

Media Development Strategy

Sierra Leone

2020-2024

Media Reform Coordination Group

(MRCG)

(Comprising IMC, MIC, SLAJ, IRN, GoE, WIMSAL,
SLRU, SLBC, SWASAL, Mass Comm., FBC)

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FOREWORD

In 2014, the Media Reform Coordinating Group (MRCG) with support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) produced the first Media Development Strategy Sierra Leone 2014-2018.

The document had four key objectives, which were:

- To improve media ethics in Sierra Leone.
- To promote transparent and independent allocation of licenses, handling of media complaints, and enabling media environment.
- To build a sustainable and independent public service broadcasting benefitting the entire population of Sierra Leone.
- To strengthen professionalism and sustainability of organisations and improved people's participation in media development and content.

After five years of implementing the Strategy, the year 2019 was used to review the document with focus on the successes made and the challenges encountered, and to develop new strategic priorities and objectives.

At the end of various consultations, the Board and other media stakeholders agreed on the five new objectives. They are:

- *To promote an enabling media environment through legislative, regulatory and self-regulatory system reforms that are in line with international norms.*
- *To increase professionalism in the media landscape.*
- *To promote gender concerns and address women specific issues within the media.*
- *To support and enhance sustainability of media institutions, revenue generation, and effective and efficient governance and management systems.*
- *To encourage democratic dialogue and audience engagement with media that provide a platform for debate and responsible engagements and national development.*

It is hoped that with the requisite financial and technical supports, this new Strategy when implemented, would enhance the growth, professionalism and capacity of media institutions and practitioners in Sierra Leone.

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Chairman, MRCG.

1. INTRODUCTION

This second Media Development Strategy is a review of the first document produced in 2013. That process was led by the Independent Media Commission (IMC) with support from the UNDP and UNESCO. A key outcome of that Strategy was the recommendation to set up a coordinating group for media development in Sierra Leone. That led to the formation of the Media Reform Coordinating Group (MRCG) which comprised representatives of key stakeholders from the media industry and academic institutions in the country¹. MRCG was established as an independent corporate entity funded by the UNDP to act as the key driver of the media reform agenda for Sierra Leone. It has been successful in entrenching itself as a corporate organization with a functional Secretariat.

The new Media Development Strategy 2020-2024, produced under the framework of the MRCG, outlines the mission and vision for the Sierra Leone media landscape for the next five years. The review process was informed by extensive desk review, consultative meetings, interviews and a validation workshop.

The key problems for the media sector, the new priorities and objectives, were identified from several studies and reviews of the first strategy. Such documents included the Media Development Strategy 2014-2018, Factsheet on UNDP's Support to Media Development, April 2016, Media Reform Coordinating Group Board Retreat/Programme Review Reports, 2017 and 2018, Evaluation of Media Development Project, 2018, UNDP Exit Strategy- Support to Media Development Project, 2019, and the UNDP Programme Document- Support to Media Development (Consolidating Peace and Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals: A strategy to ensure a responsible and sustainable media eco-system in Sierra Leone), 2019-2022.

The new Strategy is guided by the following objectives:

- *To promote an enabling media environment through legislative, regulatory and self-regulatory system reforms that are in line with international norms.*
- *To increase professionalism in the media landscape.*
- *To promote gender concerns and address women specific issues within the media.*
- *To support and enhance sustainability of media institutions, revenue generation, and effective and efficient governance and management systems.*
- *To encourage democratic dialogue and audience engagement with media that provide a platform for debate and responsible engagements and national development.*

¹ The group then included the Department of Mass Communication at Fourah Bay College (FBC Mass Comm), the Independent Media Commission (IMC), Guild of Editors (GoE), Women in the Media in Sierra Leone (WIMSAL), the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ), the Sierra Leone Reporters Union (SLRU), Independent Radio Network (IRN), Cotton Tree News (CTN), and the Ministry of Information.

The media development programme intends to boost professionalism throughout the media ecosystem, address issues of sustainability of that eco-system while working to ensure that media legislation and regulatory bodies are in line with international norms and to support freedom of expression and freedom of the press. These three areas are interdependent and reinforcing and thus must be addressed in concert through a holistic approach that supports the development of a free, pluralistic and professional media sector in Sierra Leone. The programme will therefore simultaneously address the legal and regulatory context, professional standards (at institutional, managerial and journalistic levels) and sustainability issues (also at institutional, managerial and individual levels).²

Sierra Leone is one of the lowest ranked in the Human Development Index. This is coupled with the country still consolidating peace since the civil war ended in 2002. As a result, the successful implementation of the SDGs within a peacebuilding framework will be important over the next several years and will guide the overall strategy of the next phase of the media development programme. Specifically, the Sierra Leone media development programme strives to address Goal 16 of the Sustainable Development goals and more specifically 16.6, 16.7 and 16.10.2. By addressing professionalism, sustainability, legislative and regulatory issues as well as media plurality and diversity it is hoped that Sierra Leoneans will be able to play their role in society and will have strong media institutions that ensure accountability of government while engaging with their communities and addressing their concerns.³

The new Strategy also embraces civic education as a key role the media can play in contributing to democratic dialogue and peacebuilding. It also incorporates other interventions of MRCG in areas like conflict sensitive reporting of the electoral processes, climate change awareness and mitigation, and women's political participation, and programmes and plans of the constituent members of the MRCG.

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² UNDP Programme Document- Support to Media Development -2019-2022.

³ Ibid

2. BACKGROUND

Sierra Leone is still a country with relatively high media freedom compared with other African countries, a multitude of private, community and public print and electronic media, but also a country in which all media are financially strained.⁴

The country has over 200 registered print media (newspapers and magazines) with a circulation of between 500 and 4000 copies, around 160 registered community radios, commercial and religious broadcasters, and a public broadcaster with one national radio channel, two TV-channels and 6 regional radios.

The meagre market and strong competition make some of the media test the limits or even break them with sensational stories, brown envelope journalism, blackmail and allegiance to certain political and economic interests that finance some of the media.⁵

The challenges facing the media sector in Sierra Leone include a lack of professionalism, challenges of sustainability (and the resulting poor wages paid to media professionals), and a fear of prosecution under the Public Order Act. Journalists are often poorly paid and un(der)-trained and therefore vulnerable to editorial pressure from owners, advertisers and other businesses. Yet media are critical for development and consolidation of peace.⁶

Technological changes are also affecting the country's media landscape which has become increasingly fractured with the proliferation of new radio and television stations coupled with increased use of mobile phones and the internet, particularly social media. Despite this, a recent BBC Media Action study states that radio continues to be the best way to reach wide audiences, yet no single station is able to reach a national audience.⁷

One significant issue is that of social media and how it can be regulated and/or legislated to avoid the spread of hate speech and incitement to violence. While this is currently a global issue, the stakes are high in Sierra Leone due to the country's history and as a result must be taken into consideration going forward.⁸

The media sector seems to breathe with a sigh of relief as the new SLPP government has taken steps to repeal the criminal libel laws. As at the time of producing this Strategy, cabinet had approved the repeal of the 54 year old criminal libel law in Part 5 of the Public Order Act of 1965. The document has been tabled in Parliament.

It seems there is the political will to initiate reform throughout the country, including within the media sector. Most notably, the new Minister of Information and

⁴ Media Development Strategy, 2014-2018

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Sierra Leone: Freedom of the Press 2015 [online]. Available from: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2015/Sierra-Leone> quoted in the UNDP Programme Document- Support to Media Development (019-2022).

