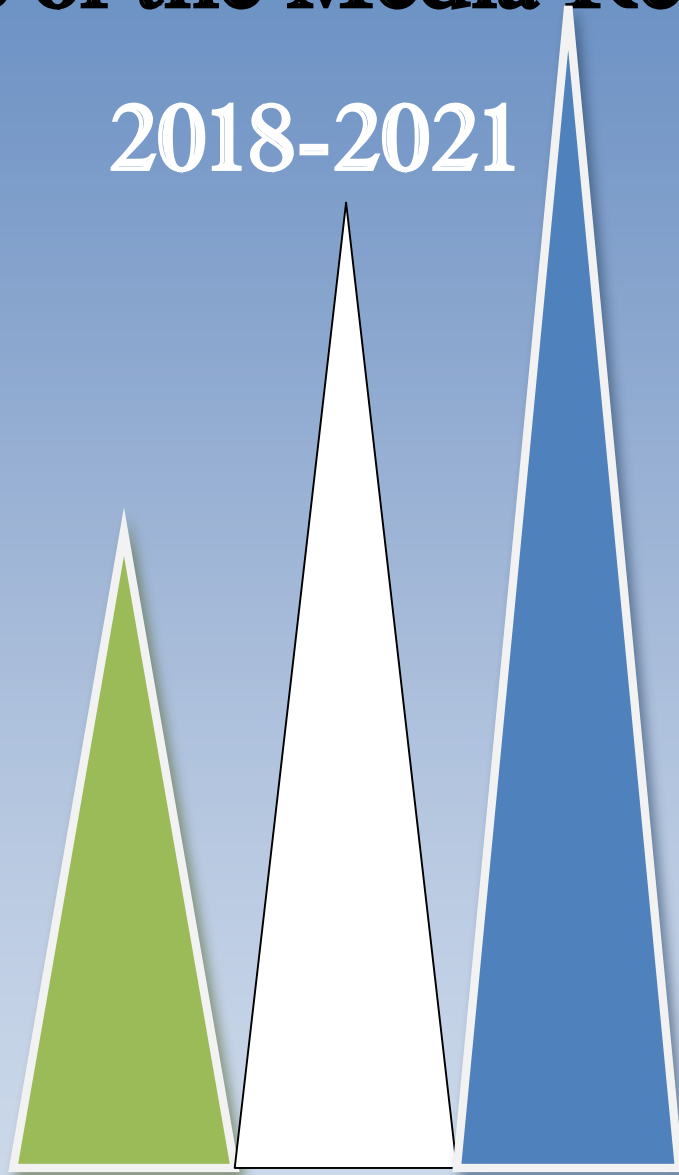


Sierra Leone

State of the Media Report

2018-2021



National Endowment
for Democracy

Supporting freedom around the world



Sierra Leone

State of the Media Report

2018-2021

IBRAHIM SEAGA SHAW (PhD)

Editor

FRANCIS SOWA (PhD) and WILLIETTE JAMES (PhD)

Assistant Editors

**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

National Endowment for Democracy (NED)

State of the Media Report 2018-2021

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

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

Authors: Ibrahim Seaga Shaw (PhD), Francis Sowa (PhD), Joseph Lamin Kamara, Khalil Kallon, Yeama Sarah Thompson and Victor Ohuruogu, Rosaline K. Amara and Sheku P. Kamara.

ABOUT MRCG

The Media Reform Coordinating Group (MRCG) is the coordinating Secretariat for media reform, research and capacity building. It comprises Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ), Independent Radio Network (IRN), Guild of Editors (GoE), Women in the Media Sierra Leone (WIMSAL), Sierra Leone Reporters Union (SLRU), Sport Writers Association of Sierra Leone (SWASAL), Mass Communication (Fourah Bay College), Ministry of Information and Communications (MIC), Independent Media Commission (IMC) and the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC).

CONTENT

FOREWORD.....	6
State of the Media Report:	6
INTRODUCTION.....	7
State of the media: Freedom, Responsibility, and Sustainable Development	7
PART ONE: MEDIA ECOSYSTEM IN SIERRA LEONE.....	12
1. Media Ecosystem in Sierra Leone: Operations, Regulations, Freedom and Capacity Building from 2018-2021	12
Abstract.....	12
1.1 Introduction.....	12
1.2 Political economy of the media.....	12
1.3 The media landscape – the numbers	13
1.4 Media laws, regulations and freedom	15
1.4.1 Constitution of Sierra Leone.....	16
1.4.2 The repeal of Part V of the Public Order Act 1965	17
1.4.3 Criminal libel law repeal and manifestoes of some political parties	18
1.4.4 The road to the repeal	18
1.4.5 The Public Order (Amendment) Act 2020.....	24
1.4.6 The Independent Media Commission (IMC) Act 2020	25
1.4.7 Right to access information	30
1.4.8 Cybersecurity Law	31
1.5 Codes of Practice/Ethics	32
1.5.1 Media Code of Practice (2007).....	32
1.5.2 Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ) Code of Ethics	33
1.6 Freedom of Expression and of the Press: Cases and Actions Taken.....	33
1.7. Social media, internet freedom and digital rights	49

1.8 Ownership, governance and management	50
1.8.1 Survivability – business model and revenue generation.....	51
1.8.2 Staff welfare and conditions of service.....	53
1.9 Key Activities of national institutions and media organisations	53
1.10 Conclusion	68
PART 2: MEDIA AND DEVELOPMENT	69
The State of Public Access to Information in Sierra Leone since 2019	69
3. Pathways to Enhancing the Media’s role in the SDGs and Medium-Term Development Plan in Sierra Leone.....	77
4. Media Reporting on the Sustainable Development Goals and the Medium-Term Development Plan in Sierra Leone	85
PART THREE: MEDIA PERFORMANCE AND ETHICS.....	95
6. Professional Journalism: Media Freedom and Responsibility.....	95

FOREWORD

State of the Media Report: Qualitative, Quantitative and Critical Analysis (2018-2021)

A plethora of national (the Constitution of Sierra Leone, the 2020 Act of the Independent Media Commission) and international legal instruments, including policies and guidelines, designed to create free and protective space for journalists to practice are being monitored and critically observed for their applicability, respectability and cogency, by a credible media coordinating outfit, that I chair, the MRCG. Hence this State of the Media Report spans 2018 – 2021.

The MRCG works to fortify journalistic practice, initiate and coordinate media development and monitor the dynamics between the media, state and non-state actors, chiefly the security forces. This publication provides the latest contribution in a line of radical knowledge resources, 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 bar none.

The State of the Media Report initiative, a major activity of the MRCG, in the last 5 years, seeks to engage and critically interrogate specific subjects and malleable variables, contributing to the teaching, practising and researching of media happenings and texts from a global perspective and national perspectives while at the same time sharing international best practices.

Thus, this published report, would strive for and serve as a nationally and internationally-relevant material for collegiate teaching and research for policy design purposes; it is open to adoption or adaptation, which would respond to the emerging global problem of safety, protection, dis/mis information.

In sum, you would realize that the number and quality of articles in this report explain their richness, analytical depth and diversity of views within the media ecosystem. From access to information, to the nexus between media and the SDGs and gender equality and technology, these articles/reports crystalize the lingering fact that modern practice of journalism in Sierra Leone is clustered by multiple variables ranging from laws to policies, guidelines, media precepts and security.

My deepest thanks and appreciation go to our funder, NED, media practitioners, contributors, partners and the Government of Sierra Leone for the many strides towards creating free media space and support to guarantee freedom of expression and safety for media practitioners.

Victor Massaquoi, PhD
Chairman, MRCG-SL Advisory Board

INTRODUCTION

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

By

Ibrahim Seaga Shaw (PhD)

*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 web site www.ibrahimseagashaw.com

Francis Sowa (PhD)

*Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Communication, Media and Information Studies, FBC, USL and
National Coordinator, Media Reform Coordinating Group (MRCG)*

This Report presents a critical overview of the prospects and challenges in media freedom and development in Sierra Leone, with a special focus on the 2018-2021 period, as well as the role of the media in the country's sustainable development pathways. It is broadly divided into two parts: the first presents an overview of the media landscape during the period under review focusing on freedom, professionalism, performance, state-media relations, regulations, management, ethics, etc.; while the second presents academic articles on the role of the media and access to information in sustainable development.

As this Report shows, Sierra Leone has in the past four years made progress in the entire gamut of press freedom and freedom of expression ecosystem; thanks largely to the historic repeal of Part V of the Public Order Act, 1965, which contained the offences of Criminal and Seditious Libel and the increasing implementation of the right to

access information law in the country. Most human rights observers, including the authors, were indeed very optimistic that the repeal of Part 5 would signal the end, or a significant reduction, in the persecution of journalists and this would give the media a better opportunity to play a more active role in the development of the country. However, despite this increased state of freedom of the press and freedom of expression, the cases of violations captured in the first part of this Report ranging from harassments to temporal detentions, and arrests of journalists and/or opposition politicians because of freedom of expression-related issues, show that there is an apparent mis-match between the increased liberal policy climate and the reality on the ground. According to these reports, what could be said to have changed for the better at least is the fact that since the Repeal, no journalist has been put on trial, or jailed, for criminal libel offences, which is encouraging. What is more, the criminal libel case against Dr Sylvia

Blyden of the Awareness Times was dropped by the State following the Repeal of Part V.

Moreover, looking at the violations documented in this Report, it is noted that some of them involve opposition politicians and people from other walks of life such as the entertainment industry, while others involve journalists but not necessarily because of their work as journalists. Of course this should not be an excuse if the reason for the violations against any of the above has anything to do with their right to enjoy their freedom of the press, or freedom of expression. Nobody, for example, be you a politician, civil society activist, or an ordinary person, should be arrested and detained by the police for simply expressing an opinion on radio, tv, or in a newspaper, except if such opinion is deemed beyond every reasonable doubt to clearly disrupt public order, or undermine any other limitations of freedom of expression. Given that Article 19 of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which provides that everyone has the right to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas without borders, has limitations such as national security, personal data etc. against which this right should be balanced.

A fine balance must therefore be struck between freedom of the press, or freedom of expression, and the trade-offs of this freedom since there is no point for a journalist, or any member of the public, to enjoy this right if this

is going to undermine the right of others to live in peace, or their right to privacy. The enjoyment of free speech therefore calls for responsibility on the part of those beneficiaries of this freedom, be they journalists, politicians, or civil society to strike this fine balance between this and other rights and freedoms of others.

The Independent Media Commission (IMC) has witnessed a surge in the number of complaints from members of the public against journalists and media institutions accusing them of breaching provisions in the Media Code of Practice. To the extent that the February 2022 IMC Media Watch Report documented a number of such complaints which ended up finding the media institutions in breach of the Media Code of Practice and instructed to pay fines and retract the broadcasts and publications. This clearly shows the Repeal of Part 5 could have been accompanied by a lot of public education and training of journalists on how to enjoy this new spirit of freedom with some amount of responsible professional journalism. It is not too late for SLAJ and IMC to fix this problem, and perhaps extend this to the security forces, especially the Sierra Leone Police who have lately been notorious in crossing the line in the name of enforcing public order.

It is clear that striking the right balance between press freedom and responsible journalism is key to the role of the media in

sustainable development. According to Siebert et al (1963)¹, social responsibility of journalism (SRJ) is the fourth and perhaps most important of the four theories of the press; the three others are the Communist, the Authoritarian, and the Libertarian. This could not be far removed from the fact that the SRJ relates to public interest journalism which suggests that for journalists to serve the public interest they must enjoy their freedom responsibly. However, controls of political power and business informed by the other theories of the press in the context of political economy of the media often make it difficult for journalists to strike the balance between freedom and responsibility, and more importantly serve the public interest. The failure to strike a fine balance between making profit and staying in business on one hand and addressing the interests of the public they serve on the other hand has been the most worrying concern of capitalism and journalism.

There is a plethora of research for example Herman and Chomsky (1988)² Herman (2002)³; McChesney (2004⁴, 2013⁵), Shaw

¹ Siebert, F.S., Peterson, T. and Schramm, W. (1963) *Four Theories of the Press*. University of Illinois Press, Urbana III.

² Herman, E & Chomsky, N (1988) *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*. New York: Pantheon Books

³ Herman, E.S. (2002;72) *The Media and the Markets in the United States* In *The Role of the Mass Media in Economic Development*. World Bank Institute.

⁴ McChesney, R. W.(2004) *The Problem of the Media: US Communication Politics in the 21st century*. Monthly Review Press. New York. USA

(2016)⁶ which suggests that journalists have mostly tipped the balance in favour of boosting the corporate interests of the owners of capital, or the means of production, and not necessarily the real producers and consumers of goods and services. Since the journalism practised in Sierra Leone is mostly based on the universally accepted Western Liberal Democracy model, and going by all the challenges of responsible and development journalism discussed in the contributions of this Report, the situation here is no different.

Yet this is in sharp contrast to journalists' social responsibility to hold power, be it political or corporate, to account in the interest of the general public. But the journalist also faces a huge crisis of choice, or identity. On one hand, he draws his power and inspiration from liberalism: the freedom to hold power to account by informing and educating the public about their human wrongs. Yet, on the other

hand, he depends on neoliberal capitalism to be able to perform this watchdog role since without the capital to employ him and provide the other means of producing the news and comments, he would not exist as a professional journalist.

⁵ McChesney, R. W. (2013) *The Problem of Journalism: a political economic contribution to an explanation of the crisis in contemporary US journalism* *Journalism Studies* Volume 4, Issue 3, January, 299-32

⁶ Shaw, I.S (2016) *Business Journalism: A Critical Political Economy Approach*. Routledge

In order to resolve this crisis, I (Dr. Seaga Shaw) make the call for a shift in paradigm from traditional journalism to what I call ‘Public-interest Journalism’ which seeks to not only blur the distinction between reporting for the investor (the capitalist), or those with political power (the politician) and the general public (society), but to tip the balance in favour of the latter if it comes to making a choice because it constitutes the majority, including the former, and also because this would help address, rather than reinforce, the imbalances of society. I make the argument that this is crucial to averting failures to strike the balance between freedom of the press and responsible journalism, and thus strengthen the role of the media in sustainable development in Sierra Leone.

This Report is written for the general public. However, public policy makers, state functionaries, civil society organizations, academics, and students, especially those in mass communication and journalism, will find it very useful as a significant contribution to the scarce literature on the media in Sierra Leone.

The article by Francis Sowa, Joseph Kamara, Khalil Kallon, and Osman Bah ‘Media Ecosystem in Sierra Leone: Operations, Regulations, Freedom, and Capacity Building from 2018-2021’ in the media section examines the media ecosystem in Sierra Leone from 2018 to 2021. The key aspects covered

are the operations, regulations, freedom, capacity building and the media’s contributions to national development during the period under review. The study is informed by theoretical constructs in the political economy of the media. The review shows that the four-year period witnessed significant changes in the operations and regulation of media institutions and as well as witnessed developments within the media landscape in the country. Although the growth in communication platforms was visible within the last four year-period of 2018-2021 with successes in creating an enabling legal environment for the media as evident in the repeal of criminal libel law and the country’s progress in global press freedom rankings; however, as with concerns in previous years, the proliferation of media institutions has not occurred without its own problems, and challenges to media development remain, including poor media infrastructure, lack of financial, technical and logistical supports to aid the work of the media institutions, freedom of expression and of the press issues, and social media, internet freedom and digital rights among others.

Ibrahim Seaga Shaw’s article ‘The State of Public Access to Information in Sierra Leone since 2019’ examines public access to information in Sierra Leone from 2019 to present. Sierra Leone has made steady progress in the promotion of public access to Information since the enactment of the Right

to Access Information Law in 2013 and the setting up of the Right to Access Information Commission in 2014. However, the article points out, while the Commission celebrates this steady progress, it is very concerned that challenges such as limited resources, funding and staffing; and above all lack of supportive legal environment caused by the existence of old laws that promote secrecy instead of openness and new laws and regulations to complement the Right to Access Information are yet to come into force despite all efforts by the Commission, have impacted the adoption and implementation of the FOI law in Sierra Leone. The article by Yeama Sarah Thompson and Victor *Ohuruogu* 'Pathways of Opportunities for Enhancing the Media's role in the SDGs and Medium-Term Development Plan in Sierra Leone' articulates the key pathways of opportunities for enhancing the role of the media in strengthening awareness, providing local and global evidence and impact stories to inform policy issues for implementation of the SDGs and the MTDP, supporting monitoring and reporting efforts and raising its voice to advance inclusion equity and justice which are critical drivers of the SDGs and MTDP in Sierra Leone. The article by Rosaline Katimu Amara 'Media Reporting on the Sustainable Development Goals and the Medium-Term Development Plan in Sierra Leone' investigates the government's implementation of the SDGs

through media monitoring and reports from 2018-to 2021. With an agenda-setting framework, the researcher looks at how the newspapers in Sierra Leone bring to light the gains of government, critical monitoring and giving voice to the voiceless and marginalized in society. The study focuses on three SDGs in Sierra Leone and investigates the trends of reporting and monitoring by the media. The final paper by Putka Kamara 'Professional Journalism: Media Freedom and Responsibility' analyses the assertion above by ascertaining the extent to which the media in Sierra Leone has enjoyed press freedom, but also living up to their responsibility without, or with little external control. The paper argues that the attainment of professional journalistic practices comes with taking into consideration several concepts. It makes a case that attaining the status of professional journalistic practices requires a blend of high ethical considerations and adhering to functional media perspectives that are in line with democratic participant models.

PART ONE: MEDIA ECOSYSTEM IN SIERRA LEONE

1. Media Ecosystem in Sierra Leone: Operations, Regulations, Freedom and Capacity Building from 2018-2021

By

Francis Sowa (Ph.D.)

*Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Communication, Media and Information Studies, FBC, USL and
National Coordinator, Media Reform Coordinating Group(MRCG)*

Joseph Lamin Kamara

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

Khalil Kallon

Executive Secretary, Independent Media Commission (IMC)

and Usman Bah

Head of Programs, Media Reform Coordinating Group (MRCG)

Abstract

This section of the Report examines the media ecosystem in Sierra Leone from 2018 to 2021. 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 study is informed by theoretical constructs in the political economy of the media. The methodology used were documentary and archival search and analyses of secondary data. The review shows that the four-year period witnessed significant changes in the operations and regulation of media institutions in the country.

1.1 Introduction

Since the end of the war in 2002, the media and communication sector in Sierra Leone has significantly diversified and decentralised. This period has seen the growth of emerging communication platforms such as mobile

phones and the internet, and a proliferation of radio and TV stations (Wittels & Maybanks, 2016). The growth in communication platforms was visible within the last four year-period of 2018-2021. However, as with concerns in previous years, the proliferation of media institutions has not occurred without its own problems. The reality is that almost half of licenced and/or registered media institutions are either mostly off-air or published infrequently. Socio-economic and political features have implications for the operations of the media. Several factors account for the situation, which are addressed in this section.

1.2 Political economy of the media

Political economy is about survival and control, or how societies are organised to produce what is necessary to survive, and how order is maintained to meet societal goals (Wasko, 2005). So in essence when it is applied to the media, it addresses factors like the ownership, survivability, organization and

production within the media ecosystem. Specifically, the study of the Political Economy of the Media (PEM) emerged with the evolution of mass media in the twentieth century with roots in the work of classic political economists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In their formulation of the political economy of communication in 1974, Graham Murdock and Peter Golding stated, “the mass media are first and foremost industrial and commercial organisations which produce and distribute commodities.” In other words, they emphasized the need for a thorough understanding of the ‘media as a business’ and not only ‘means for the production and dissemination of contents’. This is why Apuke (2017) posits that the political economy involves the idea of media ownership, the media market, and financial support. Political economy suggests the production of media products – whether news journalism, film, advertising, drama, popular music or whatever is structurally constrained by economic and political factors, especially the private ownership of media industries. Furthermore, the content, style and form of media products in the country are largely shaped by structural features like ownership, advertising and audience spending. The issues covered in this article are within the province of the theoretical constructs of the political economy of the media.

1.3 The media landscape – the numbers

Sierra Leone’s media landscape is a depiction of various variables within the political

economy construct, ownership, the market and the structure. It is also about 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 licences for the operation of radio, television and Direct-to Home services and registration for the operation of newspapers and magazines.

By 31 December 2021, there were 501 registered and licensed media institutions in Sierra Leone. They fall into various categories: newspapers and magazines, radio, television and Direct to Home (DTH) services⁷. Among them, 174 radio stations were active/operational and 38 inactive/non-operational; 17 Television stations active and seven not active; seven DTH active and four not active, and 123 newspapers active and 107 inactive, and 10 magazines active and 14 inactive.⁸ Radio and television stations are further categorized into public, commercial, community, and religious institutions.⁹ Newspapers and magazines are not categorized into specific types. In January 2021, the IMC started the re-registration and renewal processes, and by the end of the year, 83 newspapers and magazines, 99 radio stations and 12 television stations also had re-registered.

