it.

On the other hand, media can also propagate false perceptions about corruption, especially by way of misinformation and disinformation,

which can hinder the work of organizations that engage in the fight against corruption.

A typical misrepresentation concerns the differences between grand corruption, petty everyday corruption, and unfortunate, but legal inefficiency. If media misrepresent inefficiency as grand corruption, they can mislead the public and set wrong priorities for the public and policy agendas. There are three mechanisms through which the media influence our perceptions and norms: media act as watchdog, agenda setters, and public forum for a diverse set of voices. In their function as watchdog, media act as monitor of government behaviour and guard the public interest by highlighting cases of misadministration, abuse of power, and corruption. By covering such cases they help ensuring accountability and transparency of governments and other powerful factions.

Arnold and Lal (2012) propounded that the fight against corruption needs to be fought on several fronts. Institutional reform—legislation and oversight—is one, but it will not be successful if it is not embedded in a broad range of culture. Corrupt practices are often embedded in institutional practices and every-day lives and are perceived as fixed and un-contestable. Citizens are not aware of their rights, are cynical about governments' propensity to abuse power, fear repercussions, or are simply not aware that corruption is a social, economic, and political problem. The

media—traditional mass media as well as new technologies—can play a vital role in unveiling corruption, framing corruption as public problem, suggesting solutions, and generally empower citizens to fight corruption.

Media are watchdogs, agenda setters, and gatekeepers that can monitor the quality of governance, frame the discussion about corruption, and lend voice to a wide range of perspectives and arguments. By doing so, media coverage influences norms and cultures, which in turn can influence policy-making and legislative reform. Examples from India and the Philippines, among other places, show that media effects range from public awareness of corruption to massive protests against the abuse of power. Those in the international community whose work is dedicated to the fight against corruption need to be aware of the power of the media to aid this fight and need to know how to utilize its potential.

### ***Findings***

Among other things, the findings of the study suggest that while the media has been doing a ‘good job’ in exposing and reporting ‘some amount’ of corruption, the lack of, or the absence of, editorial independence tends to question the effective functionality of the very media. When a certain media institution is dependent on a certain politician or business mogul for survival for instance, it would be difficult if not impossible to call out that mogul or politician. As such, the idea of the

‘you cannot bite the finger that feeds you’ will tend to take centre stage and as Tsedu (1997) argued, ‘the absence of editorial independence negates the platform on which journalism is based.’ In Sierra Leone, the IMC Code of Practice provides that ‘journalists, newspapers and periodicals are expected to provide accurate, balanced and clearer information,’ but with those who call the tune at play, the actualization of this call would be very difficult if not impossible.

Musa S. Kamara of Radio Democracy FM 98.1 said that the institution has worked ‘assiduously’ in reporting and talking about corruption. He said that the role of the media is not to ‘indict,’ but to ‘work with partners and to provide and raise awareness on corruption. Kamara added that another media role is to ‘interpret the laws and to talk to people so as to prevent corruption.’ He further said that Radio Democracy has been working towards that direction ‘on several occasions.’ He spoke about how advocates, civil society reps, parliamentarians etc. are invited to the medium to talk about pertinent issues relating to corruption. He said that they have also been hosting and engaging Sierra Leone’s Anti-Graft body, all of which he stated are strides taken to aid in the fight against corruption in Sierra Leone.

Joseph Johnson works with AYV as a reporter/presenter. He said that their institution believes in providing ‘credible, factual and balanced news.’ He made a reference on how



there were procurement irregularities during the purchasing of vehicles during the country's fight against Ebola. He said that AYV aided in holding responsible officials accountable. He said that such type of journalism has helped to put institutions on their toes. He said that 'it was an issue of corruption' and that as such, the ACC had to make some move. Joseph is however concerned that the ACC would do some 'fire brigade responses' each time there's a media clue, but that the issue will almost always die out in no time.