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Ibid

Communications has made clear his intent to repeal criminal libel (Part V of the Public Order Act, 1965).⁹

However, this will also mean that the media sector will have to make some concessions in order to ensure a system of effective checks and balances are in place to regulate the media. The fear associated with the possibility of being prosecuted under Part V of the Public Order Act cannot be understated and its repeal may well embolden journalists to do their jobs, however, efforts must be made to ensure their work is professional and responsible.¹⁰

The Independent Media Commission (IMC) in Sierra Leone is charged with registration of all media, allocation of licenses to publish and broadcast, management of a media complaints function, stimulation of media quality and coordination of journalists training. The IMC is established by law (IMC Act of 2000 as amended in 2006 and 2007, funded by the State and its Commissioners are ultimately appointed by the President and approved by the Parliament.

Another important organisation in the media landscape is the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ), organising, protecting and defending almost all professional journalists in the country. As a major actor in the development of the media sector, SLAJ nominates Commissioners to IMC and one of the Board Members to represent the association at the SLBC. SLAJ affiliate bodies are the Guild of Editors (GoE), Sierra Leone Reporters Union (SLRU), and Women in Media in Sierra Leone (WIMSAL) among others.

A network for independent community and commercial radios, the Independent Radio Network (IRN) organises 40 radios and provides the framework for the production and exchange of programmes on elections and governance issues and other collaboration among them.

While the country's media environment continues to be hampered by serious challenges, including worries over media poverty, adherence to all ethical standards, the autonomy of the IMC and continued intimidation of journalists, there have been important achievements. Sierra Leone has seen a notable rise in professional standards for journalists, with accreditation increasingly becoming a standard requirement in the field. Indeed, during the Ebola outbreak in 2014, a stronger media was able to play a key role in broadcasting prevention messages. Similarly, during the 2018 elections, the media supported voter education and non-violence campaigns and published high quality information on the electoral process—with 83% of media institutions complying with IMC guidelines for reporting on elections.

With UNDP's support, the MRCG has become a recognized platform for strengthening the capacities of media actors, sustaining community radios and coordinating advocacy efforts. Its persistent efforts have been pivotal in putting media reform on the national agenda. Recent elections have brought a change in administration and a growing political will to reform the legal framework around the media. Thanks to this momentum, a cabinet paper has been developed for the repeal of Part V of the Public Order Act of 1965, the draft media bill and Code of Practice have been resubmitted to the Ministry of Information and the Attorney-

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Ibid

General's Office and the proposed chapter on press freedom for the national constitution has already been reviewed and recommendations made.

Economic viability of media outlets and low wages for journalists are still major obstacles to the independence of the country's media sector. Starting in 2019, expanding its core areas of support, MRCG introduced a new initiative to develop the financial sustainability of media outlets. Three of the constituent members of the MRCG, the IMC, Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ) and the Sierra Leone Reporters Union (SLRU) are leading initiatives aimed at intensifying advocacy campaigns to ensure that media institutions conform to the minimum wage stipulated by law and also enforcing the payment of salaries stipulated in their application and operational documents. The SLRU, which is a Union, will work with the Sierra Leone Labour Congress and the Ministry of Labour to secure a bargaining certificate which it can use to advocate the welfare of reporters.

The interventions demonstrate the way in which a free and independent media often requires a multi-pronged approach. Even as Sierra Leone's context remains quite complex, MRCG's successes have stemmed from its pursuit of multiple complementary actions in support of the media's role in promoting democratic governance and peacebuilding. Indeed, these actions each represents the core areas of holistic approach to media engagement, which here include regulatory reform (enabling environment), developing professional journalistic standards (media capacity development) and encouraging the use of the media for inclusion of democratic dialogue (social actor capacity development).

Through the MRCG, UNDP has been able to facilitate coordinated action by a diversity of national stakeholders who have now taken ownership of the media reform agenda.¹¹

¹¹ UNDP Exit Strategy- Support to Media Development Project, 2019

3. REVIEW OF THE PREVIOUS STRATEGY

The review of the first Strategy by the Board and staff of the MRCG was done based on the implementation of the specific objectives under the short, mid and long term achievements. The two variables used were the successes made and the challenges encountered in the implementation of the objectives.

OBJECTIVE 1: To improve media ethics in Sierra Leone	
SHORT TERM ACHIEVEMENTS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Code of Ethics of Sierra Leone Association of Journalists is reviewed and a self-regulatory mechanism for its members activated which complies with best international standards. • Any paragraph involving media in the Criminal Libel Law – Public Order Act No. 46 of 1965 are removed by the Parliament, hereby aligning the media regulation of Sierra Leone with international standards. 	
SUCCESSES	CHALLENGES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SLAJ Code reviewed and adopted. • SLAJ Disciplinary Committee reconstituted. • Criminal Libel Laws repeal advocated. • Alternatives to the Criminal Libel suggested • Lobbied at parliament. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective popularization, adaptation and enforcement of the SLAJ Code. • Criminal Libel Laws not repealed despite several advocacies and campaigns.
MID TERM ACHIEVEMENTS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Independent Media Commission Act No. 12 of 2000 is adapted to strengthen the independence of its commissioners. Its Code of Practice is reviewed, and mechanisms are established to ensure implementation of its incentives and punitive measures related to this Code. • The Civil Libel Law – Defamation Act No. 32 of 1961 is reviewed. Court cases on libel are processed quicker than before and no longer entail suspension of IMC decisions 	
SUCCESSES	CHALLENGES

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IMC Act was reviewed and popularized. • IMC Media Code of Practice reviewed, expanded and popularized. • Both documents were submitted to Information Ministry and Attorney General's Office • Draft Media Bill was developed. • Civil libel law provision popularized. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Code not yet laid in the Parliament as statutory instrument. • Media Bill not yet enacted • Civil libel not reviewed
<p><u>LONG TERM ACHIEVEMENTS</u> The Independent Media Commission is considered being substituted with an independent regulatory body.</p>	
<p>SUCSESSES</p>	<p>CHALLANGES</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are moves towards self-regulation of the media. • SLAJ has set up a Disciplinary Committee working towards self-regulation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some media institutions are not adhering to the IMC Act and Media Code of Practice, not to talk about self-regulation.

<p>OBJECTIVE 2: To improve independent allocation of licenses, handling of media complaints, and promotion of an enabling media environment</p>	
<p><u>SHORT TERM CHIEVEMENTS</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The new members for the Board of commissioners and the chairman of IMC are selected as planned without any political interference by March 2014. • The internal procedures on financial management, resource mobilisation, preparation of complaint cases, license applications and policy papers are strengthened through comprehensive management capacity building. 	
<p>SUCSESSES</p>	<p>CHALLENGES</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A proposal was made to the Constitutional Review Committee (CRC) and in the Draft Media Bill • The Strategic Plan of the IMC reviewed. • Financial management and resource mobilization procedures had been developed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The recommendation for a chapter on the Media in the new constitution was rejected by the former government in its White Paper. • Resource mobilisation has been a major stumbling block. • There is no electronic case management system.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparation of complaint cases and license applications had been reviewed at the IMC. 	
<p><u>MID TERM ACHIEVEMENTS</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Board of the Independent Media Commission has carried out exchanges with other similar regulatory bodies in order to learn from their experience, including how to regulate new media platforms. • A strategy has been developed for IMC's priorities for media policy initiatives, advocacy and communication to strengthen profile, credibility and impact of the IMC • The decentralisation of IMC with regional officers and possible commissioners has been finalised. • The Independent Media Commission Act No. 12 of 2000 has been adapted to include practical changes elaborated in 2011 and recently, ensuring its political independence by removing presidential appointment and parliamentary approval of commissioners, and has incorporated an updated Code of Practice, transparent media ownership with limited monopoly and consistent implementation of legislation. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draft IMC Act developed had changes in the composition of the Commissioners. • Media ownership had. been clearly defined in the draft IMC Code of Practice • Decentralisation project documents developed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No exchange programmes by IMC Commissioners to other regulatory media Commissions. • IMC Bill and Code not enacted.
<p><u>LONG TERM</u> The constitutional review emphasises the independence of media as part of the new constitution.</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proposal submitted to CRC for a Chapter on the Media. • Views taken onboard in the draft CRC report. • Chapter 12 proposed- that is the new media Chapter. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The process was not completed.