⁷ Data extracted from the List of Registered Media Institutions in Sierra Leone

⁸ Independent Media Commission Sierra Leone data.

⁹ PART VI (A and B) of the IMC Act 2020

Specifically, within the last four years the following media institutions were registered:

Table 1: Registered media institutions in 2018

Category	Year	Number registered or licensed
Radio		
Public Service	2018	0
Community	2018	0
Commercial	2018	4
Religious	2018	0
Relay/rebroadcast	2018	0
Teaching	2018	0
Television (Terrestrial)		
Public Service	2018	0
Community	2018	0
Commercial	2018	0
Religious	2018	0
Relay/rebroadcast	2018	0
Teaching	2018	0
Direct-to-Home (DTH)		
Television	2018	0
Print media		
Newspaper	2018	6
Magazine	2018	2

Source: IMC Data 2021

Table 2: Registered media institutions in 2019

Category	Year	Number registered or licensed
Radio		
Public Service	2019	0
Community	2019	0
Commercial	2019	13
Religious	2019	7
Relay/rebroadcast	2019	0
Teaching	2019	0
Television (Terrestrial)		
Public Service	2019	0
Community	2019	0
Commercial	2019	0
Religious	2019	0
Relay/rebroadcast	2019	0
Teaching	2019	0
Direct-to Home (DTH)		
Television	2019	0
Print		
Newspaper	2019	10
Magazine	2019	1

Source: IMC Data 2021

Table 3: Registered media institutions in 2020

Category	Year	Number registered or licensed
Radio		
Public Service	2020	0
Community	2020	2
Commercial	2020	4
Religious	2020	2
Relay/Rebroadcast	2020	0
Teaching	2020	1
Television (Terrestrial)		
Public Service	2020	0
Community	2020	0
Commercial	2020	1
Religious	2020	2
Relay/rebroadcast	2020	0
Teaching	2020	1
Direct-to Home (DTH)		
Television	2020	0
Print		
Newspaper	2020	17
Magazine	2020	0

Source: IMC Data 2021

1.4 Media laws, regulations and freedom

There are various levels of control of the media ecosystem manifested in constitution, statutes and codes and the institutions set to enforce them. Thus, the political economy approach aids in understanding the key players and institutions, which undertake such controls

Table 4: Registered media institutions in 2021

Category	Year	Number registered or licensed
Radio		
Public Service	2021	0
Community	2021	2
Commercial	2021	21
Religious	2021	3
Relay/Rebroadcast	2021	0
Teaching	2021	0
Television (Terrestrial)		
Public Service	2021	0
Community	2021	0
Commercial	2021	2
Religious	2021	0
Relay/rebroadcast	2021	0
Teaching	2021	0
Direct-to Home (DTH)		
Television (DTH)	2021	0
Print		
Newspaper	2021	8
Magazine	2021	0

Source: IMC Data 2021

through regulation of the media institutions. 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. The Independent Media Commission (IMC) is the regulatory body charged with the responsibility of registering newspapers and licensing radio and television stations. The National Telecommunication Commission (NATCOM) allocates spectrums/frequencies based on recommendations of the IMC. When the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) took over governance in 2018, it dissolved the IMC Board together with other Commissions and Boards. The IMC Board was reconstituted in October, 2018 with George Khoryama appointed as Chairman.

The four-year period under review witnessed a fundamental change in the media laws, regulation, and media freedom in the country. Key among them are the repeal of the criminal and seditious libel laws in Part V of the Public Order Act of 1965 through the enactment of the Public Order (Amendment) Act 2020, and the enactments of the bill entitled the IMC Act of 2020, and the Cybersecurity and Crime Act 2021. There was also the review of the IMC Media Code of Practice 2007.

1.4.1 Constitution of Sierra Leone

The Constitution of Sierra Leone, Act No. 6 of 1991 guarantees freedom of expression and of the press. Section 25(1) of the said constitution states that:

“Except with his own consent, no person shall be hindered in the enjoyment of his freedom of expression, and for the purpose of this section the said freedom includes the freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart ideas and information without interference, freedom from interference with his correspondence, freedom to own, establish and operate any medium for the dissemination of information, ideas and opinions, and academic freedom in institutions of learning.”

Section 11 of the 1991 Constitution outlines the obligations of the mass media.

“The press, radio and television and other agencies of the mass media shall at all times be free to uphold the fundamental objectives contained in this Constitution and highlight the responsibility and accountability of the Government to the people.”

1.4.2 The repeal of Part V of the Public Order Act 1965

Part V of the Public Order Act of 1965 (now repealed) provided the strongest setbacks to media freedom. The now repealed Part contained three separate offences ‘Defamatory and Seditious Libel’ from Section 26 (Knowingly publishing a false defamatory libel) and section 27 (Defamatory libel), Section 32 (Publication of false news), Section 33 (Seditious libel). The Part also contains defences.

Section 26: ‘Any person who maliciously publishes any defamatory matter knowing the same to be false shall be guilty of an offence called libel and liable on conviction to imprisonment for any term not exceeding three years or to a fine not exceeding one thousand Leones or both.’

Section 27: ‘Any person who maliciously publishes any defamatory matter shall be guilty of an offence called libel and liable on conviction to a fine not exceeding seven hundred leones or to imprisonment for a period not exceeding two years or to both such fine and imprisonment.’

Section 32 (1): ‘Any person who publishes any false statement, rumour or report which is likely to cause fear or alarm, to the public or to disturb the public peace shall be guilty of an offence and liable on conviction to a fine not exceeding three hundred leones or to imprisonment for a

period not exceeding twelve months, or to both such fine and imprisonment.’

(2) ‘Any person who publishes any false statement, rumour or report which is calculated to bring into disrepute any person who holds an office under the Constitution, in the discharge of his duties shall be guilty of an offence and liable on conviction to a fine not exceeding five hundred leones or to imprisonment not exceeding two years or both.’

(3) ‘Any person who publishes any false statement, rumour or report which is likely to injure the credit or reputation of Sierra Leone or the Government shall be guilty of an offence and liable on conviction to a fine not exceeding three hundred leones or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding twelve months or both.’

33(1) ‘Any person who—

- a) does or attempts to do, or makes any preparation to do, or conspires with any person to do, any act with a seditious intention; or
- b) utters any seditious words; or
- c) prints, publishes, sells, offers for sale, distributes or reproduces any seditious publication; or
- d) imports any seditious publication, unless he has no reason to believe that it is seditious, shall

be guilty of an offence and liable for a first offence to imprisonment for a term not exceeding three years, or to a fine not exceeding one thousand leones or to both such imprisonment and fine, and for a subsequent offence shall be imprisoned for a term not exceeding seven years, and every such seditious publication shall be forfeited to the Government.’

SLAJ and other human rights organisations continued to argue that the existence and/or use of the offences in Part V of the Public Order Act 1965 (criminal libel, false publication and seditious libel) contravened the constitutional provision of freedom of expression and of the press. In the 2018 elections, some political parties in their manifestoes committed themselves to either repealing or reviewing the law.

1.4.3 Criminal libel law repeal and manifestoes of some political parties

The All People’s Congress (APC) manifesto titled ‘Governing for the Grassroots – Moving Forward With Dr. Samura Kamara – Manifesto of the All People’s Congress (APC) 2018’ under the section on Moving Forward with Science, Technology and Innovation’, committed itself to enhancing professional journalism and citizen journalism through support for training, capacity building and progressive

reforms relating to journalism and freedom of expression.

The National Ground Coalition (NGC) document titled ‘Manifesto 2018, An Agenda for Job Creation and National Prosperity’ under the Strengthening Press Freedom & Access to Information section, the Manifesto noted that NGC committed itself to: ‘...Take steps to repeal Part 5 of the Public Order Act and all other laws that hinder press freedom in Sierra Leone.’

The SLPP’s ‘New Direction – People’s Manifesto’ under the section of ‘Promoting Press Freedom and Strengthening Civil Society Organisations (CSOs)’ noted that the next SLPP administration would repeal the seditious libel law and adopt policies and laws to develop the capacity of journalists.

1.4.4 The road to the repeal

Several engagements took place prior to the repeal of Part V of the Public Order Act of 1965. After Julius Maada Bio won the 2018 elections, on 21 May 2018, he met with executive members of SLAJ at State House and promised his government’s commitment to repeal the country’s obnoxious criminal libel laws. The Ministry of Information and Communications (MIC) in 2018, also held several meetings and consultations with SLAJ and other partners on the repeal of the laws and the possible safeguards that

would ensure that the rights and reputations of everybody is protected. Sierra Leone's Cabinet unanimously approved the repeal of Part V of the 1965 Public Order Act on Wednesday 11 September 2019. The Bill was gazetted on the 17 October 2019. On 4 November 2019, President Julius Maada Bio, during a meeting with the new SLAJ Executive at State House, reiterated his commitment to the repeal process.¹⁰ On 18 December 2019, the Minister of Information and Communications, Mohamed Rahman Swaray, laid the Public Order (Amendment) Bill in Parliament. The bill was anticipated to be laid in Parliament in November 2020. This 'bold move', according to the Minister, was part of the fulfilment of President Julius Maada Bio's commitment to the people of Sierra Leone during the 2018 Presidential election campaign. Nevertheless, after the process, the then Leader of Government Business, Hon. Sidi Tunis, was quoted on a local radio broadcast as saying that Parliament might not repeal the libel law if certain safeguards were not put in place to protect the reputation of people.¹¹

Meanwhile, at a Press Cocktail hosted by the President with members of the Fourth Estate on 13 December 2019, he said the campaign promise of his party to repeal Part V of the Public Order Act, which used

to be a dream, was being translated into reality. He called on SLAJ to increase engagement with Parliament, and he indicated he believed that, together, Sierra Leone would become a free state. He also urged SLAJ to convince its members to practise their profession responsibly and increase collaboration and cooperation with IMC.¹² Further, in a national broadcast by President Julius Maada Bio on the State of Law and Order in the Republic of Sierra Leone on 8 May 2020, he reassured journalists of creating an enabling environment for professional journalism and his government's commitment to repealing Part V of the Public Order Act.¹³

On 2 June 2020, the media landscape was dismayed to learn that Parliament had withdrawn the Public Order Act (Amendment) Bill 2019. That action raised many issues, as many journalists were concerned that the bill had been thrown out, which dampened their hope of a repeal. The Leader of Government Business in Parliament, Hon. Mathew Nyuma, announced parliament's decision that the bill had to be withdrawn because the legal time to debate it had elapsed. Hon. Nyuma stated: "We didn't withdraw it deliberately; we withdrew it based on procedure. The Minister of Information and Communications, Mohamed Rahman Swaray, stated, "Government is still

¹⁰ Media Reform Coordinating Group Press Freedom Report, 2019

¹¹ *ibid.*

¹² MRCG Media Freedom Report, 2019

¹³ Media Freedom Report, 2020

irrevocably committed to repealing the Criminal Libel Law.” In a direct response to the withdrawal of the Bill titled: “The Public Order Act (Amendment), 2019”, on 4 June 2020, the Ministry of Information and Communications (MIC) issued a press release in which it assured the general public and its partners that the Bill and the ‘Independent Media Commission Bill 2020’ would be tabled in Parliament and that they were still committed to the repeal.

In the light of this development, SLAJ set up a “SLAJ Criminal Libel Repeal Advocacy Group” which included stakeholders who were tasked with the responsibility of building support for the repeal process. According to a SLAJ press release on this matter, dated 17 June 2020, the mandate of the Group was to help finish the last lap in the process of repealing the Criminal and Seditious Libel laws contained in the Public Order Act of 1965. The release further explained that working alongside the MIC, the Group should coordinate the advocacy and lobbying of members of the Sierra Leone Parliament to see reason and repeal the law immediately.

With continued advocacy and lobbying by the SLAJ, IMC, MRCG and other partners for the Government to repeal Part V of the Public Order Act of 1965, Parliament issued a public notice on 9 July 2020, inviting Hon. Members of Parliament and

the general public to a pre-legislative hearing on “The Independent Media Commission Act, 2020) bill and ‘The Public Order (Amendment) Act, 2020” on 13 July 2020 at 10:00 a.m. in Committee Room No. 1, on the premises of Parliament Building. The release encouraged SLAJ and its key affiliates including the Sierra Leone Police (SLP), Guild of Newspaper Editors (GoE), female journalist representatives, among others, to attend.

Statements were delivered by various media stakeholders at the pre-legislative session, including SLAJ, MRCG and the IMC. The SLAJ President, Ahmed Sahid Nasralla, stated in his remarks that their business in Parliament was to lobby for two things: “The first is to repeal the Criminal Libel laws and pass the new IMC Bill. The second is to amend certain sections of the [gazetted] IMC Bill which is before you [the MPs], to bring it into conformity with the spirit and letters of the 1991 Constitution.” In addition, the MRCG Board Chairman, Dr. Francis Sowa, noted that ‘for 55 years, a giant has stood on top of the media fraternity and industry. It may be like Goliath in the Bible, or in more recent times, it can be likened to the police officer who knelt on George Floyd’s neck for minutes.’ Sadly, ‘Floyd called for help, but got none.’ Dr. Sowa told the Honourable Members that journalists were calling for help like Floyd and pointed out

that: “Our own eight or so minutes have started long ago. We may be in our final minute. The media industry, like Floyd, is shouting, “It can’t breathe.”” However, on an optimistic note, he remarked that unlike Floyd, MRCG, comprising 10 national media organizations, was hopeful that its call was being heeded and was confident that the media would breathe. In assuring parliament of the MRCG’s effort in capacitating the media in ensuring responsible and professional practice, Dr. Sowa expressed thus: ‘Mr. Chairman and Hon. Members, we are not in any way calling for “power without responsibility.” This is seen in many moves the MRCG has made to popularise the Civil Libel provisions in the Civil Defamation Ordinance of 1961, the support to the review of the Independent Media Commission Act and Media Code of Practice and the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ) Code of Ethics and the Disciplinary Committee.’ Dr Sowa ended by urging Parliament to repeal the criminal libel laws as by doing that they would have saved the media in the final minute of the about eight minutes’ journey to death. He concluded by making a clarion call that: ‘Let our media breathe.’

In July 2020, the MRCG used National Endowment for Democracy’s renewed funding support to bolster efforts to repeal the criminal and sedition laws that was

impeding freedom of expression in Sierra Leone and to promote the adoption of self-regulatory mechanisms for the media sector. In heightening the campaign to repeal Part V of the Public Order Act of 1965, the MRCG, with SLAJ and other constituent members, held consultative meetings across the country with key stakeholders including journalists, editors, radio station managers, civil society organizations, women and youth organizations, traditional leaders, leaders of local councils, the IMC and the MIC. The essence of these meetings was to solicit ideas, to intensify the advocacy and lobbying processes and to discuss strategies and tactics to get Parliament repeal Part V of the Public Order Act of 1965. As anticipated, the regional consultative meetings brought about a nationwide outcry for the repeal of the criminal libel law as people from various walks of life (CSOs, traditional leaders, musicians, actors, market women, businessmen, politicians) joined the advocacy by releasing statements and videos urging Parliament to repeal Part V of the Public Order Act of 1965. With the heightened advocacy, Parliament sped up the repeal process.

On 16 July 2020, the Information Minister tabled the two Bills titled ‘The Public Order Act (Amendment) 2020’ and ‘The Independent Media Commission Act 2020’

in the Well of Parliament. The Members of the House of Parliament debated the bills and both of them were committed to the Legislative Committee for further scrutiny.

On 23 July 2020, the Parliament of Sierra Leone unanimously repealed Part V of the Public Order Act of 1965. In this regard, the Government of Sierra Leone issued a Press Release titled: ‘Government repeals Part V of the Public Order Act of 1965’. In the release, the Government remarked that repeal was a fulfilment of President Julius Maada Bio’s commitment and manifesto promise to unshackle free speech, expand democratic space and consolidate the country’s democracy. The Information explained that: ‘The bold decision by the Bio-led Government to repeal this legislation is a very promising step that changes the media landscape in Sierra Leone. We hope that practicing journalists would opt for media professionalism, work with the Independent Media Commission (IMC).’

Following the repeal and the other legislative developments, on 4 August 2020, the Sierra Leonean Government issued a press release acknowledging the congratulatory message of James Duddridge, the UK’s Minister for Africa in the Department of International Development, to the Sierra Leonean

Information Minister. Through the release, James Duddridge, expressed delight that the British officials had been able to aid the process by providing technical assistance and sharing expertise with a broad range of stakeholders in supporting the Government of Sierra Leone to deliver this key pledge.

In gratitude, SLAJ issued a press release thanking the government for fulfilling its promise and all other players, including the IMC, MIC and MRCG. The SLAJ President stated in the release that, ‘Freedom comes with great power and great power comes with great responsibility. By repealing Part 5 of the POA 1965, you have given us great freedom to do our work without fear or favour. Equally so, by enacting the new IMC Bill 2020 you have reminded us of the great responsibility that goes with that freedom. How we maintain that delicate balance is what all of us journalists should work towards as we go beyond the repeal.’ SLAJ described the year 2020 as the year of freedom for Sierra Leonean journalists, media, as the country finally had repealed the 55-year-old obnoxious criminal and seditious libel laws contained in Part V of the 1965 Public Order Act. Following the repeal, SLAJ succeeded in getting the Government of Sierra Leone to drop all cases concerning seditious libel. The historic repeal registered a new dawn for the country's media and inspired a new

hope for journalists, as they no longer would be called criminals for doing their work.

President Julius Maada Bio assented to the Public Order (Amendment) Act 2020 on 14 August 2020 and on Wednesday 28 October 2020, held a ceremony at State House in Freetown in this respect. During the ceremony, the President noted that the criminal libel law infringed the letter and spirit of the fundamental rights to freedom of expression and of the press as provided for in Section 25 of the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone. He stated, ‘I have always argued that the repeal will unshackle free speech, expand democratic spaces, and consolidate our democracy. It will open up the space for the growth of the media industry in the country. Professionalism will be enhanced and the best, brightest and more women, especially, will be encouraged to work their trade.’ The President reiterated that what his Government had done was not ‘about scoring political points or ticking boxes for an international checklist on democratic governance’ but rather to have a ‘more open, participatory, and accountable democracy.’ He further stated that ‘Governments should be open to more scrutiny, not less’ and to ‘create a space for citizens to experience the alternative – responsible, objective, investigative, and the professional reporting of events.

Civilised and democratic countries cannot be seen as jailers of journalists when journalists exercise their professional responsibility to report objectively and ethically. My Government believes that journalists should legitimately and professionally report on matters of public interest without fear or favour. What we must do is create an atmosphere that is conducive to more professionalism – one that strengthens the content and nature of the professional reporting of journalists, and one in which journalists can operate freely without fear of undue harassment, arbitrary arrest, or imprisonment.’

President Bio also promised to ensure review of all cases of criminal and seditious libel and to support an investment conference on the media for the enhancement of private sector investments in the media. The fulfilment of the first promise became evident in a 16 November 2020 press release entitled: ‘Court Discharges Libel Cases’. The opening sentence of the press release read thus: ‘The Attorney General and Minister of Justice, Anthony Yeawoh Brewah Esq and his prosecution team today, (16 Nov. 2020) rendered the case of the State Vs Dr. O. Blyden and Hussain Muckson Sesay as “Nolle Prosequi” in fulfillment of the recent commitment made by his Excellency President Julius Maada Bio whilst

assenting to the repeal of Part V of the Public Order Act of 1965.’¹⁴

President Julius Maada Bio at the Presidential Media Cocktail held on the 18 December 2020¹⁵ stated that the year 2020 had witnessed momentous occasions in the area of press freedom. ‘Tonight, I am proud to say that the repeal of Part V of the Public Order Act of 1965 is no longer in the pipeline’, the President remarked. ‘We are celebrating the end of an era that criminalized libel and sedition after 55 years of its existence. The repeal of Part V of the Public Order Act of 1965 and the enactment of the Independent Media Commission (IMC) Act 2020 will enhance professionalism in the media with several key benefits that will make the journalism profession an enviable career. Particularly, if the Independent Media Commission Act 2020 is carefully implemented, backed by a clear media code of practice, it will attract investment opportunities, enhance social security scheme for media practitioners amongst others.’