In all of this, there are people that believe that some media institutions do not have any semblance of being editorially independent. Where this is the case, it could be argued that the fight against corruption would be 'sectional.' It is simple to digest more so where the media institution would be constrained to get all the relevant facts and not wanting to expose a particular group or individual (s).

For example, sources that preferred anonymity say the 'media eco-system is constrained.' Imagine being booked by any institution to cover an event? Chances are, the negatives and or issues would hardly be reported. This is in line with the argument that makes a case that 'you cannot bite the finger that feeds you and that you cannot urinate against the wind.'

## *Conclusion*

Fighting and reporting corruption is a huge task and so the challenges clearly exist. Aside from the independent resources to keep the media institution running, the qualified and requisite staff that are trained and fit for purpose, plus having the real nose for news are equally important. This will aid the agenda-setting drive and it will equally manage to guarantee accuracy and balance.

Media are crucial players in changing culture toward more transparency and accountability. By changing perceptions of what is right and wrong, the media can affect the norms that society is built on. Changes in norms will, over time, initiate changes in behaviour. This, in turn, can lead to less tolerance for corruption, stronger vigilance, and stronger participation in anti-corruption efforts. The media as watchdogs can create a broad coalition against corruption and be a catalyst for reform by uncovering grand corruption and forcing politicians into making changes. As agenda-setters, media organizations can support anti-corruption movements by bringing them to the attention of a large audience. When the media act as public forum, they can introduce and spread opinions, solutions, and innovations. In many countries, media coverage of corruption has led to considerable political and social change. Success in working against corruption will depend on whether a lasting cultural change can be achieved. Even if regulation and

oversight are in place to curb corrupt behaviour and abuse of power, the real change will come through the people. If people stop paying or demanding bribes, if they consider corruption immoral, if they report corruption when they see it, and if they support the work of organizations fighting against corruption—then change will truly have arrived. The media are a major ally in achieving these goals. Media reach and media effects can amplify the efforts of any organization and contribute to their eventual success. Coalitions between civil society and the media are more likely to be effective in uncovering corruption in the short term and creating a culture of transparency and accountability in the long run.

Interviews on this research suggest that newsmen may be ‘willing’ to unearth corruption, but arguments are made that the media landscape ‘does not have absolute independence.’ Setting the agenda may be a desire, but the circumstances that inform such agenda setting could lead to various contents that may not always be in tune with the actual philosophies of agenda- setting.

In Sierra Leone, while efforts are being made, more needs to be done. Like fighting corruption, media is equally some serious business, or it should be at least. The requisite platform is required, backed up with the necessary staff capacity. This will aid to give

the corruption fight a real face and one that may be deemed and /or seen to be ‘winnable.’

## References

Arnold and Portor Lan (2012), Reporting Corruption – Multi-Jurisdictional Corporate Investigations +1 202 942 5000.

Independent Media Commission, Code of Practice, Act No. 7, 2007, Sierra Leone.

Johnson, Joseph (14<sup>th</sup> April, 2023) AYW Television, Channel 33(online interview).

Kamara, Musa, S(12<sup>th</sup> April, 2023) Radio Democracy 98.1 FM(online interview).

Kanu, Michael Imran, The Fight against Corruption in Sierra Leone: Challenges and Opportunities in the Jurisprudence (December 1, 2016). African Journal of International Criminal Justice 2016 (2) 1-2 doi: 10.5553/AJ/2352068X2016002001002, Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3438031>.

Medoff, Norman J.; Kaye, Barbara (2013-03-20). Electronic Media: Then, Now, and Later. Taylor & Francis. ISBN 978-1-136-03041-3.  
Popkin, Dewald (2004). Journalism, Newspaper and newsheets. Europe 1450-1789: Encyclopaedia of the Early Modern World.

Tsedu Mathatha (1997) – Absence of Editorial Independence – ISBN 998-2-3-07673.

Willinsky, Frank (2005). The Access Principle: The Case for Open Access to Research and Scholarship.