OBJECTIVE 3: To build a sustainable and independent public service broadcasting benefitting the entire population of Sierra Leone	
SUCSESSES	CHALLENGES
<u>SHORT TERM</u> Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation Act 2009 is adapted to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The new Board of Trustees and the Director General are appointed as bodies entirely independent of Government and Parliament. • A sustainable and politically neutral funding mechanism is established. • Precise public service mandate and clear rules of authority and responsibility for Board of Trustees, the Director General and other management established. 	
	Nothing was done in this area
<u>MID TERM</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The new Board of Trustees and the Director General of the public broadcaster are assisted by peers from similar organisations abroad in their establishment and implementation of a strategy, defining in detail the public service mission, the departmental structure, target groups, programme schedule, and the division of broadcasting obligations for national and regional radio channels and for TV. • Extensive expert assistance serves to elaborate new programme formats and build the capacity of the editorial and technical staff responsible for producing them. • Internal procedures and guidelines for production and content have been reviewed and adapted, including division of broadcast time between national and regional broadcasters. 	
	Nothing was done in this area
<u>LONG TERM</u> The capacity of existing production and distribution equipment is analysed and additional or new technical formats are acquired if needed.	
	Nothing was done in this area

OBJECTIVE 4

To strengthen capacity, professionalism, collaboration and sustainability of private media organisations and practitioners

<u>SUCSESSES</u>	CHALLENGES
<p><u>SHORT TERM</u> A mechanism for coherent and coordinated training is established, available to all regions and media houses with different levels of practical training, in-house coaching and academic education Professional associations for media and practitioners – such as SLAJ, WIMSAL ,GoE, SLRU and others - are strengthened through capacity and institution building transforming them into essential building blocks for a sustainable media development in Sierra Leone.</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review and development of national curriculum for media education and journalism. • Development of syllabi on media education • Initiated Association for Media and Journalism Educators. • Established training platforms for organisations involved in media training. • Established criteria for media trainers • Meeting with institutions promoting media training • Regular publication of State of the Media Report 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completion of remaining syllabi • Number of multimedia production sites not yet established. • No commencement of the cross fertilization programme to fully roll-out the national media curriculum. • Inadequate funds to roll-out training coordination and activities
<p><u>MID-TERM ACHIEVEMENTS</u> Collaboration mechanisms for production, distribution and capacity building between media organisations such as IRN, CTN and other broadcast and print organisations are stimulated to strengthen sustainability and quality.</p>	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IRN, CTN and SLAJ have been collaborating in programme production and distribution. This has led to knowledge sharing and exchanges on programme production. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inadequate resources for more collaboration for production, distribution and capacity building. • GoE is constrained to engage in capacity building and joint production.
<p><u>LONG TERM ACHIEVEMENTS</u> Coherent media legislation is developed uniting all legislative measures for public, community, commercial, online and social media platform media.</p>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is no single document containing all legislative measures for the different media. • There is no national study on the usage and effect of social media that will inform the development of regulations on social media platforms. • There is no specific regulation of the social media.

In 2018, there was an evaluation of Media Development Project, 2018. On ‘Improved Ethics of the Media through Regulatory or Self-Regulatory Mechanisms, the results show that there is a noticeable improvement in professional media practice in Sierra Leone from before the project started. 45% of the respondents believed that there is noticeable improvement in professional media practice in Sierra Leone. However, much work remains to be done. 48% of survey respondents are of the opinion that the Media Code of Practice is carefully observed.¹²

On ‘Promoting Transparent and Independent Allocation of Licenses, Handling of Media Complaints, and Stimulating an Enabling Regulatory and Political Environment for Professional and Pluralistic Media, 37% of respondents believe that issuing of licenses is transparent and independent. 67% of respondents believe there is not an enabling political environment for the media in Sierra Leone. They cite constant harassment by actors in the political space and the obnoxious public order act which criminalises libel.

¹² Evaluation of Media Development Project, 2018, Ascendant & Company Ltd, Evaluator | Olufela O Adeyemi

Regarding 'Sustainable and independent public service broadcasting, serving all the people of the country' 68% of respondents say the SLBC serves all the people of the country. In focus groups, in terms of its ability to serve all the people of the country, many respondents say they get signals in Freetown and in the provinces on both the television and radio programs.

With reference to 'Strengthened professionalism and sustainability of organizations and improved people's participation in media development and content', the in general respondents observe greater participation of people in media content, but not as much in media development itself. 52% of respondents say professionalism has been strengthened in media organisations as compared to previously.¹³

The evaluation shows that the main strengths of the intervention lie in the increasing knowledge, attitudes and values in the beneficiaries, as well as their increasing power, confidence and self-esteem. There was a positive view to the work of MRCC and increasing creativity in the media and a sense of progress. The project also had the potential to improve the welfare of journalists, reduce poverty and increase facilities and opportunities for the media. The strength of the project lay in its direct participatory approach and in the depth to which it went to create training and interaction opportunities for media player. The strength of the project was in its industry cohesiveness. The evaluator noted that since this was a coalition, it was held together by an obligation to UNDP as well as being part of a beneficial group.¹⁴

The main weaknesses lie in the relative lack of flexibility in programming, combined sometimes with inadequate decision-making power, considering that programming is directly linked to UNDP and other donor funding. A key shortcoming of the project lies in the difficulty of managing beneficiary and stakeholder expectations, such that a resounding appeal is constantly made for UNDP to continue funding.¹⁵

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Evaluation of Media Development Project, 2018, Ascendant & Company Ltd, Evaluator | Olufela O Adeyemi

¹⁵ Ibid

4. KEY PRIORITIES FOR THE NEW STRATEGY

The vision for the media development strategy is based on the right to freedom of speech and expression to build a sustainable and diverse media sector whose professionalism contributes to strengthening the democracy and development of Sierra Leone.

After several consultations, four new priorities were identified with the overall aim to strengthen democratic dialogue and accountability, continue to consolidate peace and ensure development and implementation of the SDGs and other international and local programmes and initiatives through professional, independent and sustainable media based on the right to freedom of speech and expression.

1. An enabling media environment supporting legislative, regulatory and self-regulatory system reforms that are in line with international norms and the corresponding institutions are effective in their role.

The legal and regulatory environment has been a constraint in that media workers operate in a climate of fear and are thus more likely to take payments or other inducements from political or other actors in return for favourable coverage.¹⁶

Over the last 50 years, the Criminal and Seditious Libel Laws in Part 5 of the Public Order Act No. 46 of 1965 have been invoked on many occasions against editors and journalists, threatening them with prison sentences as criminals. This has been criticised internationally; it is against international practice and seems not to have had an impact on improved ethical standards. Before the last general elections, the two major political parties declared that they would review and/or repeal this legislation.¹⁷

The Civil Libel Law – Defamation Act No. 32 of 1961 is still in function, but it is rarely used. It seems to take one or more years before media cases are finally decided. If punitive measures are taken by IMC towards the media and are appealed to court, the measures are suspended until the Court has made its verdict which has resulted in unfinished cases before the commission.¹⁸

With the Independent Media Commission Act No. 12 of 2000, the IMC started as a hybrid regulatory body charged with the handling of complaints and with ensuring ethics and professionalism of the media based on its statutory Code of Practice developed with inputs from SLAJ. However, the IMC has been challenged by particular media institutions and practitioners refusing to obey its decisions. Government representatives are said to have interfered in decisions on allocation or suspension of licenses or to have bypassed IMC by taking journalists and media institutions to court in cases of defamation or libel. To provide an effective regulation

¹⁶ UNDP Programme Document- Support to Media Development, 2019-2022.