On the 22 November 2021, President Julius Maada Bio signed the Global Pledge on Media Freedom as a commitment by the

government to improving media freedom domestically and working together internationally with the Media Freedom Coalition. ‘My government is pleased to have signed up as a member of the Media Freedom Coalition’, the President said. ‘We are also pleased to be the 5th country in Africa to commit to the principles and values of the Media Freedom Coalition. To me, therefore, a free, unfettered, and professional press is not incidental to democratic governance. It is a critical bulwark for good governance and democratic participation. More public scrutiny, not less, is good for greater transparency and accountability in governance.’¹⁶

1.4.5 The Public Order (Amendment) Act 2020

On 28 October 2020, President Julius Maada Bio signed the Public Order (Amendment) Act 2020, which repealed criminal and seditious libel provisions in the country. Section 1 of the Public Order (Amendment) Act 2020 provides that ‘The Public Order Act, 1965 is amended by the repeal of Part V – DEFAMATORY AND SEDITIOUS LIBEL.’ The repeal is expected to create an enabling environment for media practitioners and civil society

¹⁴ <https://www.thesierraleonetelegraph.com/government-of-sierra-leone-quashed-seditious-libel-court-charges-against-dr-blyden/comment-page-1/>

¹⁵ <https://statehouse.gov.sl/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Keynote-Address-by-His-Excellency-President-Dr-Julius-Maada-Bio-at-The-Presidential-Media-Cocktail-on-Friday-State-House-Freetown-18-December-2020.pdf>

¹⁶ <https://statehouse.gov.sl/sierra-leones-president-julius-maada-bio-signs-global-pledge-on-media-freedom-says-unfettered-and-professional-press-is-central-to-countrys-democracy/>

activists to hold government accountable and promote good democratic governance.

After that repeal, the country has made marked improvements in world press freedom rankings. In the 2022 World Press Freedom Index released by Reporters without Borders (RSF), Sierra Leone was ranked 46th out of 180 countries, having moved up from 75th in 2021. Sierra Leone in 2021 ranked 75 out of 180 countries in the World Press Freedom Index, moving 10 places forward (85/180 in 2020 to 75) because of the bold step, which was taken by the government to repeal the law criminalising press offences in Sierra Leone. Previously, in 2020, the country had ranked 85 out of 180 countries in the World Press Freedom Index, moving one place forward (86/180 in 2019 to 85).

1.4.6 The Independent Media Commission (IMC) Act 2020

On the same 23 July 2020, Parliament unanimously repealed Part V of the Public Order Act of 1965, it also passed into law the bill entitled ‘The Independent Media Commission Act 2020 (Act No. 5 of 2020)’. Section 44 (1) of the new Act provides that ‘The Independent Media Commission Act, 2000 (Act No.12 of 2000) is hereby repealed.’

The IMC Act 2020 provides ‘for the continuation of the Independent Media Commission, to provide for the registration

and regulation of mass media institutions in Sierra Leone licensing institutions engaged in radio, television or direct to home” digital satellite service broadcasting and registration of persons and institutions engaged in the publication of newspapers, magazines in Sierra Leone and to provide for other related matters.’

Some key changes

In terms of major changes in the new Act, the definition of media institutions includes ‘online publications’. Section 1 of the Act defines a ‘media institution’ as ‘an institution engaged in the print or electronic media services, including newspapers, newsletters, magazines, radio, television, online publications, direct-to-home and digital satellite television, satellite broadcasting, public relations, advertising, media production and other similar services’.

Composition of the Commission

The composition of the Commission has been expanded; the Board (Chairman and Members/Commissioners) increased from 11 to 13 with the addition of CSO and Inter-Religious Council representatives; membership of telecommunication experts was reduced to one person; there are now an ICT expert, women broadcast and print media experts and legal representatives including women. The law also gives institutions powers to nominate their

representatives to the Board.

Section 3 of the Act is instructive on this:

3. (1) The Commission shall consist of a Chairman and the following members-

(a) 2 legal practitioners each qualified enough to hold office as a Judge of the High Court of Sierra Leone, one of whom shall be a woman, nominated by the Sierra Leone Bar Association;

(b) 2 experts in the field of electronic journalism, one of whom shall be a woman, nominated by the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists;

(c) 2 experts in the field of print journalism one of whom shall be a woman nominated by the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists;

(d) 1 expert in the field of information, communication and technology nominated by the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists;

(e) 1 expert in the field of telecommunications nominated by the Sierra Leone Institution of Engineers;

(f) A nominee of the Inter-Religious Council of Sierra Leone; and

(g) A representative of the Ministry nominated by the Minister;

(h) A representative of the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists nominated by the Sierra Leone Association of Journalist

(i) A representative from Civil Society organisation engaged in media issues nominated by the Minister in consultation with Civil Society Organisation.

Powers to regulate, suspend or cancel licences or registration and enforce decisions

The new Act gives the Commission the powers to regulate, suspend or cancel licences or registration and enforce its decisions. The following sections below are instructive on this:

Section 13 (1) A person or institution shall not-

(a) carry out radio, television or 'direct to home' digital satellite service broadcasting unless that person or institution obtains a licence issued by the Commission for that purpose; or

(b) publish a newspaper or magazine unless that person or institution is registered with the Commission for that purpose.

(2) A person or institution who contravenes subsection (1), commits an offence and shall be liable to a fine not less than Le. 30,000,000 and not exceeding Le. 60,000,000.

Section 14 (1) The Commission may suspend or cancel a licence where it is satisfied that

(a) the holder of the licence has-

(i) violated a term or condition of the licence; or

(ii) within 6 months period contravened the media code of practice more than once-

(2) Where the Commission intends to cancel or suspend a licence under subsection (1), it shall give written notice to the holder of the licence specifying the -

(a) condition of the licence which was breached;

(b) direct action to be taken by the holder of the licence to rectify the breach;

(c) time to rectify the breach; and

(d) action the Commission will take in the event of non-compliance with the notice.

(3) the licence where the holder of the licence fails to comply with paragraphs (b) and (c) of subsection (2).

(4) The Commission shall restore the licence when the holder remedies the situation that gave cause for the cancellation or suspension.

(5) A person or media institution aggrieved by the suspension or cancellation of a

licence under subsection (1) may appeal to the High Court within 30 days of the suspension or cancellation and the High Court shall within 30 days of receipt of the appeal make a decision thereon.

Section 15 (1) The Commission may suspend or cancel a newspaper or magazine registration where it is satisfied that -

(a) the holder of the certificate of registration has-

(i) violated a term or condition of the registration;

(ii) within 6 months period contravened the media code of practice more than once-

The Commission shall proceed to cancel or suspend

(2) under subsection (1), it shall give written notice to the holder of the licence specifying the -

(a) condition of the licence which was breached;

(b) direct action to be taken by the holder of the licence to rectify the breach;

(c) (time to rectify the breach; and

d) action the Commission will take in the event of non-compliance with the notice.

(3) A person or media institution aggrieved by the suspension or cancellation

of a registration under subsection (1) may appeal to the High Court within 30 days of the suspension or cancellation and the High Court shall within 30 days of receipt of the appeal make a decision thereon.

(4) The Commission shall proceed to cancel or suspend the licence where the holder of the licence fails to comply with paragraphs (b) and (c) of subsection (2).

(5) The Commission shall restore the licence when the holder remedies the situation that gave cause for the cancellation or suspension.

Section 16 (1) Where the Commission suspends, or cancels a licence under section 14 or registration of a person or institution under section 15 the Commission shall order that person, or institution to shut down and stop operations unless he complies with the directives of the Commission.

(2) The Commission may, where a person or institution fails to comply with an order under subsection (1), enter a building or place where the person or institution is operating, with the assistance of a police officer not below the rank of Assistant Superintendent, with a warrant, signed by the High Court and shut down and stop operations of that person or institution.

Ownership of media institutions

The types of ownership of media institutions remain the same in the Act; 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; or a registered business as a sole proprietor (Section 24(2) and Section 29 (2) of the IMC Act 2020). The removal of sole proprietorship from among the category of ownership engendered many public debates.

Welfare of journalists

A key highlight of the new Act is the emphasis on addressing the welfare issues of journalists. Sections 24 (3) and 29 (3) (b) (iii) provide that an application for a licence or registration must be accompanied by evidence of compliance with obligations imposed by section 12 of the National Revenue Authority Act 2002 (Act No. 5 of 2002), Section 25 of the National Social Security and Insurance Trust Act 2002 (Act No. 5 of 2001) and the Minimum Wage Act 1997 (Act No.1 of 1997) and its amendments. This, in essence, means that media institutions are required to pay their staff at least the minimum wage prescribed by law, and ensure that they pay the social security dues and taxes. This section was informed by series of complaints that a majority of media institutions were either not paying

staff salaries or were paying them below the minimum wage. This practice is deemed to have contributed to unprofessional practices by media practitioners who have had to find their living sometimes through unethical practices.

Obligation to employ registered media practitioners’ and obligation to employ qualified editors and station managers

There are also new provisions dealing with ‘Obligation to employ registered media practitioners and ‘Obligation to employ qualified editors and station managers’.

Section 39 of the Act provides:

A person or media institution shall not employ or otherwise engage a person as an editor or station manager in the business of-

(a) radio, television or digital satellite television broadcasting;

(b) a newspaper or magazine publication;

unless that person is registered as a media practitioner.

Section 40 (1) of the Act provides that:

A person or media institution shall not employ or otherwise engage a person as an editor or station manager in the operation of a radio, television or digital

satellite service broadcasting or a newspaper or magazine publication, unless that person -

(a) is a journalist with a minimum of 5 years experience; and

(b) has obtained a diploma in journalism, mass communication or media studies, or a University Degree from a recognised Institution.

(2) Subsection (1) shall not apply to a person who, before the commencement of this Act, has had 10 years experience as an editor or station manager in a media institution.

From 2018 to 2021, the new Board and Secretariat engaged in a number of activities, which included popularization of the new IMC Act 2020, registration procedures, compliance with the conditions on the welfare of journalists, seminars on effective management of media institutions, review of the Media Code of Practice, with support from the BBC Media Action’s PRIMED project. The new Board also held regular Complaints Committee meetings.

One of the key issues affecting the Commission has been the lack of financial and logistical capacity.

1.4.7 Right to access information

The Right to Access Information Commission (RAIC) was reconstituted in 2018 when the SLPP came to power and renowned communication scholar and journalist, Dr. Ibrahim Seaga Shaw, was appointed as Chairman and Information Commissioner (CIC) of the Commission. The Commission was established in 2014 by the Government of Sierra Leone with the appointment of the Chairman/Commissioner and four Regional Commissioners on July 2014 on the advice of the Minister of Information and Communications, and approved by Parliament. The Commission was created pursuant to the Right to Access Information (RAI) Act enacted by Parliament in October 2013.

From 2018 to 2021, the Commission expanded on its public awareness and sensitisation nationwide; engaged with ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs); monitored and facilitated freedom of information requests, involving central and local governments, the media, civil society organisations, the legal profession, other MDAs, and the general public. The Commission further developed Regulations and Code of Practice for Records Management, for effective implementation of the RAI Act.

Moreover, the Commission worked with MDAs on the development and enactment

of a new Records and Achieves Act and its effective implementation; and it coordinated the Open Data and Data Compact processes as well as UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Sierra Leone. The RAIC also coordinated implementation of programmes in the Open Data Readiness Assessment (ODRA) in collaboration with UN, other multilateral, bilateral and national agencies.

On 30 November 2021, the RAIC launched the Records Management Code of Practice Training Manual in Freetown. The ceremony was held at the Ministry of Finance Conference Hall in collaboration with MDAs, CSOs, academics and media practitioners.

In August 2020, the Commission – through the Records Management wing – undertook a review of the status of records management in MDAs, assessing their readiness for the implementation of the RAI Act 2013. The Commission also administered ninety-two (92) questionnaires to MDAs on the implementation of the RAI Act and basic records keeping systems. Only twenty-eight (28) of the questionnaires were completed and returned to the Commission. It also conducted a random-survey assessment on Records Management Systems in 10 MDAs to do on-the-spot checks and to cross check whether the information that was completed in the questionnaires was the

same. The report of the assessment was used by the World Bank as a basis for the selection of five (5) MDAs to establish pilot model RM repositories with a consultant from TIWAI Memory Masters SL.

In the meantime, there are concerns that media practitioners are not making freedom of information (FOI) requests. Few media institutions and journalists have so far made such requests, especially following a training for trainers workshop for journalists on how to make FOI requests organised by the Commission in collaboration with SLAJ in October 2020. One of those requests came from a female journalist, Martha Kargbo, in 2019 to the Bank of Sierra Leone. The information was not reportedly provided by the Bank even after the intervention of the Commission. The RAIC imposed a Le70,000,000 (Seventy million Leones) fine on the Bank of Sierra Leone for failing in its duty to comply with Sections 2 and 4 of the Right to Access Information Act 2013.¹⁷ The Bank appealed against the decision. The matter is still in court.

1.4.8 Cybersecurity Law

In 2020, the Cybercrime Bill 2020 was laid in Parliament. Following that, series of concerns were raised about the contents of the bill. To this end, on 29 March 2021 the

MRCG and SLAJ convened a Consultative Meeting on the Cybercrime Act 2020 to discuss provisions of the Bill, following Parliament's directive to the MIC to have further engagements on the Bill that was being debated. The consultative meeting sought the views and opinions of media stakeholders on the Bill and focused on issues relating to press freedom in Sierra Leone. The Information Minister, the SLAJ Executive, media practitioners from across the country and other relevant stakeholders attended the meeting.

Following the deliberations and consultations, including presentations from lawyers who argued for and against certain provisions of the Bill, the MRCG and SLAJ developed a media position paper titled: SIERRA LEONE MEDIA'S POSITION PAPER ON A BILL ENTITLED THE CYBERCRIME ACT, 2020 and presented it to the MIC on 13 April 2021. The media stakeholders resolved that they were not averse to the enactment of the legislation consistent with international obligations that seek to enhance protection, security and responsible use of cyberspace, but were concerned about certain provisions of the Bill that had the tendency to stifle press freedom of expressions.

On 5 May 2021, the MRCG and SLAJ took part in Parliament's Legislative Committee sitting on the Cybercrime Bill 2020 at the

¹⁷<https://www.facebook.com/globaltimesonline/posts/bank-of-sierra-leone-fined-le70m-the-right-to-access-information-commission-head/3446428018819170/>

Golden Tulip Hotel in Freetown where they presented their concerns about certain provisions of the Bill they felt could hinder press freedom in Sierra Leone.¹⁸

On 23 June 2021, Parliament passed the Bill entitled ‘Cyber Security and Crime Act 2021’ into law. The law seeks to provide for ‘the prevention of the abusive use of computer systems, to provide for the timely and effective collection of electronic evidence for the purpose of investigation and prosecution of cybercrime, to provide for the protection of Critical National Information Infrastructure, to provide for facilitation of international cooperation in dealing with cybercrime matters and to provide for other related matters’.

On 17 November 2021, President Julius Maada Bio assented to the Cybersecurity and Crime Act 2021 at Statehouse, Freetown making it a legal statutory instrument regulating the cyber space in the country. At the signing ceremony, President Bio spoke of the importance of setting laws that guide the digital technologies and the internet systems, noting that digital reforms are also part of national development.

¹⁸<http://mrcgonline.org/media/attachments/2022/01/17/nd-sixth-edition--press-freedom-report-2021--final-report.pdf>

“This law is not for political gains but to compete with other developing countries across the world in tracking Cybersecurity defaulters and to send a signal to international partners which Sierra Leone is a signatory to. We will continue to work with our international partners to ensure the smooth implementation of this law,” the President said.

1.5 Codes of Practice/Ethics

The IMC Code of Practice and the SLAJ Code of Ethics are the two national documents used to regulate the media, in addition to the individual editorial policies/guidelines of media institutions.

1.5.1 Media Code of Practice (2007)

The IMC Code of Practice outlines rules and regulations governing the establishment and operations of the print and electronic media and advertising in Sierra Leone. The IMC Code of Practice serves as guide to journalists on their day-to-day activities in their journalistic work by making provisions for rules and regulations that they are to abide by. Breaching any of its provisions goes with its own disciplinary actions. The Code, which was developed in 2007, was reviewed in 2021 with the support of the BBC Media Action’s PRIMED project. The review of the Media Code of Practice 2007 was necessitated by the IMC Act of 2020. The new code has been presented to

the Ministry of Information and Communication for the next steps, which include submission to the Law Officers Department for drafting and later to parliament for approval.

1.5.2 Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ) Code of Ethics

This document was developed and adopted by SLAJ to address the ethical issues facing Sierra Leone's journalism. It draws inspiration most of the principles drawn from other Codes of Ethics and international best practices. It is to ensure that its members adhere to the highest ethical standards, professional competence and good behaviour in performing their duties. This Code is to provide a guide to professional media practice and is therefore applicable to all members of SLAJ. The Code is enforced through SLAJ's Disciplinary Committee. The **SLAJ Disciplinary Committee** was established pursuant to Article 14 (3) of its Constitution responsible to adjudicate upon matters of indiscipline and professional misconduct of individual members of SLAJ. On 31 October 2021, SLAJ appointed Claudia A. R. Anthony as Chairperson of its reconstituted SLAJ Disciplinary Committee (SDC). Anthony's media experience spans about 40 years, starting in 1981 with commercial printing at the Lukobi-Johnson-owned press, Mary Street (footprinter), Sabanoh Newspaper

(hand typesetter) and We Yone Newspaper (linotype operator).

1.6 Freedom of Expression and of the Press: Cases and Actions Taken

In 2018, MRCG started producing its press freedom reports. Within the period under review (2018-2021), MRCG and its constituent bodies produced six editions of the reports. Twenty-eight of the 46 cases monitored were about incidents that occurred before the repeal of Part V of the Public Order Act 1965. There were arrests and detention of people who were not journalists for 'public insult' or cyber related crimes. The cases are summarised below.

1. The case of Patrick Jaiah Kamara, reporter of Concord Times Newspaper

During the March 31 2018 re-run presidential election, MRCG's monitors reported that some journalists were attacked while covering the election across the country. One of the journalists was a reporter of Concord Times Newspaper, Patrick Jaiah Kamara. He was allegedly beaten up by thugs on the instruction of the former Mayor of the Freetown City Council, Herbert George Williams and Sanusi Bruski of the APC Party. In a Facebook post of Patrick Kamara, he said he had been trying to take photos of incidents at the polling centre where the

politicians were visiting when his attackers descended on him. In the process, Mr. Kamara said, he sustained injuries on his chest and temple, lost his digital recorder and some money, and his camera was impounded. Later, the matter was charged to the Magistrate Court No. 1 at Siaka Stevens Street, in Freetown, where one of the accused, Herbert George Williams was charged with Conspiracy to Commit a Crime, and Malicious Damage and Assault occasioning Bodily Harm, contrary to Section 47 of the Offences against the Person Act of 1861. The matter was resolved in an out-of-court settlement after few appearances.

2. The case of Ibrahim Samura, the late Editor of the New Age Newspaper

Another journalist, Ibrahim Samura, the late Editor of the New Age Newspaper, was also reportedly attacked and beaten by the then ruling APC party members and supporters for taking photos of incidents that had been happening at the Polling Centre at Lumley in the West end of the Capital city, Freetown, during the March 31 2018 run-off presidential election. The alleged attackers included Ibrahim Washingai Mansaray, a former deputy minister, Abubakarr Daramy, the communication officer at Agriculture Ministry, Sanusi Bruski, Alusine Dainkeh and Dankay Koroma (daughter of the former President,

Ernest Bai Koroma), all of the APC Party. According to Samura, the incident occurred in the full view of the police and the matter was reported at the Lumley Police Station. Thereafter he was taken to the hospital. Ibrahim Samura later died on 6 June 2018 at the 34 Military Hospital at Wilberforce in Freetown, less than three months after the alleged incident. An autopsy report revealed that he died of heart attack caused by a fractured skull, which left blood dripping down into his heart and other vital organs. There was a clarion call within and outside Sierra Leone for investigation into his death. However, before his death, Mr. Samura accepted an apology from the APC party. In October 2019, Herbert Williams, the Former Mayor of Freetown and Abu-Bakr Daramy, Western Area Spokesman of the opposition APC were arrested on the said matter. The case, presided over by Magistrate Mark Ngegba of Court No. 2, Pademba Road, in Freetown was committed to the High Court. Suspects were charged with two counts of murder and conspiracy to commit grievous bodily harm. They were granted self-bail on 5 August 2020 by High Court Judge, Justice Cosmotina Jarrett, after spending several months in detention. On Thursday, 11 March 2021, the two accused were acquitted and discharged by Justice Augustine Musa of the High Court of Sierra Leone in Freetown, after the jury returned a verdict of not guilty.

3. Invitation to a TV presenter and the Leader and Chairman of the Alliance Democratic Party (ADP), by CID for Questioning

In July 2018 the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) invited, by a letter, Abdul Fonti Kabia, a presenter of the Africa Young Voices (AYV) TV, for questioning in relation to a programme on AYV TV in which the presenter had hosted Mohamed Kamarinba Mansaray, the ADP Chairman and Leader. Abdul Fonti Kabia stated that upon opening the letter, he realized that the letter had neither been addressed to him, nor did the content concern him, hence he ignored it. He said the IMC pressured him to produce a copy of the interview which he had done. He explained that everything went back to normal thereafter and he did not hear anything from anyone in relation to the matter. The ADP Leader and Chairman was also invited to the CID Headquarters in Freetown on 22 July 2018 for a radio and television interview he had granted on 20 July 2018 on Radio Democracy and AYV TV. He was to answer to an allegation relating to the publication of False News, contrary to the Public Order Act (1965). On Monday, 23 July 2018, Mr. Mansaray reported at the CID where he was detained, but he was later released. All charges were dropped and the matter terminated.

4. Arrest and detention of a civil society activist Edmond Abu

On 17 July 2018, a civil society activist Edmond Abu, Executive Director of Native Consortium and Research Centre, a local civil society think tank, was arrested and detained by the Sierra Leone Police for staging a peaceful protest in Freetown against the sudden increments in fuel pump price. According to the police, he was arrested because his protest was unauthorized, as he had had no police clearance. He was later released on bail on 18 July 2018 and the matter was not charged to court.

5. Invitation of AYV journalist by Parliament for questioning

In September 2018, an AYV journalist was invited to Parliament to answer to some questions in connection with a story broadcast on AYV TV, titled 'Caught on Camera', involving a Member of Parliament, Hon. Veronica Kadie Sesay and two others in a land matter. The Speaker of Parliament was reported to have ordered the journalist to retract the story or action would be taken against him. The AYV Director of News and Current Affairs, Mr. Samuel Wise Bangura, appeared before Parliament and was asked to retract and apologise. Nevertheless, he declined and nothing happened after that.

6. The attack on the publisher of *The Elephant Newspaper*, Nimalty Kamara

On 10 September 2018, the publisher of *The Elephant Newspaper*, Nimalty Kamara, was allegedly attacked and beaten up by youth of the ruling SLPP for allegedly criticising the new regime of President Julius Maada Bio. Kamara said he had been attacked because the youth claimed that his newspaper was writing positive things about the former APC-led government. He said he reported the incident at the Kenema Police Station and three of those who had attacked him were charged to Court in November 2018 and several hearings have been conducted. The matter was still at the Kenema High Court at the commencement of this report.

7. Assault of journalist Ransford Metzger of AYV TV

In September 2018, journalist Ransford Metzger of AYV TV was assaulted while investigating an alleged corruption matter at the St. Joseph Secondary School in Freetown. The matter was reported to the police for investigation. The alleged perpetrators were arrested and held at the CID, but were released after the journalist and AYV management accepted the apology from the perpetrators.

8. Attack on the former Editor of *Awareness Times Newspaper*, John Koroma

On 9 September 2018, the former Editor of *Awareness Times Newspaper*, John Koroma, was attacked during a By-Election in Tonko Limba, Kambia District, Northern Sierra Leone, allegedly by a team of Sierra Leone Police officers and persons who openly identified themselves as SLPP supporters. According to the report, Mr. Koroma was fully accredited by the National Electoral Commission (NEC) to observe the election. Some members of the ruling SLPP allegedly ordered the police to arrest and detain him on the grounds that he was “being too inquisitive.” The matter is still with the police and no arrest effected. John Koroma said he availed his witnesses to the police and that statements were obtained from them individually. He said the police had promised to get unto him but have not done so. Koroma has said that he is gradually forgetting about the matter. The police said that Koroma had not been able to identify those that attacked him; and as such, they were constrained to arrest any suspect. They, however, said they would continue to follow up on the matter.

9. The arrest of journalist Fayia Amara Fayia by CID Officers

On 29 September 2018, journalist Fayia Amara Fayia of Star Radio and Standard

Times Newspaper was arrested by CID officers outside the AYV media premises after participating in a TV programme titled 'Weekend Review'. The officers claimed that his arrest was based on a post on his Facebook page containing defamatory words against His Excellency the President of the Republic of Sierra Leone. However, since Part V of the Public Order Act of 1965 has been repealed, police say this case has been closed.

10. The harassment of Alhassan Jalloh, editor of Unique Newspaper

On 5 November 2018, Alhassan Jalloh, editor of Unique Newspaper, was reportedly harassed and handcuffed by police officers attached to the Lumley Police Station, while on duty investigating a fracas between Leonco Filling Station and a Mosque at Lumley. The fracas was allegedly about an access route. Mr. Jalloh explained that since he realised there was no progress in his harassment case, he has decided to drop it and move on. On their own side, the Police argued that Mr. Jalloh had failed to adhere to their advice of leaving the premises where police investigation of the fracas was ongoing, and that the journalist had been hostile at the fracas scene.

11. Arrest and detention of journalist Alpha Thorley of the NightWatch Newspaper

On 14 January 2019, the SLP allegedly arrested and detained Alpha Thorley of the NightWatch Newspaper, on allegations of publishing false information that several diplomatic passports had been issued to family members of the ruling SLPP officials. After spending two days in police detention, Mr. Thorley was released as a result of an appeal from SLAJ. The SLP said the matter had been closed because of the decriminalization of Part V of the Public Order Act of 1965.

12. Attack on two AYV journalists

On 16 January 2019, two AYV journalists, Augusta Ethel Turay and Bockarie Samai, were allegedly attacked and assaulted by supporters of the opposition APC while covering the visit of officials of the CID to the home of former President Ernest Koroma in Makeni, Bombali District, Northern Region. AYV on 18 January 2019 lodged a formal complaint with the Inspector General of Police (IGP) on the attack and other incidents of attacks. SLAJ also condemned the attack. However, the APC party denied any wrongdoing. Police claimed that the matter had stalled because the complainants had not returned with their endorsed medical reports; hence, they could not take any further action.

Nevertheless, Augustine Ethel Turay argued they had submitted their medical reports as was requested by the Police, but they had seen no progress. Consequently, the police called on the journalists to take their endorsed medical forms to the police headquarters and progress could be made from that point.

13. Death threat against the BBC correspondent, Umaru Fofana

On 17 January 2019, there was a report of a death threat against the BBC correspondent Umaru Fofana by an alleged member or supporter of the APC. In an audio message circulated on social media, the anonymous person threatened that Mr. Fofana would be killed whenever he visited Makeni, the correspondent's hometown. This was related to an interview he had conducted with Sierra Leone's former Vice President Victor Bockarie Foh.

On 18 January 2019, SLAJ issued a statement indicating that it was very concerned over the spate of violent attacks and deadly threats against journalists, mainly carried out by supporters of the APC party. Fofana's matter was still under investigation, according to the Police. However, Umaru Fofana has explained that the Police investigating the matter disclosed the identity of his key witness, so he eventually lost confidence in them and, hence, he has stopped following up on the

matter. The police in their response urged Mr Fofana to continue with the matter and to make an official complaint against the police officers that disclosed his key witness.

14. Attack and intimidation of civil society leader, Marcella Samba Sesay

In May 2019 about 25 CSOs issued a statement expressing deep concerns and dismay at the shrinking space of inclusive political participation and dialogue in Sierra Leone, following the March 2018 general elections as they 'unequivocally condemned the recent attacks and intimidation on civil society leaders, including the Executive Director of Campaign for Good Governance (CGG) – Madam Marcella Samba Sesay, who had publicly expressed critical views on the current governance challenges.' The verbal attack on the CGG boss came after she participated in a programme on a local radio station. The matter ended after several press releases condemning the attack on her.

15. Attack on civil society activist, Morlai Conteh

On 2 May 2019, civil society activist, Morlai Conteh, President of the National Youth Coalition of Sierra Leone, was allegedly attacked by a group of military officers of the Republic of Sierra Leone

Armed Forces (RSLAF), after the main opposition APC party did a walkout protest of the ceremony marking the Presidential State Opening of Parliament on 2 May 2019. After responding to medical treatment at a private hospital, Mr. Conteh said his moves to further the case were fruitless, so he decided to drop it.

16. Arrest, detention and prosecution of four local journalists

On 28 June 2019, the police arrested, detained and charged to court four local journalists including Sallieu Tejan Jalloh (Sall Tee) and David Johnson, publisher and editor of the Times SL Newspaper respectively; Mustapha Sesay, General Editor of Standard Times Newspaper; and Abu Bakarr Kargbo (Father Bakish), a Senior Staff Writer of Standard Times Newspaper. These acts by the police were for alleged publication of defamatory articles in both *Times SL Newspaper and the Standard Times Newspaper* respectively against Pa Momoh Fofanah Esq, a Barrister and Solicitor of the High Court of Sierra Leone. The journalists were charged on eight counts of criminal libel offences and were later remanded at the Pademba Road Male Correctional Centre in Freetown for five days. According to the statement of offence, the journalists had been charged with “Knowingly Publishing a False Defamatory Libel, contrary to Section 26 of the Public Order Act of 1965,

and the Publishing of a False Defamatory Libel contrary to Section 27 of the Public Order Act, 1965 (Act No. 46 of 1965).” With the intervention of SLAJ, the four local journalists were released on bail on 2 July 2019 by Magistrate Mark Ngegba of Court No.2 in Freetown. On 22 November 2019, Legal Link helped secure the discharge of the four journalists.

17. Assault on two female sport journalists

On 8 September 2019, two female sport journalists Francess Bernard-Bundor and Esther Marie Samura of the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC) were attacked and assaulted by officers of the Sierra Leone Presidential guard at the National Stadium, during the FIFA 2022 World Cup Preliminary return-leg match between Sierra Leone and Liberia. Several organizations, including SLAJ, Women in the Media Sierra Leone (WIMSAL), and Sport Writers Association Sierra Leone (SWASAL) issued out press releases condemning the action and demanding accountability. In response to the incident, the Government set up a Committee to investigate the matter. On 17 October 2019, the Committee presented the report containing their findings and recommendations to the Ministry of Information and Communications with 13-point recommendations including punitive action to be taken against the Presidential

guards. The Government took action against the presidential guards, refunded the medical expenses by the journalists and paid for their property destroyed or stolen.

18. Arrest and detention of Journalist Salieu Tejan Jalloh

On 11 November 2019, the Managing Editor of the Times Newspaper Sallieu Tejan Jalloh (Sal Tee) was arrested and detained by plainclothes police officers in Freetown in connection with an SMS text message that he had sent to the Chief Minister of Sierra Leone, Prof. David Francis, enquiring about an alleged payment of US\$ 1.5 million into the latter's private ECOBANK account by SL Mining. The licence of this company had been cancelled by the state. Jalloh was granted bail by the CID on 12 November 2019, after SLAJ intervened. Media and civil society organizations condemned the journalist's arrest. Jalloh explained that the plainclothes officers had lured him outside his office on the pretext of wanting to grant his newspaper an advertising contract, only to arrest him when he showed up. Police said the matter has been closed because of the decriminalization of Part V of the Public Order Act of 1965.

19. Arrest and detention of Mahmud Tim Kargbo

On 20 September 2019, Mahmud Tim Kargbo, a freelance writer and social

commentator, was arrested and detained by the police. Denying him bail, police charged him on 23 September 2019 for publishing an article titled 'Justice Redefined by Miatta Samba.' Kargbo had reportedly accused the Judge of corruption and incompetence. The matter was presided over by Magistrate Hannah Bonnie. The accused was later granted bail on 26 September 2019 after six days in detention. Kargbo tendered an open apology and retracted the article on 27 September 2019. The matter is still in court.

20. Attack on three local journalists

In January 2020, the Calabash Newspaper reported that three journalists in the Northern Region of Sierra Leone – Ibrahim Manasaray, aka 'Hebro' of the SLBC in Makeni, Abdul M. Jalloh of Amzas Radio in Makeni and Foday Moriba Conteh of Calabash Newspaper in Tonkolili Districts – were attacked by violent youths of Sambaia Chiefdom, in the Tonkolili District. The attack was allegedly on the orders of Hon Alhaji Musa Bamba Foray Jalloh, commonly known as Musa Bendugu of Constituency 056, Sambaia Chiefdom, Tonkolili District. Meanwhile, Hon. Jalloh denied any involvement in the case. The matter was under police investigation when the victims decided to disregard it for lack of progress.

21. Alleged threat to arrest journalist

On 23 February 2020, Alex Lawrence Koroma, one of the producers of the Good Morning Salone programme on Radio Democracy FM 98.1, reported an arrest threat on his Facebook wall and WhatsApp status by the former IGP, Richard Moigbeh. According to the producer, the former IG had issued the threat based on a programme he had produced on the state of security, to which the police were invited but failed to attend. From MRCG's monitoring, the threat to arrest him was not executed.

22. Arrest and detention of two reporters and a civil society activist

On 5 March 2020, the SLP arrested and detained Chernor Jalloh, reporter of *Radio Democracy*; Yusuf Bangura, reporter of *Concord Times*, and a civil society activist, Thomas Moore Conteh, Executive Director of Citizens Advocacy Network (CAN) during a Limkokwing University protest. The protest concerned fee subsidies by the Government of Sierra Leone to the University. The two reporters were arrested while covering the protest. With the intervention of SLAJ, the two journalists were released from police detention on the same day while the matter of Mr. Moore was dismissed by the Court.

23. Invitation of Mohamed Sankoh (AKA 'One Drop') by Police

On 20 March 2020, Mohamed Sankoh also known as 'One Drop', the Managing Editor/Publisher of The Nationalist Newspaper, was invited by police in connection with an opinion piece he had authored titled: 'Is the Catholic Church in a Mess?' After making a statement to the police, Sankoh was released and no charge was carried against him. The police explained that they had mistaken the journalist for another person.

24. Assault on journalist Fayia Amara Fayia

In April 2020, there was a report of assault of journalist Fayia Amara Fayia of Star Radio and Standard Times Newspaper by military officers in Kenema and his subsequent arrest and detention by police there. According to a press release issued by SLAJ on 10 April 2020, 'Fayia was mob-beaten by about nine military officers allegedly led by one Major Fofana and arrested on Wednesday, 1 April 2020 in Kenema in the line of duty.' The release stated that Fayia was mob-beaten because he had attempted to take snapshots of a truckload of rice being offloaded within a barricaded area after he was denied entry into the venue. The journalist was taking photos of the scene with his phone from a distance, when Major Fofana allegedly

stepped forward and grabbed his mobile device from him and later ordered his colleagues to beat him up. On 8 April 2020, the Police charged Fayia with ‘disorderly behaviour and obstruction of security services’. On 9 April, 2020, he appeared in the Kenema Magistrate Court No. 1, where he reportedly collapsed. SLAJ stated that Fayia was subsequently granted bail in the sum of Thirty Million Leones (Le30,000,000.00), equivalent to US\$3,000 plus two sureties. The matter at the Magistrate Court No. 1 was adjourned to 15 April, 2020. SLAJ, MRCG and Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) signed a petition letter to His Excellency the President, Julius Maada Bio (through the Minister of Information and Communication) kindly urging him to intervene in the matter. The matter is still in court.

25. Assault on station manager Stanley Sahr Jimmy

Stanley Sahr Jimmy, Station Manager of Wusum Radio 88.5 FM, in Makeni, was allegedly ‘mob-beaten’ by five police officers at the Mena Police Station on 5 April 2020. According to a SLAJ press release, he had gone to report an alleged breaking into his Radio Station, but an argument ensued in the process between some of the police officers and him, which allegedly resulted in his beating and ‘forceful’ dispossession of his mobile phone. ‘Jimmy reportedly sustained injuries

to his lower abdomen, mouth and left eye. A medical report has been tendered to the Complaints, Discipline and Internal Investigations Department (CDIID) while he is responding to treatment’, stated the SLAJ press release. In response, the police stated that four of the officers were seriously reprimanded in the presence of the complainant and that there was no case against one of the officers. The SLP said the matter had been closed. Conversely, Mr Jimmy claimed the police were yet to call him to identify those that had assaulted him nor had they been disciplined.

26. The arrest and detention of Dr. Sylvia Blyden by CID

Dr Sylvia O. Blyden, a Member of the Board of Directors of Awareness Times Newspaper, on 1 May 2020 was arrested and detained at the CID in Freetown, allegedly because of her critical and controversial publications and postings on social media. She was later charged with 10 counts of various offences, ranging from seditious libel to publication of false news, and defamatory libel, among others. She was on 3 June 2020 ‘rearrested and sent to prison’ for allegedly breaching court’s ‘sub judice’ rules by discussing her case on social media. Several human rights organisations including Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) called for her release. The case against Dr. Sylvia Blyden was rendered, ‘Nolle Prosequoi’, according

to a Government press release on 16 November 2020, signifying all charges against her were dropped.

27. The arrest and detention of Adeyemi Jackson

The Sierra Leone Police arrested and detained Adeyemi Jackson of Universal Radio on 21 May 2020 at the CID Headquarters in Freetown after reportedly requesting an interview with Dr Ibrahim Bundu, a medical doctor attached at the Connaught Hospital in Freetown. The request was in relation to an alleged sexual assault matter. The journalist was released on the next day after the intervention of SLAJ. Police said the matter has been closed.

28. Invitation of manager of Lunsar Radio, Alhaji Foday Labay by Police

On 12 June 2020 The manager of Lunsar Radio, Alhaji Foday Labay was allegedly requested by the SLP in Lunsar to produce a tape recording of a radio programme in which he had hosted Prof. Sheikh Umaru Kamara, the Community Relations Officer of Sierra Leone Mining Company in Lunsar. The interview had been done on 23 April 2020 and it resulted in a strike action calling for the resignation or replacement of a Paramount Chief. With the intervention of SLAJ, Labay was released and the matter dismissed.

29. The matter of the Supreme Court of Sierra Leone ordering the arrest of Lawyer Augustine Sorie-Sengbe Marrah

On 28 October 2020, the Supreme Court issued a press release, ordering the arrest of Lawyer Augustine Sorie-Sengbe Marrah for publishing information on social media about a ruling on the qualification of lawyers to hold certain offices. Allegedly, the information had political undertone and had the tendency to put the legal profession into disrepute. Marrah's post was said to be demeaning to the apex court of the land. A number of institutions, including the Campaign for Human Rights and Development International (CHRDI), the Sierra Leone Bar Association (SLBA) and SLAJ issued statements in relation to the issue. On 2 November 2020, the Supreme Court found Lawyer Augustine Sorie-Sengbe Marrah guilty on a one count of criminal contempt. The matter ended when Lawyer Marrah complied with the Supreme Court order to do a retraction of the said post in an article and write a letter of apology to the judiciary and the presiding judges. As ordered, he also published the said letter of apology in the front pages of two widely read newspapers in Sierra Leone.

30. Verbal attack against Umaru Fofana

BBC reporter Umaru Fofana was in December 2020 allegedly verbally attacked by people who claimed to be APC

members. The social media attack was a consequence of some BBC reports which the so-called APC members deemed unfavourable to them. SLAJ on 8 December 2020 issued a press release condemning the attacks and urged the SLP to investigate the matter. The release also called on the APC to publicly condemn the attacks. People from diverse backgrounds also condemned the attacks on Fofana.

31. Arrest and detention of Emmanuel C. Thorli

Emmanuel C. Thorli, a reporter of the *Night Watch Newspaper* was on 7 February 2021 arrested and detained by the SLP for allegedly taking snapshots of a Jui demolition exercise carried out by the police at Jui Junction, Western Area Rural District. The journalist said he had gone to the demolition scene to get more facts on what really happened to complete a news story he had started writing when two police officers grabbed him by the trousers and asked why he had taken snapshots of the site. Thorli narrated that he had explained to the officers that he was a journalist, but they responded that his being a journalist did not matter to them. They, therefore, ordered him to go along with them to the police station.

‘Immediately, one of the officers cocked his gun and I had to comply,’ Thorli explained. The officers ‘bundled’ him into

the Jui Police Station and locked him up from 8:00 a.m. unto 12 noon, he further reported. According to him at 12 noon that day, he was transferred to the CID, where he spent the night. The following day, after the CID had obtained statements from him, the SLAJ executive secured his release.

32. Detention of proprietor and news editor of *Public Review Newspaper*

The Editor-in-Chief and Proprietor of *Public Review Newspaper*, Joseph Turay, and his news editor Ezekiel Dumbuya were On 22 March 2021 detained by officers of the CID in Freetown for more than five hours. Their detention concerned a land dispute in the Western Area Rural District. . Police claimed that the newspaper had reported erroneously on the matter. According to Turay, after the police had obtained statement from him, he left the CID. However, Turay further explained, after a while, the police started searching for him, claiming that they were not done with him yet and that he must take his Editor, Mohamed Jalloh, to the CID. On the contrary, Turay further narrated, he did not return to the CID, referring them to SLAJ and the IMC. Since then, the *Public Review Newspaper* has been put under pressure for continuing to write about the land dispute.