¹⁷ Media Development Strategy, 2014-2018

¹⁸ Ibid

of media ethics, the IMC needs to strengthen its independence, integrity and powers to implement its decisions.¹⁹

There are concerns about regulation of social media. Sierra Leone has witnessed a significant increase in internet penetration and usage as manifested in various social media platforms in the country. This is contributing to technology/digital-led development in the country. There are concerns about misuse of the internet and its varied platforms with particular reference to invasion of people's privacy and disseminating information that would affect the development, growth and peace of the country. There are also fears that in the absence of appropriate laws and/or adherence to international best practices, there are tendencies for governments as well as other private interests to device repressive means including surveillance, filtering and blocking to clamp down on free expression. The major concern was how to ensure a balancing act between the enjoyment of the rights of freedom of expression (including internet rights and freedoms) and the protection of the reputation and privacy of others. As noted in the African Declaration on Internet Rights and Freedoms, "A fundamental challenge in need of urgent resolution in the digital age is how to protect human rights and freedoms and responsibilities on the internet." The Media Reform Coordinating Group (MRCG) brought together divergent stakeholders including government, Ministries, Departments and Agencies, Commissions, national media organizations, civil society organizations and the Sierra Leone Bar Association in a consultative forum to debate on the regulation of social media in the country. It hopes to develop a collaborative framework to collectively address the problem relating to regulatory framework on the use of social media.

Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ), founded in 1971, organises, protects and defends journalists across the country. It aims to strengthen media's role through accurate information and by upholding the independence and ideals of professional journalism. SLAJ developed its last Code of Conduct in 2001 which was to be upheld by its Disciplinary Committee. However, the Committee did not deal with all cases, and after some years it ceased to function. Consequently, there is a real need for SLAJ as a respected professional association to become an effective self-regulatory body able to process and solve most cases even before they reach IMC or eventually the Courts.²⁰

However, to ensure the media continue to be professional and responsible in light of such a repeal, it would be important to ensure that appropriate checks and balances are in place to address possible regressions of the press. This can be done by strengthening the regulator, IMC, as well as ensuring there is effective on-going self-regulation. The MRCG will work with key partners to work with government officials to ensure that criminal libel is repealed and that key institutions, such as the IMC, are strengthened to offset the repeal. Having a variety of media actors working towards a common goal will also address what is currently a fragmented media sector. In

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ Ibid

addition to the regulatory body, there will be some exploration into formalizing self-regulatory efforts, of which there have been several uncoordinated efforts.²¹

The MRCG has supported the development of an information policy for the ministry of Information and Communications. In the last two decades or so, Sierra Leone has taken up the task of reconstituting the political order, maintaining peace and law and order, and building viable institutions as drivers of a transitional democratic state. In this regard, it has built bold and ambitious national development agendas, the *Agenda for Change* and the *Agenda for Progress*, as part of the blueprints that will guide the state in moving from a low to middle income country by mid-21st century. The need for a *proactive, progressive, and participatory National Information Policy* is an invaluable catalyst in the state's effort to take-off into a future with improved quality of life for all citizens. The Information Policy will promote transformational leadership and shared governance aimed at steering Sierra Leone toward becoming a model nation state in the global community.²²

Based on the above analyses, the key recommendations are that:

- The repeal process of Part V of the Public Order Act No. 46 of 1965 is completed and new media regulation mechanisms disseminated and popularised across the country.
- The country's media regulation is aligned with international standards.
- *The Civil Libel Law – Defamation Act No. 32 of 1961* is reviewed, approved and popularised across the country.
- The National Information Policy finalised, approved by Parliament and disseminated across the country.
- *Independent Media Commission Act No. 12 of 2000* is reviewed and adapted to strengthen its independence and to provide mechanisms to ensure the implementation of its incentives and punitive measures related to the Code of Practice.
- A transparent and independent allocation of licenses is ensured, a free and fair handling of media complaints, and conducive media environment guaranteed.
- The production of the IMC Media Watch is supported to showcase media performance in Sierra Leone and to serve as a reference point on the work of the media industry.
- SLAJ reviewed Codes of Ethics is popularised implemented and enforced and the work of its Disciplinary Committee is enhanced.

²¹ UNDP Programme Document- Support to Media Development (Consolidating Peace and Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals: A strategy to ensure a responsible and sustainable media eco-system in Sierra Leone), 2019-2022.

²² MRCG Narrative Project Report, October 2018

- Media institutions are encouraged to review and/or develop their *self-regulatory mechanisms* such as their *editorial policies/guidelines* and abide by them in line with best international standards.
- National engagements are organised to stimulate conversations on the responsible use and/or regulation of social media platforms.

2. Increased professionalism of the media landscape and gender equality.

This is to improve standards and ensure best practices of media including ethical standards of media houses and journalists, media associations, higher education and other actors within the sector.

Since the civil war in Sierra Leone ended in 2002 journalists have been given substantial media training through international and local NGOs such as BBC Media Action, Search for Common Ground-Talking Drum Studio, Fondation Hironnelle (which in collaboration with the University of Sierra Leone established the Cotton Tree News project) Deutsche Welle, OSIWA, Journalists for Human Rights (JHR- the local counterpart is now Initiatives for Media Development (IMDev)), Initiative for Mobile Training of Community Radio (INFORMOTRAC) and Community Radio Network (CORNET) etc., or through national organisations such as SLAJ, IMC, Independent Radio Network (IRN), Women in Media in Sierra Leone (WIMSAL), Sierra Leone Reporters Union, UN agencies, Ministries, Departments and Agencies as well as Civil Society Organisations. However, most trainings have been duplicated and uncoordinated and some journalists have often been trained on the same topics more than once. The motivation for participation is in some cases said by media stakeholders to have been the personal financial benefits of some participants. A national register involving media employers and employees could help build a coherent, progressing and labelled system of general and specialised trainings that each journalist takes part in. Most trainings at present are aimed at reporters, with little attention paid to building the capacity of editors, managers and media houses, which has in reality reduced the utility of new skills. The problem is further compounded by the fact that some editors and managers hardly attend trainings specifically designed for them. The professional associations for media and journalists primarily need building of their strategic capacity and management to obtain the influence they should have.²³

Media workers themselves complain that short, one-off workshops simply are not effective in building capacity or changing attitude or behaviour.

Since capacity building was a key pillar of the project, a comprehensive curriculum review of the Mass Communication Department of the University of Sierra Leone was carried out. The review identified the capacity needs of the Department to enhance the faculty/staff development and student training, identified the technology needs and ways to integrate into the teaching and learning processes innovative pedagogy, and aligned its programmes with those at accredited peer institutions in Africa to meet national and regional accreditation standards.²⁴

²³ Media Development Strategy 2014-2018

²⁴ Evaluation of Media Development Project, 2018, Ascendant & Company Ltd, Evaluator | Olufela O Adeyemi

In 2017 representatives from Communication schools across the country (including Njala University, Fourah Bay College, Limkokwing University, LICCSAL Business College, UNIMAK and Every Nation College) met and established the Association of Communication, Journalism and Media Educators-Sierra Leone (ACJME-SL). This as part of an ongoing UNDP/UNESCO initiative to develop a national strategy for media development in Sierra Leone, a comprehensive review of the media and journalism curriculum at Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone, was proposed as an essential component of this effort. Through that review, stakeholders were able to map out a strategy to position the Department of Mass Communication (Mass Comm.) as the Center of Excellence (CE) for training professional journalists, and communication and multimedia specialists with all other Communication Schools in the Country. The Association has provided a network for collaboration and partnership among the different institutions teaching journalism, media and communication studies. It will lead to increased research and publication on the work of the media in Sierra Leone.²⁵