33. Arrest, detention and prosecution of journalist Osman Hardy Jalloh

TV-News24 journalist Osman Hardy Jalloh was on 28 April 2021, detained in Kenema, Eastern Region of Sierra Leone and sent to the correctional centre on the orders of Magistrate Joseph Toby of Magistrate Court No. 2, Kenema. Jalloh's detention related to an article he had published, titled: 'Imam Granted Bail after Five Days in Jail'. A day after his detention, Jalloh appeared in Magistrate Court No. 2 in Kenema. The Magistrate claimed that the journalist had been remanded for contempt of court, as he had done erroneous reporting, since the facts about the detained accused showed that he was not an Imam as reported by Jalloh. Nonetheless, with SLAJ's intervention, Jalloh was released.

However, Jalloh was on 10 June 2021 allegedly arrested and detained for the second time on the orders of Magistrate Toby of the same Court Number 2 in Kenema. This time, Jalloh's detention was for a follow-up he had done on the same article on the matter between an Imam and a female chief in Blama. He spent five days at the Kenema Correctional Centre. In this regard, on 24 July 2021, Jalloh wrote an official complaint to the Human Rights Commission-Sierra Leone (HRCSL) with concerns that the Magistrate did not 'articulate any points of authority' that he 'relied on' to 'warrant the unlawful

detention, arrest and jailing...' of the journalist. In December 2021, Sylvester Kallon, the Deputy Director of HRCSL's Eastern Regional Service, noted that he was doing an 'admissibility opinion' on the matter to send to the Directorates of Complaint, Investigations and Legal Services of the HRCSL. Meanwhile, the Magistrate argued that he had a case with no one.

34. Arrest and detention of Journalist Hassan Gbessay Koroma

The SLP on 6 May 2021 arrested and detained Hassan Gbessay Koroma, a Concord Times Newspaper journalist, for allegedly taking pictures of the Minister of Internal Affairs, David Panda Noah. The alleged picture taking had occurred on Siaka Stevens Street during an operation in which the Minister and some police officers chased commercial bike riders off the Central Business District (CBD). This operation was said to be about weeding out commercial motorbike riders from the CBD. On the same day, Koroma was released with the intervention of his editor and the Secretary General of SLAJ, Asmieu Bah. Police say the matter has been closed.

35. Intimidation and verbal attack on BBC sports journalist, Mohamed Fajah Barrie

BBC sports journalist Mohamed Fajah Barrie was on 13 June 2021 allegedly

intimidated and verbally attacked by the Adviser to Sierra Leone Sports Minister, Alie Kader in Conakry, Guinea, for publishing a story on his Facebook timeline. The story was about the national men's team Leone Stars players' spending several hours at the Sierra Leone-Guinea border crossing point after they were refused entry into Guinea by the Guinean Immigration Authorities for lack of COVID-19 test results. Sport Writers Association of Sierra Leone (SWASAL) in a press release condemned the attack and set up a three-man committee to investigate the issue for further actions. However, the following month, the Sports Minister intervened and the matter was settled.

36. Dismissal of *AYV TV* presenter Phebean Swill-Randall from the Sierra Leone Board of Entertainment and Investment

AYV TV presenter Phebean Swill-Randall was on 12 August 2021 reportedly dismissed from the Sierra Leone Board of Entertainment and Investment as entertainment Board member by the Ambassador of Entertainment and Investment, Amara Dennis Turay commonly known as Kao De Nero. The dismissal was reportedly for a Facebook post Swill-Randall had made on increment in the pump price of fuel in the country. According to a Facebook post by Mrs. Swill-Randall, Kao De Nero had asked her

to delete her post on fuel price increment, stating: 'things like these derail our joint effort in getting the support we are all yearning for'. She refused, according to her, disregarding her status as entertainment Board Member. After that, the Ambassador dismissed her.¹⁹ Efforts to reach Kao De Nero proved futile.

37. Arrest and detention of 10 Star Radio journalists

The SLP arrested and detained ten journalists, including the station manager, Abdurahman Kamara, of Star Radio in Freetown on 5 October 2021. The arrest was in connection with a complaint made by the Electricity Distribution and Supply Authority (EDSA) on an alleged illegal electricity connection by Star Radio. The station manager denied the allegations. Deputy Media and Public Relations Officer of the SLP, Samuel Saio Conteh, said police had arrested the journalists for obstructing the investigation of the matter. On his visit to the police station, the proprietor was also detained. With the intervention of SLAJ, nine journalists were granted bail on the same day, excluding the proprietor and the station manager who remained in detention for three days at the CID. The matter was charged to court and three hearings were held in October 2021.

¹⁹<https://www.facebook.com/1310961414/posts/10219740706970761/>

The next hearing was to be in November, but this did not materialize. The matter was still in court at the time of the compilation of this report.

38. Intimidation of The Times Newspaper editor, Salieu Tejan Jalloh

The Times Newspaper editor, Salieu Tejan Jalloh, was reportedly subjected to intimidation and death threat by anonymous callers in October 2021 as a result of his publications about perpetrators behind the ‘alleged attempted ritual murder of the six virgins’. Mr. Jalloh’s ‘Alert for Public Attention’ on his Facebook post stated that his life was under threat and that he wanted the public to know that the alleged suspects had been planning to either kidnap him or get him eliminated.²⁰ Mr. Jalloh said the matter has been settled, as the alleged anonymous callers contacted him and apologized to him.

39. Matter against Editor of *Voice of Salone Newspaper*, David Johnson

The SLP on 22 November 2021 allegedly raided the office of the editor of *Voice of Salone Newspaper*, David Johnson, to arrest him on the grounds of ‘insulting statements’ on WhatsApp. The alleged raid came in the wake of a complaint filed by Lawyer Sydney Campbell. The attempted

arrest was in connection with a story the editor had published on a land saga between the lawyer and Hassan Sankoh at Limba Corner at Rokel Community on the outskirts of Freetown. The matter came up in 29 November 2021 at the Ross Road Magistrate Court No. 3, where the editor was charged with five counts including: Threatening Language and Abusive Language contrary to Section 3(1) of the Public Order Act (POA) of 1965 as amended in 2020; Insulting Conduct, contrary to Section 3(4) and Section 3(5) of the POA of 1965; and Intimidation, contrary to Section 4(4) of the POA of 1965. Lawyer Campbell explained that, based on the advice of his family, they had peacefully resolved and settled the matter out of court on 2 December 2021.

40. Physical assault and detention of Ransford Wright

The SLP allegedly assaulted and detained Ransford Wright, a camera operator at the AYV TV on 13 December 2021. According to SLAJ, the staff had gone to the Central Police Station to get the other side of a story he had filmed earlier on the same day of an accident involving an SLP motorcycle, a commercial motorbike (Okada) and a child victim. In their press releases on the matter, SLAJ and AYV condemned the attack and urged the leadership of the SLP to take appropriate action against the alleged perpetrators. In a

²⁰<https://www.facebook.com/100003649263583/posts/2309223199209300/?app=fbl->

corresponding press release, dated 14 December 2021, the SLP acknowledged the severity of the allegations and instructed an investigation into the matter.

41. ‘Scathing verbal attacks and threats’ to Salone Compass Newspaper

The Salone Compass Newspaper on 14 December 2021 reported to SLAJ and MRCG about some ‘scathing verbal attacks and threats’ to its entire editorial team ‘from unknown members of the general public through phone calls.’ The report stated that the attacks and threats had started on 13 December 2021 after the newspaper had published a story with the banner headline ‘POLICE PLANS MASSIVE ARRESTS’, which was news reported at an SLP press briefing on 9 December 2021 at the Police Headquarters in Freetown. The newspaper says it was also accused of inciting the public to boycott the mid-term census and that some of the anonymous callers identified themselves as police officers.

42. Closed-door questioning of NGC Leader by police

The Inspector General of Police (IGP) invited the National Chairman and Leader of the NGC Party, Dr. Dennis Bright, to report at the Police Headquarters, in Freetown on 7 December 2021 in connection with an interview he had had on Radio Democracy. The interview concerned the proposed 2021 Mid-term

Census to which the NGC and the Coalition of Progressive Political Parties (CoPP) had objected. The IGP expressed concern about the way Dr. Bright had made comments about the census. In a closed-door interview, the CID questioned the NGC leader for two hours in front of his lawyers. He was released on the same day.

43. Arrest and detention of Unity Party 2018 presidential aspirant

Femi Claudius-Cole, the 2018 presidential aspirant for the Unity Party, was on 13 December 2021 arrested and detained at the CID for an alleged negative comment she had made on Radio Democracy in relation to the 2021 mid-term housing and population census. The opposition party leader had allegedly accompanied Diana Konomanyi, a key figure of the APC, who had been invited by the CID. While Konomanyi was released, Claudius-Cole remained in detention. She was, however, released later.

44. Arrest and detention of Pastor Septimus Yambasu

The SLP arrested and detained Pastor Septimus Yambasu on 14 December 2021 for allegedly using obscene and insulting words against President Julius Maada Bio. Pastor Yambasu, who is a driver of a commercial vehicle, reportedly made the statement in his vehicle along the Jui-Wilberforce axis and one of his passengers reported the matter to the police. He was

charged for insulting conduct contrary to section 3(1) of the Public Order Act of 1965. The matter is at the Pademba Road Magistrate Court No. 1 in Freetown. Pastor Yambasu was initially refused bail, but was later granted bail during the second court sitting.

45. Verbal attack against Asmaa James, station manager of *Radio Democracy*

, Alhaji Amadu Bah, a popular Sierra Leonean musician, known as LAJ, on 13 December 2021 verbally attacked and insulted the station manager in a video shared on Facebook and several other social media platforms. The insults came in the wake of a report aired by *Radio Democracy* on a bench warrant ordered by a magistrate for LAJ. SLAJ accompanied Asmaa James to the Cyber Unit of the SLP on 13 December and filed a complaint against LAJ for his conducts. MRCG and other pro-press freedom organisations condemned LAJ's actions. Meanwhile, in an open letter on Facebook, dated 13 December 2021, LAJ apologized to Asmaa James and the women of Sierra Leone as he expressed regrets and took full responsibility for his actions. About nine days later, Asmaa James reacted to his apology, stating that she had forgiven the singer.

46. Cyber-attack attack on popular Sierra Leonean blogger, Hawanatu Konneh Fofanah

In a Facebook post on 25 December 2021, blogger Hawanatu Konneh Fofanah wrote that she and her husband had made an official complaint at the CID against an anonymous individual who had attacked her personality on Facebook. Five days later, she again posted on her Facebook page complaining that she had suffered too much of cyber-attack and bullying on social media. She reported that she had been insulted alongside her parents and that her life had been threatened. The matter was being investigated as at the time of writing this Report.

1.7. Social media, internet freedom and digital rights

Based on the critical nature of contemporary developments related to digital media, media stakeholders and their partners undertook a number of initiatives aimed at addressing issues concerning digital rights. For instance, on 28 June 2018, the MRCG and its constituent bodies organized a Consultative Meeting on Social Media. The forum was to debate any possible regulation of social media based on democratic standards and international best practices, and to examine existing social media laws/policies/regulations. Tonya Musa, Head of Mass Communication Department at Fourah Bay

College, presented a paper on the ‘Common concerns about Regulating Social Media in Sierra Leone’. His paper pointed out that the debate on regulation had presented three frameworks: Government Regulation, Self-Regulation and Co- regulation. He noted that co-regulation was the new paradigm for regulating Social Media Companies. Abu-Bakarr Sheriff, Esq. presented on the ‘Regulation of Social Media: An Overview of Legal Frameworks.’

At the end of the forum, it was resolved that:

‘We the participants at a meeting of different stakeholders including government, national media organisations, civil society and professional organisations on the debates of regulation of social media at Ramsey House, 14 Liverpool Street, Freetown on the Twenty-eight June, 2018, resolved that there should be a regulation of social media in Sierra Leone and it should be co-regulation to be undertaken by the state and non-state actors, including civil society organizations, internet service providers and other relevant bodies. Be it further resolved that there should be a Data Protection Act and the review of the Public Order Act with a complete repeal of Part Five of same.’

1.8 Ownership, governance and management

The ownership, governance and management of media institutions have been serious issues of concerns. The four-year period saw some changes in some the requirements for governance and management of media institutions, but 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.²¹

The 2018-2021 data about radio ownership show that four radio stations are partnerships; 189 are companies, 12 are sole proprietorships and seven are body corporate (established by Act of Parliament – the one SLBC radio and its stations in the region). In the area of Television ownership, there is no partnership, 18 are companies, no sole proprietorship and five body corporate established by an Act of Parliament (SLBC). Regarding newspaper ownership, 20 are partnerships, 167 are companies, 42 are sole proprietorships and one owned by the government.

The concern that has repeatedly come up is that majority of media institutions registered as companies limited by

²¹ Sections 24(2) and 29 (2) of the IMC Act 2020

guarantee with or without a shared capital are not run as proper companies. The sole proprietorship approach is popular among the types of ownership of media institutions in the country as seen in the way even the ones that are companies are run as ‘one-man businesses.’ There are also concerns about the governance and management of media institutions in Sierra Leone. A 2019 study shows that a large number of the media houses (over 40%) do not have a board of directors in place. Where boards exist, the data show that the majority (more than 50%) do not meet regularly. It is therefore obvious that there is no oversight or supervision of the activities of the management of these institutions.²²

A major difficulty relates to business plans. When applicants file with regulatory bodies, radio stations are asked to produce business plans to provide an idea of how they will make themselves sustainable. However, those business plans are usually presented only to get the radio stations registered or to get loans from banks, and they are abandoned immediately afterwards.

On financial management, in many media institutions, the company accounts are the same as the proprietors’ or editors’

personal accounts and there is no method in place for accessing funds other than the individual decision of the account holders. The data also indicate that only a small proportion (less than 20%) of the media houses have a finance manager/accountant. This implies that in the vast majority of media houses either the general manager/managing editor/managing director or a junior officer handles the accounts, thus removing one layer of necessary checks and balances for prudent financial management.²³ With the absence of the basic accounting documents in a large number of the media houses covered by the survey, it is doubtful whether these media houses are in a position to produce accurate accounts as required by law.²⁴

1.8.1 Survivability – business model and revenue generation

Several engagements with media managements over the period under review showed that their institutions do not have any defined business model. That is, a model, which describes how an organization creates, delivers, and captures value, in economic, social, cultural or other contexts. Peter Drucker defines business model as ‘assumptions about what a company gets paid for.’ In addition to what a company is paid for, ‘these assumptions are about markets. They are about identifying customers and competitors,

²² Spencer, J. (2019). A Framework for Sierra Leone Media Revenue Generation, Resource Mobilization, Sustainability and Accountability. A study commissioned by the Media Reform Coordinating Group-Sierra Leone(MRCG-SL) with support from UNDP

²³ Ibid
²⁴ Ibid

their values and behavior. They are about technology and its dynamics, about a company's strengths and weaknesses.²⁵ The practice in Sierra Leone of business models is that media institutions are operated largely as one-man businesses, just one individual who is in charge and decides what to do.

In the area of revenue generation, advertising is the main source of income for media institutions. Other sources are sponsorships and projects. Nevertheless, a largely informal economy accounts for a contracted advertising market and limited private sector investment in the media leading to media poverty and sometimes government influence – as the biggest advertiser.²⁶ Due to the state of the economy and the fact that very little brand advertising is being done, the volume of advertising revenue available to the media is insufficient to sustain it.²⁷ This problem has been compounded by the fact that collecting payment from some advertisers is quite challenging and most media institutions have to endure long delays

²⁵ Ovans, Andrea (2015). What Is a Business Model? January 23, 2015 <https://hbr.org/2015/01/what-is-a-business-model>

²⁶ M'Bayo, R.T. 2015. 'Media Failures: Expanding the Scope of Freedom and Responsibility in Sierra Leone' in Ritchard Tamba M'Bayo (ed) *Sierra Leone: State of the Media Report 2015*. Freetown: UNDP & MRG. P. 53 – 56.

²⁷ Spencer, J. (2019). A Framework for Sierra Leone Media Revenue Generation, Resource Mobilization, Sustainability and Accountability. A study commissioned by the Media Reform Coordinating Group-Sierra Leone(MRCG-SL)with support from UNDP

before payments are made, or payments are not made at all in some cases, resulting in most media houses having to write off millions of Leones as bad debt every year. To make matters worse, a significant proportion of advertising revenue is used by media houses to pay commissions to those distributing adverts. Apart from the fact that this causes media houses to lose revenue, it has also resulted in adverts being distributed based on the size of the commission being paid rather than the value that the institution will get from advertising in a particular newspaper, radio or TV station. Circulation or listenership has thus become largely irrelevant as a determinant of advertising volume in a media house.²⁸

This should be addressed because advertising is a big part of the media business. Most media depend on marketing and advertising for support (Azzaro, 2008, p.5). As Kung (2008) points out, the business model for traditional media businesses (with the exception of public service broadcasting) is that they receive revenues from advertisers in return for 'delivering audiences' to them, those audiences having been attracted by the content media products offer. Media institutions are hardly sustainable due to low capital and high production costs and

²⁸ Ibid

advertisers who are supposed to be the main source of revenue owe huge debts.²⁹

1.8.2 Staff welfare and conditions of service

Staffing and remuneration of staff is a major issue in the media sector and it's one of the factors affecting the quality of content of many media houses. At least a quarter of the institutions represented in the survey have staff that are not paid salaries. Of those paid salaries, more than 30% are paid below the minimum wage. Apart from the fact that such actions are illegal, they are also immoral and present the offending media institutions in a bad light. They also encourage these unpaid staff and those paid below the minimum wage to engage in what is called 'coasting', which, in some cases, degenerates to extortion. In addition, these staff cannot focus on producing good quality stories, since they are preoccupied with making enough money through unorthodox means in order to survive. Perhaps, more worrying is the fact that the majority of respondents to the questionnaire indicated that their media institutions are not complying with statutory obligations which could result in their being liable to prosecution. More than 55% of these media institutions do not deduct PAYE tax from salaries of their staff and pay to government as required by

²⁹ Sowa, F. (2015), Media Management: Sustainability and Profitability of Sierra Leone's media. State of the Media Report.

law. In addition, less than 60% pay corporate tax. To make matters worse, less than 40% of respondents said all staff in their institutions are registered with the National Social Security and Insurance Trust (NASSIT), and of this number, only 25% are having their contributions paid regularly.³⁰ However, the new IMC Act 2020 makes provisions for better conditions of services of staff employed by media institutions.

1.9 Key Activities of national institutions and media organisations

In 2018-2021 national media institutions and associations organised various programmes within the media, aimed at improving and addressing issues relating to the media. In 2018, under the 'Support to Media Development Project' with funds from the UNDP, MRCG and its constituent bodies organised various programmes, including improving on self-regulatory mechanisms (SLAJ Code of Practice), newspaper peer-review mechanisms, handling of media complaints and governance of community radio stations, launch of the Association of Communication, Journalism and Media Educators (ACJME-SL) and community

³⁰ Spencer, J. (2019). A Framework for Sierra Leone Media Revenue Generation, Resource Mobilization, Sustainability and Accountability. A study commissioned by the Media Reform Coordinating Group-Sierra Leone(MRCG-SL)with support from UNDP

radio station governance, ownership and sustainability.

Peer-review meetings

There were peer-review meetings for editors and station managers organized with support from UNDP, led by the Guild of Newspaper Editors and Independent Radio Network (IRN). The meetings were on maintaining ethical standards, improving media content and upholding professional credibility. Station managers and newspaper editors from 2018 to 2020 met and discussed these issues and made a commitment to upholding them in the day-to-day running of the newsrooms.

National consultative forum on guidelines on responsible use of social media

A National Consultative Forum on Guidelines on Responsible Use of Social Media was also organised on 28 June 2018. There were concerns about misuse of the internet and its varied platforms with particular reference to invasion of people's privacy and disseminating information that affects the development, growth and peace of the country. 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 MRCG brought together divergent stakeholders including government, Ministries, Departments and Agencies, Commissions, national media organisations, civil society organisations and the Sierra Leone Bar Association in a consultative forum to debate the regulation of social media in the country.

Monitoring and coaching

In 2018, the Sierra Leone Reporters Union (SLRU) led mentoring and coaching initiatives for journalists. The mentoring and coaching programme had 15 participants who worked on stories with specialised areas of reporting. These stories were done for the print and electronic media.

Association of Communication, Journalism and Media Educators (ACJME-SL)

The Association of Communication, Journalism and Media Educators (ACJME-SL) was launched in August, 2018 at the University of Makeni (UNIMAK) in Bombali District, Northern Sierra Leone. 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. This was part of a 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 the effort. The objectives of the Association include to promote professionalism in journalism; to recognize educators who possess the education or experience to teach scholastic journalism and advise student publications and to increase the availability of courses and workshops appropriate for the scholastic journalism teacher and adviser.

Community radio station governance

Furthermore, in 2018 the MRCG and IRN convened a workshop on community radio station governance in Sierra Leone to discuss the report of a study commissioned in 2007 on that subject matter and to proffer measures in addressing the identified challenges. The findings of this study indicate that most of the governing boards have outlived their mandates, are not functioning, or are completely non-existent. Some of the radio stations are still struggling with sustainability issues with no discernible path to independent broadcasting. Major

among the issues recommended is the reconstitution 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. The MRCG engaged station managers on the findings of this study to discuss and put together an action plan that would be systematically rolled out in addressing the problems.

Wage of reporters

Regarding reporters' wage, the SLRU organised a campaign on minimum wage for reporters in 2018. 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 by 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 (during that period) per month. However, there were 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 is working with the Ministry of Labour to address the issue.

Information and Media Policy

In 2018, the Ministry of Information, with support from the MRCG, engaged in the development of an Information and Media Policy. The need for a *proactive, progressive, and participatory National Information and Media 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 Policy is expected to promote transformational leadership and shared governance aimed at steering Sierra Leone towards becoming a model nation state in the global community. An outline was developed and a meeting was held with stakeholders. The draft policy has been developed and is awaiting validation.

IMC's Media Watch

During the period under review, IMC produced two editions of its *Media Watch*, a publication that outlined the performance of media institutions in the country. It contained cases of breach of the media Code of Practice and compliance with ethical standards.

Promoting professional media coverage and conflict-sensitive reporting in elections

In 2018, MRCG and the constituent organisations completed a workshop on 'Promoting Professional Media Coverage

and Conflict Sensitive Reporting of the 2018 Multi-Tier Elections in Sierra Leone' as part of the 'Conflict Prevention and Mitigation during the Electoral Cycle in Sierra Leone' project. This component of the project sought 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.

Media situation room

A media situation room (MSR) was also established. The main objectives of the MSR was to receive, process and analyse data and information from its monitors to provide real-time information on the performance of the media. The reports were processed and evaluated by the MSR staff based on the information recorded on the Media Monitoring Checklists. Where there was a need for clarification of information, the MSR staff contacted the monitors for further details. The MRCG's approach was to engage on peer review, engagement and interaction with media institutions on possible breaches of the thematic issues covered by the MRCG. In some instances, the MRCG published press statements on such issues. The MRCG Sub-Committee on the Media Situation Room (MSR) engaged with some media institutions to encourage them to embark on professional media

coverage and reportage and conflict-sensitive reporting.

National Endowment for Democracy supports

Other activities were undertaken in 2018 with support from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). They included peer-review meeting for radio and TV station managers and editors, which concerned ethical breaches at the level of station managers and newspaper editors and suggestions of ways of curbing them; mapping out ways of ensuring professional accountability within the peer-review group; and discussion of managerial challenges.

There were also fora on the popularisation and consultation on civil libel law in Sierra Leone, supported by NED in 2018. The aim was to discuss the civil defamation law as an alternative to Part V of the 1965 Public Order Act, which criminalised libel. Regional workshops brought together relevant stakeholders to chat the way on raising the awareness of the existence of the law. The aims and objectives of the workshop were to popularize the civil defamation law, to create awareness on the existence of the law, to present the effectiveness of the civil defamation law as an alternative to the criminal libel law provisions and to allay the fears of the

government on repealing Part V of the Public Order Act 1965.

UNDP capacity building for reporting

In 2019, the UNDP's support targeted media capacity building for reporting on SDGs and women's political participation in Sierra Leone. Led by the SLRU under the MRCG's platform, the Mentoring and Coaching on SDGs/Production of Stories on SDGs included Training Needs Assessment, Mentorship Training and Fellowship. Five mentors were identified and contracted. Ten mentees were recruited and coached (seven men and three women). Twenty development reports (stories) were produced on the SDGs and they were broadcast on major radio and television stations and published on newspapers and online sites. They were also published on MRCG's Facebook page. The programme created a platform for journalists to interact and develop skills for specialized SDGs reportage.

The 'Increased Awareness on Women's Political Participation' initiatives were led by Women in the Media Sierra Leone (WIMSAL). Two major activities that bordered around campaign to disseminate women's instrument of power and capture and show case the contribution of women to governance and peace-building efforts were organised in 2019. Two meetings were held; over 70 editions of radio

discussions programmes produced; and over 600 slots of jingles broadcast. In all, 10 feature articles were produced and published in newspapers. The women's instrument of power, peace and security meeting held on 5 September 2019 in Bo, Southern Region, brought together women who were actively involved in politics, civil society activists and journalists. These women included: councilors, chairladies, former aspirants, female civil society activists and female journalists from across the sixteen (16) political districts. The women were exposed to some of the most significant instruments (the three gender Acts and other international gender instruments) that protect and promote women's rights. The meeting on the 6 September 2019 in Mile 91, Tonkolili District, Northern Region, captured and showcased the lofty contributions of women to governance and peace-building efforts in Sierra Leone.

In the months of September and October 2019, there were radio discussion programmes organized by IRN, which were produced and broadcast in 16 radio stations across the country. Further, ten newspaper articles were published in newspapers. This was led by the GoE. In these programmes, the women pointed out some of the most compelling issues affecting their rights and their political participation, ranging from marginalisation, discrimination to

intimidation, among others. They also made valuable recommendations that would help increase women's participation in governance and peace building processes in Sierra Leone. Through the feedback from the radio discussions (text messages and calls), it was learnt that the incredible stories of women had helped inspire many other women who were still dwelling in fear to come out and compete with the men for social and political positions/offices. There has been an increasingly high level of awareness on women's issues through these radio discussions and jingles on women's contribution to governance and peace building in Sierra Leone.

Another key programme was 'Increased Awareness on Climate Change Issues and Mitigation Measures.' The activities were audio-visual production on climate change informed by a baseline study on climate change awareness. The activities were also informed by production of messages on climate change and Social Mobilisation/Public Engagement in six coastal Communities, including Lakka, Hamilton, Tombo, Conakry Dee, Shenge and Turtle Island. Between May and June 2019, a baseline study was undertaken in all the six coastal communities. Three audio-visual contents were produced (two 1-minute videos and one 15-minute documentary depicting causes, dangers of climate change and adaptation, mitigation

and prevention approaches. Three hundred (3000) stickers, 500 fliers and 200 T. Shirts were produced and printed. Additionally, six community meetings were conducted.

The baseline study on climate change awareness in the six coastal communities gauged the coastal population's understanding and awareness of climate change. It identified the knowledge gaps, cultural beliefs or behavioural patterns that might affect the people's adaptation potentials. The audio-visual crew captured pictures/images and video recordings of climate change issues in the six coastal communities. Information, education and communication materials were developed to raise awareness about climate change prevention, response and mitigation strategies, change in community mindsets and attitudes towards climate change risks and threats to the environment.

The public engagement activity in the six coastal communities provided an opportunity to show case the videos on the damage caused by climate change and the need for measures to be put in place to reduce the risk.

The residents in the six communities targeted so far now had an increased knowledge about climate change. They were now familiar with the adaption and mitigation strategies. The indicators are

that some communities have stopped practices that would exacerbate the dangers of climate change. After watching the videos, the community people, especially women, discussed the causes, effects, solutions and the role of the community in the entire process of addressing climate change issues. They also suggested how they could stop contributing to the dangers of climate change by stopping sand and stone mining and deforestation. However, they also called for alternative livelihood support to deviating from such practices.

MRCG's Climate Change Social Club

The MRCG established the *Climate Change Social Club* in five coastal communities with the exception of Turtle Island because of lack of telecommunications network, as WhatsApp groups had been created for the club members to interact. The club's main responsibility was to take the lead in the campaign on climate change in their communities. In addition, a climate change school social club was established in the Howard Memorial Secondary School in Shenge where over 500 pupils were sensitised by showing the videos on the damage caused by climate change and the need for measures to be put in place to reduce risks.

MRCG Strategic Plan

In 2019, the MRCG Strategic Plan was reviewed. The development of a new Strategy was informed by a brainstorming meeting where MRCG Constituent Members and key media stakeholders converged and proffered ideas. The newly developed strategy resulted in adding gender as a key component in the reform agenda so that the welfare of female journalists could be pivotal in all media development programmes. The new media development strategy has five objectives that are categorised into a timeframe of short term, which is to be accomplished within one year; mid-term, which is to be achieved between one and three years and the long term between one and five years. The development of a new Strategic Plan for MRCG and its constituent Bodies provided the MRCG the roadmap for effective media development and sustainable media reform agenda for the next five years. The previous strategy that spanned 2014-2018 had only four objectives and it made tremendous achievements in all areas, but it needed much more improvement for better service delivery.

In 2020, the key media activities were focused on the repeal of the criminal and seditious libel laws, which eventually happened in July 2020. The other activities

were peer review, enforcement of SLAJ Code of Ethics

Peer reviews by GoE and IRN

The Guild of Editors and Independent Radio Network (IRN) led the conduct of two peer reviews in 2020 supported by NED through the MRCG. The two sessions provided a forum where station managers and editors met, reviewed their publications, discussed challenges facing the media industry, and proffered solutions for improvement. The peer review meetings addressed issues surrounding the operation of media institutions during Covid-19; Media's consideration and adherence to ethical guidelines; and the safety and security of journalists during Covid-19. The sessions were to ensure professionalism, to help strengthen self-regulation and to improve output within the media landscape leading to a credible, economically viable and well-focused media landscape in Sierra Leone.

SLAJ Disciplinary Committee

In 2020, the SLAJ Disciplinary Committee held public hearing sessions to help guide journalists about professional reporting and providing a platform where complaints brought up by members of the public against journalists would be addressed. Held at SLAJ Headquarters in Freetown, the sessions were also to instil confidence

in the minds of the public that media practitioners would be responsible and professional in the discharge of their duties.

MIC on IMC Bill 2020

The Ministry of Information and Communications organized several sessions on the draft IMC Bill 2020. The sessions generated many public discussions and debates on the processes leading to the enactment of the bill.

SLAJ on the repeal of criminal and seditious libel laws

With support from MRCG, in July 2020 SLAJ held regional consultative meetings and engagements to heighten the advocacy for the repeal of criminal and seditious libel laws and for the encouragement of the implementation of alternative media legislation. It convened three regional consultative meetings in Freetown, Makeni and Bo in July 2020 with key stakeholders. The meetings solicited ideas, intensified the advocacy and lobbying processes and discussed strategies and tactics that helped in parliament's repeal of Part V of the Public Order Act of 1965.

Having secured funding support from NED, in December 2020, MRCG trained and capacitated media practitioners from various media houses in Freetown, Makeni and Bo on the new IMC Act of 2020 and the 1961 Civil Libel law for effective and responsible journalism. Significant

provisions in the IMC Act of 2020, especially those dealing with reregistration of media houses, payment of NASSIT, NRA and staff, compliance with the minimum wage, licensing and continuation of operation of media houses in conformity with the new Act were thoroughly explained.

Changing the narrative on transitional justice

Another major highlight of media programmes in 2020 was the project on 'Engaging the Media to Change the Narrative on Transitional Justice (TJ) Issues' in Sierra Leone supported by the Africa Transitional Justice Legacy Fund Project (ATJLF). The initiative focused on utilising the services of media institutions and practitioners to increase public awareness on transitional justice mechanisms by engaging the media to change the narrative on TJ issues in Sierra Leone. In March 2020 a baseline study was done. It assessed the level of awareness among journalists (editors, station managers, reporters, etc.) on TJ mechanism, especially as they related to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and Special Court for Sierra Leone; measured and gauged their reportage on TJ issues in the country and their willingness to participate in trainings, mentoring and coaching on TJ mechanisms and production of content on TJ.

Regional trainings were held for 50 journalists/reporters to popularise TJ issues across the country in June 2020. The Reporters were trained on: understanding TJ issues by drawing reference to other African countries, reporting on TJ issues; highlighting TJ issues across the country and proffering recommendations/next lines of action.

In the following month, the MRCG recruited six mentees and two mentors to take part in the mentoring, coaching and production of content on TJ issues in Sierra Leone. The selection of the six mentees was done on a regional basis by ensuring that each region had one mentee. The six mentees produced two stories monthly under the supervision of their mentors. The stories done by the mentees were published on various mainstream media outlets, the MRCG website, on Facebook, twitter and other media platforms.

MRCG and MFWA joint capacity building

In September 2020, MFWA and MRCG jointly organized a capacity-building workshop on the safety of journalists in Sierra Leone, with funding by the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Ghana. The main objective of the training was to equip journalists with requisite skills

on how to protect themselves in the line of duty as in covering events and reporting. Thirty senior journalists in Sierra Leone were selected from radio stations, television stations, newspapers and online media. They were trained on: producing responsible, fact-based coverage while staying safe; the basics of safety in journalism (risks awareness and physical safety); digital and cyber safety; and identifying safety mechanisms available to journalists. The main facilitator was Umaru Fofana. Mr. Francis L. Keilie from the Office of the National Security (ONS) facilitated on ‘Working with the Security Agencies and Identifying safety mechanisms available to journalists’.

Accreditation requirement to report on Parliament

In April 2020, the Office of the Clerk of Parliament issued a press release titled ‘APPLICATION FOR ACCREDITATION TO REPORT ON PARLIAMENT’, in which he requested journalists from all media houses to apply for media accreditation through his office to enable them cover and report on parliamentary proceedings. On 15 May 2020, the Office of the Clerk of the House also issued a public notice, requesting journalists from all media houses to send in their applications, along with their CVs, academic qualifications, and copies of

operational licences, among others, for the accreditation.

In response to the parliamentary press release, the GoE issued a press release on 18 May 2020, expressing deep concern about Parliament's setting of eligibility criteria for journalists who wished to be accredited to cover and report on parliamentary proceedings. The GoE expressed its fears that those criteria would restrict journalists' access to parliamentary proceedings. The GoE viewed the action of Parliament as a form of censorship and a calculated attempt to muzzle free and independent press in the country. It called for an immediate review of the criteria. The GoE pointed out that there were bodies like SLAJ that could assist in regulating the conduct and practice of journalists in Sierra Leone and that the criteria set out by the Clerk of Parliament should be the sole function of SLAJ, the IMC or any of the professional bodies regulating journalists in the country.

Two days later, a tripartite meeting held by Parliament, SLAJ and IMC resolved that the accreditation process would continue and that the Parliamentary Media Committee on accreditation would constitute representatives of the three institutions, which would set the criteria for accreditation. The Committee was also mandated to set a date to invite journalists

for interview and recommend to the Parliamentary Service Commission.

Reviewing the IMC Code of Practice 2007

On 27 August 2020, IMC Commissioners held a one-day retreat at the Estuary Resort, John Obey in the Western Area Rural, to review the Media Code of Practice 2007. The review, according to the Commission, was aimed at keeping at pace with the current media landscape and regulatory environment in line with the IMC Act 2020 and the repeal of Part V of the 1965 Public Order Act, which criminalized libel. The Media Code of Practice specified the rules and regulations governing the registration/licensing and operations of print and electronic media and advertising in Sierra Leone, including newspapers, magazines, radio, TV and DTH.

UNDP Covid-19 capacity building

In 2020, the UNDP supported the capacity building of journalists in response to the outbreak of Covid-19 in Sierra Leone. This project was implemented by MRCG and the constituent organisations to improve the capacity of reporters, DJs and presenters on reporting and providing public education on Covid-19. The outcome was that the capacities of journalists in response to Covid-19 were increased. The project targeted three separate trainings for 180 journalists across the country. Journalists

were trained on facts and key messages regarding the virus. They were to educate the public on actions to contain its spread in the country, sensitise the public about fake news on Covid-19 and to effectively generate and disseminate accurate information that would support public education on Covid-19. The journalists were provided with the required ethical guidelines on reporting during emergencies as provided for in the IMC and SLAJ Codes and international reporting guidelines. They were also equipped on how to integrate the issue of Covid-19 into existing radio and TV programmes and newspaper publications to increase the level of awareness and understanding of the virus among the public.

Fighting disinformation

In 2020, UNDP, through its Oslo Governance Centre (OGC), collaborated with MRCG and undertook an information pollution mapping in the country. The project focused on information pollution mapping to provide in-depth understanding and documentation of the major sources of disinformation on Covid-19. It also aimed at identifying trusted sources of information. A desk review of media penetration and trusted public information sources was conducted and focus group discussions held. The MRCG recruited two team leads, six media monitors and four regional media monitors who monitored

Covid-19 contents on radio, television and online media platforms.

Cybersecurity

A key highlight of the activities in 2021 was the Cybersecurity Bill (discussed above). SLAJ joined the rest of the world and UNESCO to celebrate 30 years of the Windhoek Declaration on the World Press Freedom Day 2021. The occasion was used to reflect on where the Association and its members had come from, where they had arrived and where they wanted to go with regards freedom of speech and of the press. It further reminded journalists of their responsibilities and the obligations of governments to guarantee these fundamental rights that are crucial to national development.

In that light, in June 2021, SLAJ held its 50th Anniversary of its Annual General Meeting in Bo, Southern, Sierra Leone on the theme on the theme ‘Looking Inwards, Looking Outwards: Towards a Strong, Accountable and United SLAJ, and a Free and Professional Media’. The President of SLAJ noted that the media had led the fight for democracy in Sierra Leone. ‘It was our opposition to the planned imposition of a one-party rule in the 1960s that led to the enactment of the Criminal Libel Law’, he noted. He outlined several successes gained and challenges faced since the establishment of the Association, as in world press freedom indexes, promoting of

professionalism, advocacy for the safety and security of journalists, etc.

In appreciation of the Sierra Leonean government's repeal of Part V of the Public Order Act, on 9 June 2021, SLAJ presented its Golden Jubilee Press Freedom Award to President Julius Maada Bio at State House in Freetown. This was a law that shackled the Sierra Leone media and journalists for 55 years and the law flourished under post-Independence Sierra Leone, a prolonged one-party system, and multi-party democracy. Successive governments and politicians used the law to intimidate and incarcerate journalists to escape being held to account and to clamp down on dissenting views. It prevented women from coming into the journalism profession and aspiring for leadership positions in the media industry and prevented private sector investment in the media, rendering the industry poor.

Review of information and communication curriculum

On 5 and 6 August 2021, MRCG and the Mass Communication Department at Fourah Bay College held a two-day session in which lecturers of media/communication/journalism and media stakeholders reviewed the Department's curriculum on these disciplines. The reviewed curriculum was to be used by other media and journalism

schools across Sierra Leone. Among many things, the review aimed at reviewing modules to meet international standards. Diploma and certificate courses in media and journalism were re-designed and added to the new curriculum.

Training on local governance policies and regulatory framework

Having received funding support from UNDP, in June 2021, MRCG engaged 27 community stakeholders including heads of CSOs, chiefs, women's leaders, youths, religious leaders from eight UNDP-operational districts on local governance issues. The community engagement meeting informed a two-day training workshop organized for journalists and civil society activists. The training was on local governance policies and regulatory frameworks for the promotion of transparency and social accountability in the operations of local councils. The training also concerned reporting and support to local communities on social accountability. The initiative was aimed at supporting and enhancing local communities' understanding of policies, programmes and procedures of local councils.

Before the training, a resource person was recruited, who conducted the needs assessment and produced a training manual

that was used to train the journalists and CSOs.

Specifically, the two-day training covered: brief history of local government; media and local governance; identification of local governance issues for radio programmes; key provisions of the Local Government Act 2004; training on radio programme production and presentation on local governance issues; practical session on production and presentation of radio programmes on local governance issues.

In all, 12 journalists and 12 CSO activists were trained. As the journalists and CSO activists indicated, the training manual increased their knowledge on local governance issues and served as a referential guide in reporting and producing programmes on local governance issues to raise awareness on the work, policies, programmes and mandates of local councils.

MFWA support in 2021

In 2021, the MFWA supported activities in areas including safety and security of journalists in the country, training of female journalists on issues relating to women's digital rights and launch of MRCG's March 2018-December 2020 edition of its State of Media Freedom in Sierra Leone Report.

In effect, in April 2021, the MFWA and the MRCG organised a National Forum on Safety of Journalists in Sierra Leone that was attended by 60 media stakeholders, government representatives, security agencies, regulatory bodies and CSOs. The forum highlighted issues around the safety and security of journalists in the country; building capacity of stakeholders on safety of journalists' standards; fostering collaboration among stakeholders to combat impunity for crimes against journalists; understanding of the role of the media and security agencies and their collaboration for the promotion of peace.