This Strategy aims to utilize an approach that relies heavily on mentoring and coaching, both in-person and remotely and media education. The MRCG and the Sierra Leone Reporters Union have been working on minimum wage for some time now. The MRCG supported the SLRU to engage the Sierra Leone Labour Congress and the ministry of Labour responsible to enforce the issue of the minimum wage on the necessary steps in cases of breach from media employers. The meeting also looked at harnessing the value of the bargaining certificate for the Union. Sierra Leone has a government-mandated minimum wage which is Le 500,000 per month. However, there are concerns that some workers (including journalists) are either paid less than this mandatory minimum rate or not even paid. Some people argue that the minimum wage does not even extend to staff out of the public service. The SLRU in collaboration with the MRCG sought to address this issue as a key component of the media reform agenda. While advocacy for the minimum wage for reporters may seem to be a never ending quest, this meeting seeks to be a starting point. The meetings which was participatory used the question and answer format including a moderator and representatives from the Ministry of Labour, the Sierra Leone Labour Congress, and the Independent Media Commission. At the end of the meeting, SLRU was shown the various institutions and stages to register in a bid to get the bargaining certificate. The SLRU is now in the process of renewing its membership with the Sierra Leone Labour Congress in a bid to secure the requisite documentation for the acquisition of the bargaining certificate.²⁶

Based on the above analyses, the key recommendations are that:

- The Association of Communication, Journalism and Media Educators-Sierra Leone (ACJME-SL) is supported to roll out and strengthen communication, journalism and media training that will promote professionalism in the industry.
- Mentoring and coaching initiatives are supported to provide hands-on capacity building and knowledge transfers to young reporters as well as skills transfer for specialised reporting.

²⁵ MRCG Narrative Project Report, October 2018

²⁶ MRCG Narrative Project Report, October 2018

- Coherent and coordinated training programmes are carried out in all regions and targeted media houses, adjusted to different levels of training, academic education and in-house coaching.
- The bargaining certificate for the minimum wage for reporters should be secured and implemented across the country to address staff welfare issues.
- Compliance with ethical standards of media houses and journalists is supported by all national media organisations.
- Higher education institutions providing communication, journalism and media training are supported with the requisite teaching and learning material and infrastructure and linked with similar institutions overseas.
- The national curriculum for communication, journalism and media education is reviewed and syllabi produced for all courses.
- Systems are devised to ensure the ordinary people (media consumers) are involved in determining media structures and interaction, identifying relevant content.
- A fully gender balanced approach to all capacity building needs is emphasised to increase professionalism.
- State of the Media Report is produced annually to serve as referential material for communication, journalism and media education and practice in Sierra Leone.

3. Enhanced sustainability of media institutions

This is to ensure that governance structures are in line with best practices and are implemented successfully resulting in more revenue generation and the ability to pay staff a living wage while decreasing reliance on donor funding.

There have been many media support interventions in Sierra Leone over the years. While there has been an increase in the number of media houses, there are still serious issues regarding sustainability and professionalism. It is also necessary to ensure sustainability/profitability of media houses – only then can media workers make living wages and focus on professional content rather than content that is “subsidized” by political and other actors who essentially purchase news coverage.²⁷

Apart from SLBC, the main media broadcast structure is the IRN with 40 community and private radios that coordinate training, news and current affairs programmes. The IMC Media Code of Practice (p.26) defines a community radio as a body, *which is for, by and about the community, whose ownership and management is representative of the community, which pursues social development agenda and which is not for profit*. In reality, community radios are generally based on volunteers that have been trained in basic radio skills. They have typically received donor support as a key element in their funding, but have not found new and inventive methods of income generation, which still makes running a community radio an uphill task. Local commercial radios have to generate their income mainly from small

²⁷ UNDP Programme Document- Support to Media Development, 2019-2022.

businesses, while national broadcasters can target large and international advertisements as could the local ones if they market themselves as a group.²⁸

In 2017, the MRCG commissioned a study by some of the most experienced media scholars on confronting the effective governance of Community Radio Stations in Sierra Leone and to proffer measures in addressing the identified challenges. The findings, of this study indicate that most of the governing boards have outlived their mandate; are not functioning or are completely non-existent. Some of the stations are still struggling with sustainability issues with no discernible path to independent broadcasting. Major among the issues recommended is the re-constitution of the boards, and training of managers for transparent and accountable operations and the active involvement of communities in the ownership and operations of the community radio stations.²⁹

The print media of which over 200 are registered by IMC seem to constitute the most significant media sector problem. The IMC has been criticised for registering numerous newspapers and not regularly checking on the viability of those newspapers. A mushrooming of small irregularly published newspapers of modest quality produced by a minuscule staff challenge the position of a few professional newspapers. Often some papers rely on undisclosed political or economic interests. These papers may be founded by lonely riders out of a job or by journalists after having graduated from university as a means to escape the high unemployment rate and the precarious economic conditions of young journalists. Some print media might become sustainable if a system of common distribution to all cities is implemented or if they merge. The problem is compounded by the non-availability of data which advertisers could utilise in placing adverts on print and broadcast media institutions. There is no Audit Bureau of Circulation. The Guild of Editors is suggested as an institution that should take the lead in establishing a distribution system.³⁰

There is also very limited evidence of the use of new information platforms such as Skype, Face Time and video/tele-conferencing as a means of improved communication between media institutions and local communities. International support partners are not sufficiently exploring such mechanisms as a means of de-emphasizing the very stereotypical approaches to group coordination, training and exposure.³¹

The economic viability and prognosis for sustainability of the media in Sierra Leone, is becoming of increasing concern to media practitioners and development partners, considering the important role played by the media in national development. The Media Reform Coordinating Group (MRCG) in 2019 commissioned this study to develop a Framework for Revenue Generation, Resource Mobilization, Sustainability and Accountability of the media in the country. In order to get clarity on the current state of the media, a questionnaire was issued to a group of media practitioners at a meeting called by the MRCG to discuss the issues. Data from the questionnaire

²⁸ Media Development Strategy 2014-2018

²⁹ MRCG Narrative Project Report, October 2018

³⁰ Ibid

³¹ Ibid

revealed that indeed there were major challenges in relation to accountability and sustainability of the media. Through the data collected and discussions held with the media practitioners, the challenges threatening the sustainability of many media institutions in the country were grouped under three main headings, namely: financial management, statutory compliance and business growth. In the area of financial management, a majority of media houses had ineffective accounting systems with the absence of adequate checks and balances, partly due to the fact that many of them are one man businesses (sole proprietorships), with the owner/proprietor being the editor/station manager. There was also widespread failure to comply with statutory provisions under the Companies Act 2009, the National Social Security (NASSIT) Act and income tax laws, all of which put the offending media houses at risk of being shut down through legal action. It also emerged that due to the state of the economy and the fact that very little brand advertising was being done, the volume of advertising revenue available to the media was insufficient to sustain it. There is therefore need for action to be taken that would encourage more brand advertising in the country.³²

In terms of enhancing the sustainability of media institutions, one strategy will be a significant focus on Sierra Leone's outlying champions. The outlying refers to individuals and media institutions, particularly outside Freetown, that are often neglected locally and internationally even though they play - or potentially play - an important role in the country's development process. Champions refer to individuals and outlets that are committed to serving the public interest and have demonstrated a clear commitment to both independent media and the development process. This will most likely be seen through the competitive small grants activities that will be sought and will demonstrate from the outset that should media actors seek not only to survive but also to play a critical role in the country's development.

These small grants projects are likely to include everything from content production, media research, business strategies as well as support to media workers who can be trained as solar technicians, for example. The latter is important as the issue of power currently constrains access to internet and thus constrains the ability of the media sector to effectively network and share content and engage with audiences. Distribution of this content in the past has been a challenge and as part of the small grants scheme it is likely that some support will be provided to allow for internet infrastructure support which would require small solar systems (and technicians) to ensure uninterrupted power.

It is also important to note that key linkages will be promoted to ensure that different parts of the sector are engaging with one another. There are numerous opportunities, for example, for research and acquiring a better understanding of the media systems and audiences in Sierra Leone but this can only be done through cooperative efforts between researchers/academics and media institutions – be they media associations, media houses or government bodies or ministries. This project

³² A Framework for Sierra Leone Media Revenue Generation, Resource Mobilization, Sustainability and Accountability, 2019- produced for the MRCG by Dr. Julius Spencer.

seeks to ensure quality research is produced during the lifetime of this project and quality research that can further inform the healthy development of the entire media eco-system.

Based on the above analyses, the key recommendations are that:

- Media institutions and individuals are motivated encouraged to apply for competitive small grants program with focus on attracting women, youth and the disabled, particularly in the districts.
- Networking and partnerships in a variety of content production and collaboration including co-productions; mentoring and coaching are encouraged for SLBC and IRN member stations.
- Districts and disenfranchised populations including women, youth and disabled which is part of the “outlying champions” strategy are reached and resource mobilization and governance structures; education and research, and audience engagement are encouraged.
- Specialised training and coaching focusing on business and management, finance, editorial and production issues for media institutions and associations are organised.
- Collaborative mechanisms such as IRN, common distribution of newspapers, or joint sale of advertisements encouraged in order to facilitate sustainable and professional media.
- An Audit Bureau of Circulation of Publication established to provide access to circulation figures of all newspapers; data and information to prospective advertisers and related statistics in support of the quality of newspapers.
- A Listener’s Council established and popularised as a “people-centred” performance assessment barometer for the public broadcaster. It’s Annual or Quarterly reviews and recommendations could serve as a genuine society generated feedback mechanism on the efficacy, relevance and suitability of SLBC’s programmes and operational performance.
- Targeted exchange programmes among Community Radio Board Members for the application of “best practice” options encouraged and linked to community media capacity building initiatives.
- Targeted training for Community Radio Station Managers on creative programme development and resource mobilisation that demand community centred participation piloted.
- The UN Communication Group, the IMC and SLAJ encouraged ensuring the publication of a Quarterly Media Training Roster aimed at providing a transparent and public announcement of on-coming training fora/events.
- SLAJ and IMC spearhead the identification and formation of a “donors roundtable” for the coordinated and harmonised identification of internally and externally identified funding for media development.

- Capacity strengthening of MRCG and its constituent organizations ensuring media professionalism, viability, sustainability and accountability is achieved.

4. Democratic dialogue and audience engagement with media that provide a platform for debate and responsible engagements and national development.

Since its establishment, MRCG has supported initiatives promoting democratic governance, peace consolidation and national development. These include engagements on the constitutional review process, conflict sensitive reporting on elections, climate change awareness and mitigation and women's political participation. Its mentoring and coaching programme have also focused on coverage and reportage of the SDGs which touch on all aspect of good governance and human development.

By addressing professionalism, sustainability, legislative and regulatory issues as well as media plurality and diversity it is hoped that Sierra Leoneans will be able to play their role in society and will have strong media institutions that ensure accountability of government while engaging with their communities and addressing their concerns.³³

The coverage and reportage of elections by the media have not been done without their own attendant problems. For instance, journalists faced the challenge of understanding, covering and reporting on the electoral processes in a professional manner. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has played a key role in providing training on elections reporting, ethics, the law and support for the coverage and reportage on the elections. Such supports greatly improved the coverage and reportage of particularly the 2012 multi-tier elections. The workshop on 'Promoting Professional Media Coverage and Conflict Sensitive Reporting of the 2018 Multi-Tier Elections in Sierra Leone' part of the 'Conflict Prevention and Mitigation during the Electoral Cycle in Sierra Leone' project. This component of the project seeks to enhance and strengthen the skills of 500 local journalists (including editors and station managers) from regional media houses in Sierra Leone to provide professional media coverage and conflict sensitive reporting of the 2018 multi-tier elections in Sierra Leone. The participants will be taught about the role of media amid conflict, both how it can prolong and exacerbate a conflict and its role in preventing conflict and promoting reasoned political dialogue. Additionally, they will be taught methods of conflict sensitive reporting and how to effectively and professionally report on the electoral cycles and adherence to the Independent Media Commission's (IMC) Guidelines on Reporting Elections.³⁴

Sierra Leone is among the 15 least gender-developed countries in the world and though it has developed a National Action Plan in line with the country's commitment to United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, which calls for women to

³³ UNDP Programme Document- Support to Media Development, 2019-2022.

³⁴ MRCG's Elections Project Report

contribute to ensuring long-lasting peace, most women empowerment initiatives happen at the local level, including the media.³⁵

Based on the above analyses, the key recommendations are that:

- Democratic dialogue initiatives (community engagements) are organised and popularised using various media platforms to support peace, national cohesion and development programmes.
- Civic education programmes are designed on key issues in the country and disseminated on traditional and mainstream media platforms.
- Media coverage, reportage and monitoring on SDGs implementation undertaken across the country.
- Effective elections training, conflict sensitive reporting frameworks established including the setting up of a media situation room prior to, during after the elections, to gauge and assess media performance.
- Sustained community engagements and media coverage and reportage on climate change issues and mitigation measures undertaken within the context of behaviour change communication.
- IEC materials, videos and documentaries on climate change issues are produced and studies undertaken on the outcome of the community and media interventions.
- Media coverage and reportage on women's political participation and dissemination of information on women's instruments of power intensified.

³⁵ Report on Implementation of Activities, UNDP Support to MRCG for Media Capacity Building for Reporting SDGs Implementation and Showcasing Women's Political Participation in Sierra Leone, 2019

5. KEY PROGRAMMES OF CONSTITUENT ORGANISATIONS

INDEPENDENT MEDIA COMMISSION (IMC)

The key focus areas of the IMC in addition to the collective objectives are:

Post Repeal Media Regulatory challenges: As Cabinet had approved the repeal of the criminal libel law, the IMC has to brace itself for the Post Repeal Media Regulatory challenges by undertaking:

- Nationwide training and sensitization of the media, including Station Managers, Newspaper Editors on the Media Code Ethics.
- Enforcement powers of IMC strengthened.
- Empower IMC and its Media monitors with the provision of the relevant monitoring equipment and devices.
- Establish and support IMC offices in all the region.

SIERRA LEONE BROADCASTING CORPORATION (SLBC)

SLBC prides itself to be a constituent body of MRCG, and is aware of its coordinating role towards facilitating media development in terms of investment, professionalism, capacity and capability, equipment, and legislation.

The SLBC sees itself as a strong pillar to broadcasting in Sierra Leone, and therefore embarks on improving on its operations. Noting that it is the only public service broadcaster in Sierra Leone, it is on the move to fulfill one of the fundamental principles of public service broadcasting – which is universality of service.