Additionally, the Minister of Information and Communication launched a report by MFWA and MRCG titled 'Study on the State of Safety of Journalists Policies and Practices among Media Houses in Sierra Leone'. During the launch, Minister Mohamed Rahman Swaray, assured journalists of Government's commitment to press freedom.

In collaboration with MRCG and WIMSAL, MFWA also conducted two training workshops in April and September 2021 for 40 female journalists and 45 female bloggers and activists in Freetown to tackle women's rights regarding online issues in Sierra Leone. Based on feedback from the participants, the workshops improved their digital literacy, as they had

been introduced to proper digital usage, social media and online privacy, identifying and dealing with online abuses against women.

The MRCG March 2018-December 2020 State of the Media Freedom Report contained an overview of laws, policies and institutions governing the media space in Sierra Leone; key press freedom and safety of journalists' issues; summary of press freedom violations recorded within that period, analysis of trends of violations, key perpetrators and victims; status of redress of violations; and recommendations to both governmental and non-governmental stakeholders on how to improve the situation.

National media investment conference

Also in 2021, the MIC invited stakeholders, including SLAJ, to discuss the actualization of President Bio's pronouncement on organizing a national media conference. The President had made the pronouncement on 28 October 2020 during his assent to the Public Order (Amendment) Act 2020 thus: 'The Government will also support an investment conference on the media with a view to supporting enhanced private sector investments in the media.'³¹

MOU between media and security sector

SLAJ and the Security Sector signed a Memorandum of Understanding on 2 November 2021, which set forth the understanding and commitment of the two parties relating to the safety and security of journalists and maintenance of law and order in the country. Both parties committed to: working together to do no harm and protect people at risk; respect each other's professional values, needs, and requirements; ensure the public's right to information; stand together to strengthen the fundamental importance of media freedom and law and order for the security, prosperity, and wellbeing of all societies; work together to create and maintain an environment where media freedom can thrive; and work together to sensitize media and security workers about each other's roles and responsibilities among others.

Journalism Welfare Fund

In 2021 also, SLAJ launched the Golden Jubilee Journalism Welfare Fund. The launch was done at SLAJ Headquarters in Freetown by the UN Resident Coordinator in Sierra Leone, Dr Babatunde A. Ahonsi. The fund's ultimate aim is to cater for the welfare of journalists in the country.

³¹ Statement by His Excellency, Dr Julius Maada Bio, President of the Republic of Sierra Leone on the Occasion of The Repeal of Part V of the Public Order Act, Freetown, State House – 28 October 2020

International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists: MRCG's call to the Information Ministry

MRCG commemorated the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists on 2 November 2021 by calling on particularly the Information Minister to ensure the safety and security of journalists in the country. 'As we observe the 'International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists' today, the MRCG reminds the Hon. Minister of Information and Communication, Mohamed Rahman Swaray, of a petition sent to him by the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA), the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ) and MRCG to respectfully seek his intervention to end the ongoing

prosecution of journalist, Fayia Amara Fayia of the Standard Times newspaper," Dr. Francis Sowa, National Coordinator of the MRCG, said.

1.10 Conclusion

The last four years 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 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.

PART 2: MEDIA AND DEVELOPMENT

The State of Public Access to Information in Sierra Leone since 2019

By

Ibrahim Seaga Shaw (PhD)

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

Introduction

The enactment of the freedom of information law in 2013 was a very important step towards democratic governance, transparency, accountability and the rule of law in Sierra Leone. The law itself provides a democratic space for monitoring of government affairs at all levels, and also widen the opportunities of the public to claim access to crucial information for active participation in the democratic process. This law demonstrates that you cannot talk about accountable governance in Sierra Leone without factoring in access to information. Apparently, by virtue of the enactment of the Right to Access Information Law in 2013 and the setting up of the Right to Access Information Commission to implement it in 2014 with the appointment of veteran journalist Mr Unisa Sesay as its first Chairman and Information Commissioner, the government of Sierra Leone is cognizant of the reality that freedom of information is an indispensable part of democratic societies in which citizens are given the right to be informed

about policy decisions, actions of government and the conduct of state functionaries.

The Commission, which was reconstituted in October 2018 with my appointment as Chairman and Information Commissioner, and the appointment of four regional Commissioners the following month, commenced operations against the backdrop of a number of international human rights instruments consistent with Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which provides for a right of all persons to seek, receive and impart information without borders; and Article 9 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights. Mindful of the task involved in implementing a law enacted to engender transparency and accountability, and that access to information is the key to open governance, the realization of the right to participatory democracy, freedom of expression and the assertion of other basic human rights, the Commission has in the past three and half years brought on board and implemented a host of ideas,

projects, and programmes ranging from Proactive Disclosure of Information, Freedom of Information, Records Management, Popularisation of the law to Capacity Building.

One major step taken by the Commission under my leadership was the call for an investigation of the existing internal controls, and management and functional review by behavioural change institutions such as the Internal Audit Department and Public Sector Reform Unit (PSRU). The Commission prioritized the findings and recommendations submitted by these institutions in the discharge of its mandate. Another major step was the holding of capacity building seminars in collaboration with the World Bank and OSIWA with the objective of empowering the Commission's human resource capacity, as well as that of state and non-state stakeholders with initiatives, concepts, skills that helped them to formulate guidelines, rules, and principles that will foster competency, creativity, and above all effectiveness in their implementation of the RAI law. Added to this was the organization of roundtables and interactive sessions with stakeholders on different occasions and locations where diverse insights were shared about access to information rights and the issues bordering on the statutory provisions of the RAI Act. Moreover, the Commission ensured the development of instruments such as the records management code of practice and the

RAI regulations that give effect to the RAI Act.

The Importance of ATI to Human Rights and Sustainable Development Goals

The fundamental governance principles of an access to information (ATI) approach are transparency, participation, accountability, and good governance. Such a basis makes access to information not only critical to all activities of government, but also beneficial to how citizens inform themselves about what is happening around them, and how they can use this information to empower themselves. Having access to information means having access to knowledge essential to one's basic rights and freedoms; having access to resources that make it possible to enjoy healthy life and individual empowerment, and the awareness of major challenges facing humanity. That is why the development of adequate laws to make these fundamental rights a reality is essential in any society.

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 protection of fundamental freedoms in accordance with national legislations and international agreements. These include Article 19 of the Universal

Declaration of Human Rights, Article 9 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights, and Section 25 of the 1991 Sierra Leone constitution. Being in the global information rights community, Sierra Leone cannot be an exception to the process.

Speaking at the launch of the new UNESCO Report on Access to Information on 17th July 2019 at the UN Headquarters in New York on ‘Why access to information is crucial to achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG)16 and how monitoring systems contribute to it?, I compared the sustainable development goals to human rights in terms of being universal, indivisible, interdependent, and interrelated, and added that the Commission has used this human right approach to sell right to access information in Sierra Leone by calling on the public and public institutions to see it not only as an end in itself but as means to an end, or many ends. Moreover, they should see ATI not only within the context of the First Generation civil and political rights but also within the context of the Second Generation economic, social rights, and cultural rights. I have called on them to adopt the holistic human rights approach in seeing that ATI is not only key in the realization of all other human rights but also in the realization of all the 17 SDGs. This holistic human rights approach

resonates with my call in my book ‘Human Rights Journalism’ on mainstream journalists to focus more on exposing human rights violations associated with indirect structural and cultural violence related to the Second Generation economic, social, and cultural rights as more proactive approach to prevent those human rights violations associated with direct political violence related to the First Generation civil and political rights.

Norwegian founder of peace research Johan Galtung³² believes in Lisa Schirch’s³³ theory of just peace -- sustainable positive peace—which can only be achieved by ensuring justice for all. Galtung argues that peace goes beyond the absence of direct violence (Behavior) such as war, and develops the alternative concept of positive peace such as addressing indirect cultural (Attitude) or structural (contradictions) violence as the ‘best protection against violence’. Galtung therefore has a holistic approach to peace and human rights in that what actually happens at the manifest level (direct violence) depends on what happens at the latent level (indirect violence). It is important to recognise the resonance between Galtung’s holistic peace approach

³² Galtung, J. (2004). Violence, War, and their Impact: On Visible and Invisible Effects of Violence. Available at: them.polylog.org/5/fgj-en.htm

³³ Schirch, Lisa (2002). Human rights and peacebuilding: towards just peace. Paper presented to 43rd Annual International Studies Association Convention, New Orleans, Louisiana, March 2002.

with the idea of a holistic human rights approach that sees all rights – be they negative civil and political rights (first generation rights); positive economic, social and cultural rights (second generation rights), both enshrined in the 1966 Twin Covenants of the UN, or group rights (third generation rights) such as those adopted in the 1993 Vienna World Conference as universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated. It is therefore reasonable to argue that ATI is as important to an holistic human rights approach as it is to the realization of all the 17 SDGs.³⁴

Thus, ATI, which is captured in SDG 16-10-2 is important not only as an instrument, or tool, in achieving the other sub goals of SDG 16 such as access to justice for all, climate change, and peaceful and inclusive societies, but also in achieving all the other 16 SDGs such as no poverty, zero hunger, access to quality health for all, quality education, gender equality etc.³⁵

Take for example a market woman who can only ask questions about lack of social amenities such as market toilets and sanitation if she has access to information about funding their parliamentarians, or

³⁴ Shaw, I.S (2012) Human Rights Journalism: Advances in the Reporting of Humanitarian Interventions. Palgrave Macmillan. UK

³⁵ ‘RTI Not just an end, but a means to many ends’--- RAIC Boss’ on www.raic.gov.sl

local authorities receive on their behalf from government, or donor agencies. Progress on the free quality primary and secondary school education cannot also be adequately monitored if schools fail to proactively disclose information so that parents can access what they need to ask the right questions about any possible gaps in the quality, or quantity, of education that is provided. Moreover, investigative journalists cannot succeed in exposing corruption in high government places if they are denied access to information that would enable them to do so.

This underscores the selection of SDG 16.10.2 by the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development as one of the accelerator goals for the SDGs included in the 2021 Voluntary National Review (VNR) Report for Sierra Leone. It is for this reason that the Commission is delighted to have contributed for the first time a report (accompanied by a Shadow Report and Documentary) on the state of access to information in 2019 and 2020 to Sierra Leone’s Voluntary National Review submitted to the 2021 High Level Political Forum meeting at the UN in New York.

Monitoring and reporting on Compliance with the RAI Law

Freedom of Information law in general is seen as a three-phase process: the passage, implementation, and enforcement. These

three elements are crucial and interrelated. Nonetheless, the implementation phase is paramount. In Sierra Leone, the Right to Access Information Commission is the only statutory institution with the mandate to facilitate access to information as well as monitor and report on the state of compliance with the RAI law. Practical experience has it that without full and effective implementation, the Freedom of Information law will be meaningless. Nonetheless, a well-implemented Freedom of Information law is an instrument that governments can use to learn from past successes and mistakes; mainstream transparency and accountability in public places, curb corruption, guarantee a vertical and horizontal flow of information, and of course, build citizens' trust in public service delivery. Sierra Leone's ATI law was ranked the 5th most robust in the world in 2019.

This achievement demonstrates the willingness of Sierra Leoneans across the board to pass this law. Commendation should be given to the drafters of the RAI law, and the Civil Society activists who established themselves right from the outset as FOI advocates, and fought relentlessly for this law to occupy a space in the statute books of Sierra Leone.

The right of access to information applies to all public bodies, including the

executive, legislative and judicial branches at all levels of government, constitutional and statutory bodies, bodies which are owned or controlled by government, and organizations which operate public funds, or which perform public functions. The law allows all persons to request information contained in official documents. This includes information of individuals exercising state functions related to the performance of their duties. Public Authorities are required to publish their location, functions, rules, and methods and procedures. Documents that have been previously released that the public authority deems important to others must also be published. Public authorities are obliged by law to proactively publish on their websites, or/and other platforms their roles, functions, activities and operations. Information can be withheld only if the law restricts their disclosure as provided for in Part 3 Sections 12-26 of the RAI Act 2013 which relates to exempt information such as personal data, national security, third party information etc.

RAIC's core mandate is to implement the Right to Access Information (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. has 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 notable examples of the latter were the fining of the Bank of Sierra Leone and the Ministry of Health and Sanitation in 2021 for refusing to comply with Freedom of Information (FOI) requests from one journalist and civil society organisation, respectively.

Two things have helped the newly constituted 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. 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 focused 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.

Sierra Leone participated in the 2020 annual UNESCO survey on Public Access to Information (SDG 16.10.2) and the country scored 5 out of 5 on adoption and 4 out of 4 on implementation of the FOI law with a total score of 9. In the 2021 UNESCO survey, Sierra Leone scored 5 out of 5 for Adoption and 3 out of 4 for

implementation of the FOI law with the total score of 8. Sierra Leone also scored 85% on FOI in the MCC compact assessment for 2020 and 2021. Sierra Leone was among 6 countries that co-sponsored the UN Resolution that recognised September 28 as the International Day for the Universal Access to Information on 15th October 2019, a day which has been celebrated in Sierra Leone since 2019.

The Commission launched the proactive disclosure of information scheme in December 2018. It also established a multi stakeholder council that serves as a back-stopping to its monitoring efforts in ensuring proactive information disclosure compliance. In collaboration with multilateral, bilateral and national agencies, it further strengthened the open data and data compact process coordination and the implementation of programmes in the Open Data Readiness Assessment, and an open data portal which sits at the Ministry of Information and Communication edifice. The new Commission also established an Archives and Record Management system that developed a code of practice for records management. It also expanded its investigation approach, complaint request efforts, and regulatory guidelines and rules of procedures. This endeavour was constantly reinforced with an expanded

nationwide sensitization and public awareness campaign.

Sierra Leone has made steady progress in the promotion of public access to Information since the enactment of the Right to Access Information Law in 2013 and the setting up of the Right to Access Information Commission in 2014. In an assessment conducted in 2019, the Commission noted that 112 successful Freedom of Information (FOI) Requests were made in the country between 2014 and 2019, about 50% of which were actually made in 2019 alone. In the Commission's assessment of 2020, we noted that 144 FOI requests were made in the whole country, out of which 132 were fully complied with. In the Commission's assessment of 2021, 195 requests/complaints were made, out of which 174 were fully complied with while the others were rejected, or pending. The Proactive Disclosure of Information (PDI) was launched on 6th December 2018 by the Vice President and steady progress has been made on this front since then. In the Commission's assessment of PDI in 2019, it noted that out of 10 public authorities that submitted Proactive Publication Schemes, one was fully approved, two were approved with observation, three given conditional approval, and three rejected. In the Commission's assessment of PDI in 2020, it noted that out of 20 public authorities that

submitted their publication schemes, 10 were approved with observation, 8 given conditional approval, and 2 were rejected. In the Commission's assessment of PDI in 2021, it noted that out of 31 public authorities that submitted their PDI Schemes, 3 were approved, 10 were given approval with observation because they are on the verge of being fully approved owing to the fact that they complied with 15 and above obligations, 13 are given conditional approval as they complied with between 10 and 14 obligations, and 5 are rejected as they complied with less than 10 PDI obligations. In the Commission's assessment of 20 public authorities, it noted that 13 have Records Management departments/units, 15 have Public Information Officers, and 15 have ICT departments/units. In the Commission's assessment of 26 public authorities in 2021, it noted that 19 have Public Information Officers, 18 have Records Management Units/Depts, and 19 have ICT Units/Depts.

Conclusion: Prospects, Challenges, and Ways Forward

Increased popularisation, public engagement, and capacity building activities involving state and non-state actors throughout the country over the past three years have contributed immensely to this steady progress the country has made

on FOI and PDI compliance. However, while the Commission celebrates this steady progress, it is very concerned that challenges such as limited resources, funding and staffing; and above all lack of supportive legal environment caused by the existence of old laws that promote secrecy instead of openness, and new laws and regulations to complement the Right to Access Information still to come into force despite all efforts by the Commission have impacted the adoption and implementation of the FOI law in Sierra Leone. Besides, Part 2 Section 2 Subsection 3 of the RAI Act 2013 provides that "Nothing in this Act limits or otherwise restricts the disclosure of or the right to access information pursuant to any other enactment, policy or practice", This provision strengthens the Act to the extent that its applicability takes precedence over any other law that came before or after its enactment, and which tends to contradict it.

For the Commission to sustain and even build on the steady progress it has made in increasing the visibility of its work and further boosting the FOI and PDI compliance as discussed earlier in this article, government through the Ministries of Information and Communication, and Finance should provide it with more support, especially in the areas of funding and enabling legal environment.

3. Pathways to Enhancing the Media's role in the SDGs and Medium-Term Development Plan in Sierra Leone

By

Yeama Sarah Thompsom

Managing Director, Sierra Leone News Agency

and Victor Ohuruogu

Senior Africa Regional Manager, Global Partnership for Sustainable Development

Abstract

Globally, there are growing calls for the media to play a more central role, as a non-state actor, in the realisation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Moreover, the accountability mechanism for monitoring the development, implementation, reporting and review of Sierra Leone's Medium Term Development Plan (MTDP) is not complete and effective without the media playing its crucial role as a critical stakeholder in national development. Given the call to action on the decade of delivery of the SDGs, this paper highlights the capacity challenges of the media in Sierra Leone and the various efforts being advanced to address data storytelling capacity gaps. The paper also articulates the key pathways to enhancing the role of the media in strengthening awareness, providing local and global evidence and impact stories to inform policy issues for implementation of the SDGs and the MTDP, supporting monitoring and reporting efforts and raising its voice to advance inclusion equity and

justice which are critical drivers of the SDGs and MTDP in Sierra Leone.

Introduction

National development is an important part of national growth (Allen et al, 2016), and the process of national development is continuously people-driven and majorly focusing in providing what the masses need to enable them to live comfortably and sustainably in the society. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are geared towards achieving national development. As a result, the United Nations have invested hugely in terms of finance and other resources to ensure its' actualisation (Adekoya & Ajilore 2012).

The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development that includes the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015 (UN, 2015). The SDGs are targets related to national and international development and they are a universal set of goals with targets and indicators geared

towards framing agendas and policies of member states (Wole-Abu, 2018).

The SDGs are concerted efforts and commitment, both at national and international levels, targeted at advancing social inclusion and designed to be sustainable (Galli et al, 2018 & Martin, 2019). According to the Centre for Environment Education (2007), the concept of sustainable development is designed to maintain a balance between the human need to improve lifestyle and well-being on one hand, and conservation of the natural resources and ecosystems on which present and future generations rely on.

In Sierra Leone, leveraging the opportunities provided by the SDGs, however, will require capacity building, policy coherence, and financing a long-term evidence based national sustainable development plan, among others. Such a plan is necessary to ensure that there are concentrated and aligned national priorities that will guarantee the achievement of the SDGs (Galli et al, 2018).

Worth noting is that Sierra Leone continues in keeping pace with the global need for an enhanced right to access information through investment in public interest media. In the 20th World Press Freedom Index report published by Reporters Without Borders (RSF) on Wednesday 3rd April 2022, Sierra Leone was ranked 46th

out of 180 countries, jumping 29 places up from 75th position in 2021.³⁶ However, the country still lags as it relates to the latest trends and development in media technology to enable the media fully support and contribute to its national growth, and the sustainability of service provision (Government of Sierra Leone, 2019).

Developments in the recent years have placed journalism in crisis, whether online, offline or hybrid. A range of factors are transforming the media landscape, raising questions about the sustainability, quality, impact, and credibility of journalism. For the media to continue serving its role as a source or reliable information, it should commit to re-energise and re-engineer itself towards inspiring initiatives in ensuring its viability. The 2030 Agenda, with its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), provides a vision for an integrated and sustainable approach to development. and a viable, independent, professional, diverse, and pluralist media, operating in a safe environment, can contribute meaningfully to this vision.

“SDG 16.10 on public access to information and fundamental freedoms cannot be achieved without independent media which can help in achieving all

³⁶ <https://rsf.org/en/rsfs-2022-world-press-freedom-index-new-era-polarisation>

SDGs - whether gender equality, climate change eliminating poverty, reducing inequalities, and sustainable cities,” said Guy Berger UNESCO’s director for freedom of expression and media development.³⁷

The Media, SDGs and the MTDP

Globally, it is expedient to address the SDGs with their targets and indicators. The 17 SDGs, or global goals, contain hundreds of targets and indicators on which progress must be measured to realize Agenda 2030. Sierra Leone like many other countries have also built localized indicators into its Medium-Term Development plan. However, awareness level is still very low as large proportion of individuals do not know about the SDGs and what they are meant for (Sheriff et al, 2020). The challenge still remains on how to leverage successful partnerships with the media as part of a broader effort to respond to the global SDG mandate while increasing local ownership over development progress. Moreover, effective propagation approach of the sustainable development goals, instituted by a national government come at a cost, hence national actors must ensure an effective management of the process through engagement and partnership with the media.