On this account, and on sustaining independent public service broadcasting, SLBC seeks the following:

1. TRAINING

- a. Training for reporters and presenters on newsgathering, presentation and interviewing skills
- b. Training for reporters on digital editing using the adobe audition package
- c. Training for camera operators on filming techniques and documentary production

2. SEMINAR

- a. Seminar for producers on programming
- b. seminar for script editors on editing techniques
- c. seminar for station managers in the regions and heads of units on managing personnel, money, and machines

3. LOGISTICAL SUPPORTS

- a. Provision of digital recorders and cameras
- b. Provision of external microphones for cameras, talk back system and laptops for outside-office packaging.
- c. Renovation of regional broadcasting studios in Makeni, Margboraka, Kono, Kailahun, Kenema, and Bo

SIERRA LEONE REPORTERS UNION (SLRU)

As a union representing reporters, we recognize the need for this review. We are interested in all the issues, knowing the importance of this process to the overall growth of the media. However, our specific interest has to do with the fourth point: ***Strengthened capacity, professionalism and sustainability of private media organizations and practitioners.***

Capacity building is important for journalists. Capacity building can be tied to some other goals like professionalism and ethics. Reporters are the foot soldiers of the media; a media house is as good or as bad as its pool of reporters. So, as a union we believe MRCG should continue facilitating and supporting mentorship programs for reporters in different fields of reporting. With MRCG's support we may possibly seek to extend future mentorship programs nationwide.

In the coming years we would want to collaborate with MRCG to gauge the progress of the mentorship program.

Apart from the fellowship program, further capacity building programmes should be looked in to. Capacity building should be a continued program. It should also be targeted to get maximum impact.

As SLRU we are also deeply concerned about the welfare of our members. Most reporters are not paid. Some who are paid are paid below the minimum wage. This situation has laid the foundation for unprofessionalism. Journalists use their situation as an incentive to practice without ethics and credibility. In the coming months we will try to engage stakeholders in the media to discuss the situation. We believe the poor remuneration scale in the media is based on flawed financial models or in some cases the lack of any financial models to run media houses. We are hoping that there will be a strategy that addresses the financial models of media houses.

We want MRCG to lead a quarterly media discussion on emerging challenges facing the media in Sierra Leone. We believe the forum can also be used for Peer Review and a deeper understanding of ways to raise the standard of our practice as journalists.

SPORTS WRITERS ASSOCIATION OF SIERRA LEONE (SWASAL)

Sports has been a tool not to only address challenges and developmental issues around the world today but it has also been a channel for promoting mobilisation, raising awareness and encouraging youths, politicians and all related key players for education and development. With the power or the spirit of bringing individuals and communities together, as well as bridging cultural and ethnic divides Sports and sports journalism go beyond reporting action on the pitch or venue grounds but of the pitch or beyond competition and results.

It is on this backdrop that there is highly the need for **Sports Journalism Qualification** with ethical and competent media professionals for this particular media sector. The need for the very first sustainable qualification structures in Sierra Leone which will help increase human capacity to ensure that the media professionals (Sports Journalists) who are the most important intermediaries for the exchange of ideas and information, to fulfill their role are all but needed.

A capacity building structure which could see the start of a **Certificate or Diploma in Sports Journalism** to be introduced in all the major tertiary institutions in the country will be a great step to give a new phase, life and idea to the present young and upcoming sports journalists.

The establishment of this will also strengthen and capacitate the sports journalists and will combine theory with hands-one experience in media outlets which will be vital for a professional and independent media sector and the essence of sports journalism beyond reporting the actions.

MINISTRY OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS

Activity	Deadline/timeframe	Key performance Indicators
Develop, enact and popularise the National Information Policy	January, 2020	Enhanced National information policy
Repeal of Part V of the Public Order Act	November/December 2019	Public order act repealed
Strengthening IMC's mandate – Post Repeal	January, 2020	Improved media code of practice and level of compliance
Consultative meetings with various stakeholders on the enforcement of media regulations	December, 2019	Enhanced compliance and participation of media institutions
Develop, enact and popularise the National Film Policy	January-March, 2020	Film policy enacted and level of compliance
Organise Public speaking sessions and media trainings for Ministers, Heads of MDAs and Communication Officers	January-June, 2020	Number of Government Officials trained and their delivery output on media
Pitch robust outreach to disseminate government policies and programmes through the Public Broadcaster	On-going	Increased public awareness on government policies and programmes
Weekly simulcast Radio discussions on Government priorities broadcast in selected radio stations nation-wide	On-going	Informed nation on government policies, programmes, etc.
Monthly National Press Conferences to be held in the Regions	On-going	No. of press conferences organised
Engage Information and Public Relations Officers in Government Ministries, Departments and Agencies	On-going	Government information, visibility and partnership enhanced

6. SIERRA LEONE MEDIA DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2020-2024

Aim:

The overall aim of the Media Development Strategy is to promote a free and responsible media, promote democratic dialogue, consolidate peace and support various national development initiatives.

This is achieved through key priorities with specific strategic objectives:

Timeframe:

For this strategy, short term achievements should be accomplished within one year, mid-term achievements between one to three years, and long term between one to five years.

Objective 1: *To promote an enabling media environment through legislative, regulatory and self-regulatory system reforms that are in line with international norms.*

Short term achievements

The repeal process of Part V of the Public Order Act No. 46 of 1965 is completed and new media regulation mechanisms disseminated and popularised across the country.

The country's media regulation is aligned with international standards.

- SLAJ reviewed Codes of Ethics is popularised, implemented and enforced and the work of its Disciplinary Committee is enhanced.
- The National Information Policy finalised is approved by Parliament and disseminated across the country.
- The Civil Libel Law – Defamation Act No. 32 of 1961 is reviewed by the Law Officers Department and approved by Parliament.
- Independent Media Commission Act No. 12 of 2000 is reviewed and adapted to strengthen its independence and to provide mechanisms to ensure the implementation of its incentives and punitive measures related to the Code of Practice.
- The production of the IMC Media Watch is supported to showcase media performance in Sierra Leone and to serve as a reference point on the work of the media industry.

Mid-term achievements

- The Civil Libel Law – Defamation Act No. 32 of 1961 is popularised and its implementation monitored.
- A full system for transparent and independent allocation of licenses is established, and free and fair handling of media complaints and enabling media environment guaranteed.
- Media institutions are encouraged to review and/or develop their self-regulatory mechanisms such as their editorial policies/guidelines and abide by them in line with best international standards.
- National engagements are organised to stimulate conversations on the responsible use and/or regulation of social media platforms.

Long term achievements

- The Independent Media Commission statutory regulation model is replaced with a self-regulation one.
- The harmonisation and codification of existing media laws is achieved.
- The constitutional review emphasises the independence of media as part of the new constitution.
- The creation of the IMC is provided for and guaranteed by the Constitution of Sierra Leone.
- Coherent media legislation is developed uniting all legislative measures for public, community, commercial, print, online and social media.
- Develop and implement policy on the responsible use and/or regulation of social media platforms.

Objective 2: *To increase professionalism in the media landscape.*

Short term achievements

- The Association of Communication, Journalism and Media Educators-Sierra Leone (ACJME-SL) is supported to roll out and strengthen communication, journalism and media training that would promote professionalism in the industry.
- The bargaining certificate for the minimum wage for reporters should be secured and implemented across the country to address staff welfare issues.
- State of the Media Report is produced annually to serve as referential material for communication, journalism and media education and practice in Sierra Leone.

- Mentoring and coaching initiatives are supported to provide hands-on capacity building and knowledge transfers to young reporters as well as skills transfer for specialised reporting.

Mid-term achievements

- Coherent and coordinated training programmes are carried out in all regions and targeted media houses, adjusted to different levels of training, academic education and in-house coaching.
- Higher education institutions providing communication, journalism and media training are supported with the requisite teaching, learning material and infrastructure and linked with similar institutions overseas.
- The national curriculum for communication, journalism and media education is reviewed and syllabi produced for all courses.
- A fully gender balanced approach to all capacity building needs is emphasised to increase professionalism.

Long term achievements

- Compliance with ethical standards of media houses and journalists is supported by all national media organisations.
- Systems are devised to ensure the ordinary people (media consumers) are involved in determining media structures and interaction, identifying relevant content.

Objective 3: *To promote gender concerns and address women specific issues within the media.*

Short term achievements

- A fully gender balanced approach to all capacity building needs is emphasised to increase professionalism.
- Develop systematic national monitoring and training programmes on gender issues within the workplace.
- Establish and register gender ambassadors in all media houses (with incentives).
- Promoting gender concerns and women specific issues in the workplace.
- Yearly national consultative forum for all women journalists to dialogue with each other to foster growth and enhance productivity.

Mid-term achievements

- Research and publish a comprehensive literature on the status of **women journalists**.
- Research and publish a comprehensive literature on the status of **women in the media**.
- Develop and maintain a comprehensive gender policy to be domesticated in all media institutions.

Long term achievements

- Advocacy for the quota system in the leadership structure within the Sierra Leone media; 30% women's representation.
- Forming a critical Mass: Strengthening/formation of a more united women's group for all women journalists working in Sierra Leone.

Objective 4: *To support and enhance sustainability of media institutions, revenue generation, and effective and effective governance and management systems.*

Short term achievements

- Media institutions and individuals are motivated encouraged to apply for competitive small grants program with focus on attracting women, youth and the disabled, particularly in the districts.
- Networking and partnerships in a variety of content production and collaboration including co-productions; mentoring and coaching are encouraged for SLBC and IRN member stations.
- Specialised training and coaching focusing on business and management, finance, editorial and production issues for media institutions and associations are organised.
- A sustainable and politically neutral funding mechanism is established for the SLBC.
- SLAJ and IMC spearhead the identification and formation of a "donors roundtable" for the coordinated and harmonised identification of internally and externally identified funding for media development.
- Capacity strengthening of MRCG and its constituent organizations ensuring media professionalism, viability, sustainability and accountability is achieved.

Mid-term achievements

- Districts and disenfranchised populations including women, youth and disabled which is part of the "outlying champions" strategy are reached and resource mobilization and governance structures; education and research, and audience engagement are encouraged.

- The SLBC Board of Trustees and the Director General of the public broadcaster are assisted by peers from similar organisations abroad in their establishment and implementation of a strategy, defining in detail the public service mission, the departmental structure, target groups, programme schedule, and the division of broadcasting obligations for national and regional radio channels and for TV.
- Extensive expert assistance serves to elaborate new programme formats for SLBC and build the capacity of the editorial and technical staff responsible for producing them.
- Targeted exchange programmes among Community Radio Board Members for the application of “best practice” options encouraged and linked to community media capacity building initiatives.
- Targeted training for Community Radio Station Managers on creative programme development and resource mobilisation that demand community centred participation piloted.
- The UN Communication Group, the IMC and SLAJ encouraged ensuring the publication of a Quarterly Media Training Roster aimed at providing a transparent and public announcement of on-coming training fora/events.

Long term achievements

- Collaborative mechanisms such as IRN, common distribution of newspapers, or joint sale of advertisements encouraged in order to facilitate sustainable and professional media.
- The capacity of SLBC’s existing production and distribution equipment is analysed and additional or new technical formats are acquired if needed.
- An Audit Bureau of Circulation of Publication established to provide access to circulation figures of all newspapers; data and information to prospective advertisers and related statistics in support of the quality of newspapers.
- A Listener’s Council established and popularised as a “people-centred” performance assessment barometer for the public broadcaster. It’s Annual or Quarterly reviews and recommendations could serve as a genuine society generated feedback mechanism on the efficacy, relevance and suitability of SLBC’s programmes and operational performance.

Objective 5: *To encourage democratic dialogue and audience engagement with media that provide a platform for debate and responsible engagements and national development.*

Short term achievements

- Media coverage, reportage and monitoring on SDGs implementation undertaken across the country.
- Democratic dialogue initiatives (community engagements) are organised and popularised using various media platforms to support peace, national cohesion and development programmes.
- Civic education programmes are designed on key issues in the country and disseminated on traditional and mainstream media platforms.
- Media coverage and reportage on women's political participation and dissemination of information on women's instruments of power intensified.
- Sustained community engagements and media coverage and reportage on climate change issues and mitigation measures undertaken within the context of behaviour change communication.

Mid-term achievements

- Effective elections training and conflict sensitive reporting frameworks established including the setting up of a media situation room prior to, during after the elections to gauge and assess media performance.
- IEC materials, videos and documentaries on climate change issues are continuously produced and studies undertaken on the outcome of the community and media interventions.

Long term achievement

- Network of journalists working on SDGs, climate change and women's issues established across the country.

7. IMPLEMENTATION AND PARTNERSHIP

To implement the Media Development Strategy a steering committee is formed with the participation of the Ministry of Information and Communications, the IMC, the SLAJ and key development partners and media training institutions.

International and national experts are expected to provide technical assistance to facilitate the process to achieve each of the objectives.

There are other potential funding sources including the International Women's Media Foundation (IWNF) in Washington, DC, which has a program called the Howard G. Buffett Fund for Women Journalists. This may be a potential source of funding for WIMSAL activities, for example.

There are several INGOs that are currently working in Sierra Leone, the sub-region or that have a history of working in-country.

Farm Radio International (FRI) has several projects on-going in West Africa and has expressed interest in partnering with UNDP/MRCG to seek funding for agricultural/development related activities such as the content production stream. FRI currently has a number of broadcast partners in Sierra Leone.

Developing Radio Partners, an NGO based in the US, was instrumental in the original setting up of IRN. They are keen to continue working on this project and can assist in a variety of ways including sustainability training, as well as nuts and bolts journalism training; ensure constant engagement with the community via SMS, phone, social media and radio listening clubs; the production of content, distributed to stations, that focus on a specific topic – featuring issues and solutions. The organization also has significant experience in mentoring, youth radio, behaviour change radio content and disaster planning.

Universities in the UK, Canada and the United States are all potential partners. Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada has expressed an interest in partnering with UNDP in Sierra Leone.

There are also a number of in-country partners including various ministries that have a stake in aspects of this project's activities including the Min. of Information and Communications, Min. of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs and the Min. of Youth Affairs,

There should be continual outreach to UN agencies regarding possible partnerships. UN Women, FAO, ILO, UNAIDS, UNFPA, UNICEF, WFP, WHO are all likely to have some media or communications component to their programmes.

8. SUSTAINABILITY

The MRCG will only be sustainable when the constituent organisations are strong and vibrant and support its work. The MRCG works with UNDP as its key funding agency and it hopes that the partnership will continue. It is anticipated that MRCG will receive some support from the UNDP because this new Strategy aligns and focuses on media reportage of development programmes, peace consolidation and national cohesion. It is envisaged that emphasis on facilitating media to report results of development projects, better serve to inform and educate the citizenry on functions and programmes of democratic institutions.

The UN SDG Media Compact is an additional window that is geared toward sustained commitment from media houses/journalists to more involve in the polarization of the SDGs, foster government commitment and report on progress made in country. The MRCG, through its constituent bodies had hosted preparatory meetings in order to subsequently galvanise the role of media in attaining the SDGs and periodically report on progress in their implementation in Sierra Leone.

As a national media leadership platform, the MRCG and its constituent organizations, will over the phase out period establish robust funding/strategic partnerships beyond the UNDP support. This entails reaching out to and working with the communication department of other UN agencies in Sierra Leone, MDAs, private sector and other development partners in and outside Sierra Leone. The MRCG has already started engaging other donors like the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) to support some components of its work. MRCG is part of the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA), a regional media platform, that is interested in its work. That partnership helps in MRCG's sustainability. Again, MRCG is now forging partnerships with other local organizations. Moreover, the constituent bodies have discussions on how they can give some sort of support to the MRCG Secretariat from their own resources which they will generate. In short, the constituent organizations have resolved that the MRCG's platform is crucial for effective coordination of their work and it should continue to operate.

9. KEY SOURCES

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