The Media arguably, continues to be one main pathway to ensuring effective management and maximum delivery of SDG’s (Jackson, 2015). It plays a major role as an institution in the society. The media provides pathways through which information is disseminated to the society in order to achieve its’ purposes. According to Lasswell (1948), media has three functions which include surveillance of the environment, the correlation of parts of the society in responding to the environment, and the transmission of social heritage from generation to generation.

Wole-Abu, (2018) reveals that for the media to be of immense benefit in the realisation of the SDGs, they must be included in the implementation, reporting and monitoring of the SDGs goals. He further revealed that one of the keys to achieving the SDGs depends on information access by the people via the media given the critical role that information plays as a key strategy for driving inclusion of all groups across levels and promoting transparency and accountability of the process of national growth and development.

Essentially, the key functions of the media are to inform, educate and entertain. These functions have a collective impact on the lives of people.

³⁷ <https://en.unesco.org/news/why-independent-media-matter-sdgs>

1. Information-The media performs this role to update people of all that's going on in the society. It is a very powerful social institution that exerts an influence on the society. This influence can help in the propagation and attainment of the SDGs (Wole-Abu, 2018).
2. Education: The media performs the role of an educator through its influence on people's behaviour and strengthening of certain habits or ideologies that it disseminates. Hence, it has the ability to educate people about the objectives and implementation processes of the SDGs (Wole-Abu, 2018)
3. Entertainment- This is the most popular and recognized function of the media. The entertainment-dominated function of the media can impact the rate of national development which could, in part, be due to dedication of little time to the functions of information dissemination and education that can often aid national development (Wole-Abu, 2018)

The sustainable development goals will have optimal advances in its aspirations if the media is viable, understands the SDGs, enables public access to information, and disseminates timely information to aid fundamental freedoms. According to

Wainwright (1982), the media is a platform that can be leveraged to promote national development because information is processed to cater for human curiosity on what is happening in the society.

Capacity Challenges and Pathways to Enhancing the Media's Role in Sustainable Development

Effective advocacy and awareness creation to support the implementation, monitoring and reporting of the SDGs by the media comes with its costly requirements, majorly that of capacity-literacy, research , technical and financial. From various engagements carried out by the Sierra Leone News Agency, some of the key capacity issues impacting the effective participation and deployment of media resources on the SDGs in Sierra Leone include:

- i. **inadequate knowledge capacity:** most local media practitioners focus on providing content on governance issues and politically-related content, as part of their reporting on development themes at the expense of creating content on the SDGs and tracking various services performance and linking their outcomes to the various SDGs. The reason for this widespread practice can be traced to inadequate knowledge and interest in the SDGs

by local media practitioners. Concerted efforts led by national focal institution with support from the UN system, especially the United Nations Development Program, UNWomen, UNFPA and bilateral institutions are needed to create a strategic capacity building partnership to strengthen the local media and other institutions including universities, Institutes of Journalism, Sierra Leone News Agency for continuous capacity building. This could strengthen the advancement of the content on SDGs as a public good.

- ii. **poor data literacy:** this is a major challenge not only to the media, but also at senior levels of most government institutions. This challenge includes how to read and communicate data and statistics to the citizens and policy makers, in various contexts as well as how to derive meaningful insights and information from raw or processed data generated on various SDG indicators.
- iii. **Poor technical capacity:** a basic amount of technical capacity is required to understand how to monitor and report on the SDGs particularly in terms of how to effectively map the various policy

objectives of the medium-term development plan to the SDGs, understanding how to leverage and localize SDGs reporting framework, how to strengthen the monitoring of sustainability reporting of private sector actors and how to align it with national reporting etc.

- iv. **Poor strategic engagement capacity:** the media has not fully understood the SDGs landscape including how to strategically engage local and international custodians of the SDGs within the borders of the country in order to have a full picture of the situation and provide context-specific and data-driven reportage and awareness of the SDGs.

Although there are existing global platforms that present interactive storytelling and data visualisations, such as the World Bank's Atlas of Sustainable Development Goals, journalists in Sierra Leone do not understand the concepts about how some SDGs are measured, where data are available, and above all trust in the official statistics or data produced in-country. More recently, the Sierra Leone News Agency (SLENA) and the Statistics Sierra Leone rolled out a project to strengthen statistical communication skills of journalists and statisticians to promote public trust in official statistics. A google

collaboration also ensured training on data visualisation and storytelling. More strategic partnerships can be advanced by national institutions such as SLENA, with select global organizations that are committed to media development and specific UN agencies that supports strengthening local media capacity for SDGs reporting. But this is not enough as the imperative to 'leave no-one behind' provides important entry points for media actors to engage with broader development interventions on the sustainable development goals. This principle also directly underpins the ideals of the SDGs and the hugely growing political advocacy and strategic programs targeted at achieving this principle is a major opportunity for advancing the role of the media. The availability (as provided by the ³⁸Right to Access Information Law 2013), understanding, trust and use of data to propel evidence-based reports provides an opportunity to inform and drive inclusive and sustainable socio-economic development in Sierra Leone.

In order to achieve enhanced impact, state and non-state actors can help promote this by supporting media development, including encouraging national media actors to engage with such processes to support public interest media. Moreover, the sustainable development goals

provided a robust development framework for driving and sustaining action and at all levels and this places a huge responsibility and opportunity for the media's involvement in advocating for better alignment and performance of the SDGs and the Medium-Term Development Plan.

The media remains one of the strongest players advancing a human rights-based approach to data journalism and one of the key elements of the human rights-based approach to the use of data for achieving sustainable development and the MTDP is participation. It is central to a human rights-based approach and decision-making about participation should be transparent and equitable and can best advocated and monitored by the media.

Conclusion

Optimal promotion of the SDGs to drive national support and inclusion of all groups can be achieved through effective engagement provided by the media through its well-targeted high impact information, education, and entertainment. The Media has thus been identified as a better platform and driver of national consensus for effective delivery of the SDGs and promotion of the medium-term development plan of the government of Sierra Leone given its inclusive

³⁸ <http://www.sierra-leone.org/Laws/2013-02.pdf>

programming that delivers information and education services to both urban and rural dwellers.

Nevertheless, it is very important to note that the media can only successfully promote and help drive the implementation, reporting and monitoring of the SDGs if it dedicates more resources to its information and education functions. Without this fundamental shift in approach, the media may be seen to cater only to the elites of Sierra Leone and may not be inclusive in its functions. Moreover, selecting effective channels for transmitting information to the citizens, by the media, can enhance equitable delivery of social services and achievement of the SDGs (Jackson, 2015).

The only benchmark for evaluating the media is via its contribution to national development such as the country's national development plans because they are social institutions which should take on the task of sensitizing and mobilizing citizens towards national development (Ekwelie, 1980 & Allen et al, 2016). The SDGs can be achieved through strategic partnerships of critical stakeholders and including especially the media who has a vantage role in helping to drive and champion that cause for a successful and sustainable national development.

REFERENCES

Allen, C., Metternicht, G., and Wiedmann, T (2016) National pathways to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): A comparative review of scenario modelling tools. *Environmental Science & Policy* 66, 199–207.

Adekoya, H., & Ajilore, K. (2012). Empowering National Development in Nigeria through Appropriate National Communication Policy. *Kuwait Chapter of Arabian Journal of Business and Management Review* Vol2, No3.

Centre for Environment Education. (2007). *Sustainable Development: An Introduction (Volume 1)* (Accessed: 19th May, 2022).

Ekwelie, S. (1980). *Mass Media and National Development. African Cultural Development*. In Kalu O Ed . Nsukka : Fourth Dimension Publisher.

Galli, A., Đurović, G., Hanscom, L., and Knežević, J (2018) Think globally, act locally: Implementing the sustainable development goals in Montenegro. *Environmental Science and Policy* 84, 159–169.

Government of Sierra Leone: Ministry of Development and Economic Planning (2019). *Sierra Leone's Medium-Term National Development Plan 2019-2023. Education for all. Volume 1*. Available from: www.moped.gov.sl/wp.../03/Medium-

Term-National-Development-Plan-Volume-I.pdf (accessed May 19, 2022).

Ishmail Sheriff, Sisay Abebe Debela, Matthew James Turay, Osman Alhaji Kabia, Musa Titus Sesay. Enablers for Achieving a Pathway to Sustainable Development in Sierra Leone. *International Journal of Sustainable Development Research*. Vol. 6, No. 2, 2020, pp. 30-36.

Jackson, Emerson Abraham (2015). Role of information science in sustainable development: Sierra Leone as a case study. *Management of Sustainable Development Sibiu, Romania*, Volume 7(2); 23-29.

Martin, D. A (2019). Linking fire and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. *Science of the Total Environment* 662, 547–558.

United Nations (UN) (2015). *Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda*

for Sustainable Development. New York: United Nations (accessed May 19, 2022).

Wainwright, D. (1982). *Journalism made simple*. London: Heinaman. Vol.43, 2409-6938.

Wole-Abu, N. (2018). The Role of Traditional Media in the Propagation of the Sustainable Development Goals in Nigeria. *International Journal of African and Asian Studies*;

Why independent media matter for the SDGs; <https://en.unesco.org/news/why-independent-media-matter-sdgs>, (Accessed 20 May, 2022)

4. Media Reporting on the Sustainable Development Goals and the Medium-Term Development Plan in Sierra Leone

By

Rosaline Katimu Amara

*Masters of Science (MS), Mass Communication, National University of Science and Technology
(NUST)*

Pakistan Islamabad

Abstract

The significant impact of the media on the development of the nation is crucial. The media should be the driving force for development as it creates awareness among citizens and makes the government accountable. Hence, to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Sierra Leone and the country's medium-term plan, the media in its monitoring and reporting mechanism, can raise the voice of the voiceless and critically monitor the government. The study investigates the government's implementation of the SDGs through media monitoring and reports from 2018-to 2021. The main research questions are: How often do the newspapers cover stories on the NMTDP/SDGs (Health, Education, and Climate Change) from 2018-2021? What are the pattern and directions of coverage of these newspapers' publications? and What were the major themes covered by these publications? With an agenda-setting framework, the researcher looks at how the newspapers in Sierra Leone brings to light the gains of government, critical monitoring and giving voice to the voiceless and marginalized

in society. The government flagship program, human capital development resonates with SDG's goals on health, education, and climate change. Hence with quantitative content analysis, the researcher examines the contents from two major newspapers. The study focuses on three SDGs in Sierra Leone and investigates the trends of reporting and monitoring by the media. The study reveals that newspapers in Sierra Leone reported on the Medium-Term National Development Plan that captures the SDGs with human capital development as its priority. However, they carried less critical/monitoring content on the plan.

Key words: media, sustainable development, health, education, climate change.

Introduction

Communication serves as a driving force for the development process from all angles. The use of communication for development or development communication is an integral part of the successful implementation of the SDGs goals in Sierra Leone. The field of development communication is diversified. This field makes use of different forms of

communication, including the mass media. The idea of development communication is to map out simple communication through the media that is geared towards development in a way that people will understand and promote change. Therefore, the media (electronics, print and new media) can serve as a mediator between the government and the people through its reporting mechanism. It can also monitor the government agenda in ensuring transparency and accountability of government officials (Bhattacharya, Khan and Sabbih, 2020). The media have numerous roles, from serving as a watchdog, raising awareness among citizens, setting the public agenda for discussion to raising the voice of the marginalized. The SDG's main promise is "leave no one behind" which is a core component of participatory development. The media should ensure that they raise the voice of the marginalized in society through its report either in the form of news, editorials, features, interviews, talk shows and vox pop (Bhattacharya, Khan and Sabbih, 2020). By doing so, they are actualizing the participatory aspect of development.

For Sierra Leone to join the bandwagon of achieving the SDGs by 2030, the government puts together a plan of action that serves as a blueprint for the implementation of the SDG's goals. The Sierra Leone's new Medium-Term National Development Plan (MTNDP) covers the period from 2019 to 2023. The goal of this plan is to ensure an inclusive and participatory

approach to development in achieving the SDGs within 15 years, and the long term plan is to become a middle-income country. At the heart of this plan is the "Human Capital Development" which among other SDGs focuses on quality education and health-care delivery that align with Goal 3, good health and wellbeing and Goal 4, quality education. To achieve quality education, the government lays a premium on "free quality basic and secondary education and strengthening of tertiary and higher education" thereby improving human resources. In the area of healthcare delivery, the government focuses on improving access to health facilities, and the availability of drugs and equipment (MTNDP, 2019).

The term development has been around for decades, with a focus on the environment as captured in the world chapter of nature in 1982 (Hák and Janouškova, 2015). As time progressed, social development was incorporated, and today there is sustainable development (SD) (Hák and Janouškova, 2015). Since the inception of SD, information was mentioned as one of its key players. The term SD has a series of definitions, but in all of the definitions, some keywords serve as a focus for international and local governments. It is a development that considers the importance of socio-economic development concerning the adequate use of natural resources. It also considers the protection of the ecological environment and the future

generation (Thi Phuong, 2020). Thus SD pays keen attention to the world's economic and social growth as well as the environment in which we live. Hence, a successful SD needs to be open, participatory, and inclusive, which means everyone should involve at every stage of its planning and implementation.

The sustainable development goal (SDG) was adopted by world leaders in 2015 and was born out of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The SDGs seek the government to advocate for properties and protect the planet (Janoušková, Hák and Moldan, 2018). The SDGs cover 17 goals with 169 targets and 243 indicators. Therefore, countries are obliged to develop plans of action that meet the goals, targets and indicators. In Sierra Leone, the MTNDP is the government blueprint that incorporates the SDGs, Africa Union Agenda 2030, and the Peacebuilding and State Building Goals (PSGs).

To successfully meet the goals of the SDGs, the role of the media in promoting, reporting and monitoring the implementations of these SDGs is curial. The media is the fourth estate of the government and a key counterpart to development that can promote the government plan and as well as do critical follow-ups and reviews. Since the SDGs emphasize inclusiveness, information dissemination and communication are key to achieving inclusiveness. Thus, the media can collaborate

with stakeholders and state actors to report and monitor the gains made on SDGs. The follow-ups serve as the media monitoring mechanism to critically review the strides of government based on the plans set out (Saner, Yiu and Nguyen, 2020). The media monitoring and report on SDGs can showcase the progress and challenges of government.

Researchers believe that media have a pivotal responsibility to society by giving information for human capital development. Through its powers of information, the media provide public awareness of SDG among people. They also provide scientific knowledge on evidence-based issues to improve people's knowledge (Wagh and Ambedkar, 2019).

Media development in Sierra Leone started in the 19th century with the arrival of the first modern printing press and has existed over two hundred years. However, the print media in Sierra Leone has got a lot of challenges ranging from readership to distribution (Wittels and Maybanks, 2016). Thus, this study aims to look at how the media (Print) covers the issues of SDGs, with regards to government gains and challenges, the frequency and focus of their reports, and the extent of their critical probing of government issues in the NMTDP.

The media's role in development is clearly stated, from reporting to monitoring. The media should create awareness among citizens through regular reports and engagement with stakeholders. But this awareness and

engagement require critical evidence-based monitoring of development indicators that will either show the strides of government or one that will bring these government officials accountable to the public (UNDP and UNESCO, 2016). Thus, lack of critical views and analysis on the government's medium-term development plan, devoid of event news shows that the media (Print) has limited monitoring strengthen of the MTNDP.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical perspective that underpins this study is the Agenda Setting theory. The media as a mediator between the government and citizens, create awareness of major issues in the country. Propounded by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw in 1972, this theory was born out of the idea that the mass media create the agenda for public discourse. However, its true origins can be traced to the idea of public opinion as developed by Walter Lippman in his celebrated 'Public Opinion' published in 1922; Lippman raised concerns about the media and its vital role in creating an image in the audience's mind (Zain, 2014). Since the agenda-setting brings to light the powerful influence of the media, thus it can shed light on the importance of the SDGs. The agenda-setting role of the media is suitable for this study, as it creates awareness among the public on the gains and challenges of the different SDGs (Farina, 2014). This can be done through reportage and monitoring. Through its priming mechanism, the media

effectively communicate and engage the public on the importance of development. As the SDGs seek to leave no one behind, through its framework of framing, the media can pass on information in a simple language that the public can understand. Hence, the media can use simple communication to inform the public about the NMTDP. On the other hand, the government can understand the plight of the people and their needs (McCombs, 2015). It is believed that development is a process and for it to be sustainable, the media should constantly be there to sensitize the public about government plans. In this way, the public will also be able to be part of the development agenda and contribute to it.

Methodology

The study employed quantitative content analysis to understand the newspaper pattern of coverage of the NMTDP/SDGs, the frequency and direction coverage and the themes covered by the articles. This research method deals with how texts are classified and analysed to understand the newspaper content. It deals with any form of recorded communication hence, it gives a vivid description of print media content, electronic and social media (Wimmer and Dominick, 2011; Coe and Scacco, 2017). Thus, this study analyses newspaper contents from two major newspapers in Sierra Leone; Politico and Global Times Newspaper. The newspapers were purposively selected by the researcher to meet the target of the study. The two

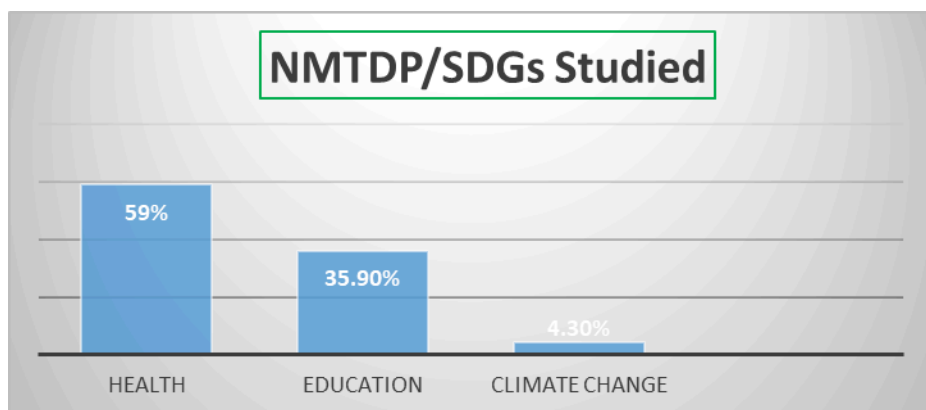
newspapers cover stories across the country and have an effective website where their publications are posted. The researcher coded and analysed the pattern and direction of coverage (news stories, features, editorials, and opinions), the frequency of the coverage, and the themes of the articles. From the newspaper's online content, the researcher

developed themes, which were the centre focus of the articles. These themes were defined and coded to understand the dominant issues discussed by these newspapers concerning the NMTDP/SDGs (Health, Education and Climate change).

Results

The study determined to analyse content from two newspapers, the pattern (news, features and opinion), coverage type (reports, critical views/monitoring) and frequency (2018-2021) of their coverage on NMTDP/SDGs (Health, Education and Climate Change) and the central theme in the articles. The analysis showed that there were 335 (59.8%) articles on health, 201 (35.9%) on education and 24 (4.3%) on climate change.

Figure 1: NMTDP/SDGs studied



The study covered contents from two newspapers; Global Times and Politico newspaper. Between 2018-and 2021, these newspapers covered 560 published articles on their online platform that focuses on health, education and climate change. Out of the 560 articles on health, education and climate change covered by these newspapers, 276 (49.3%) were covered in 2020, and politico newspaper alone covered 266. The table below shows the frequency of the publication on health, education and climate change between 2018-2021.

Table 1 Frequency of publication by year

Years	Frequency	Percentage
2021	171	30.5%
2020	276	49.3%
2019	105	18.8%
2018	8	1.4%

RQ2. The pattern of coverage of these newspapers was based on news, features and opinions.

Of these 560 articles, 93.6% of them were published by Politico newspaper on their website, while 6.4% were published by Global Times newspaper on their website.

The result showed that 88.8% of the coverage pattern of these SDG/NMTDPs was based on news and 10.2% was based on features. The coverage types were based on “reports” with 91.6% and 8.4% on critical views/monitoring of these SDG/NMTDP by the media. The table and figure below shows the analysis of the coverage pattern and type.

Table 2 Pattern of Coverage

Coverage Pattern	Frequency	Percentage
News Article	497	88.8%
Features Article	57	10.2%
Opinion	6	1.1%
Total	560	100.00

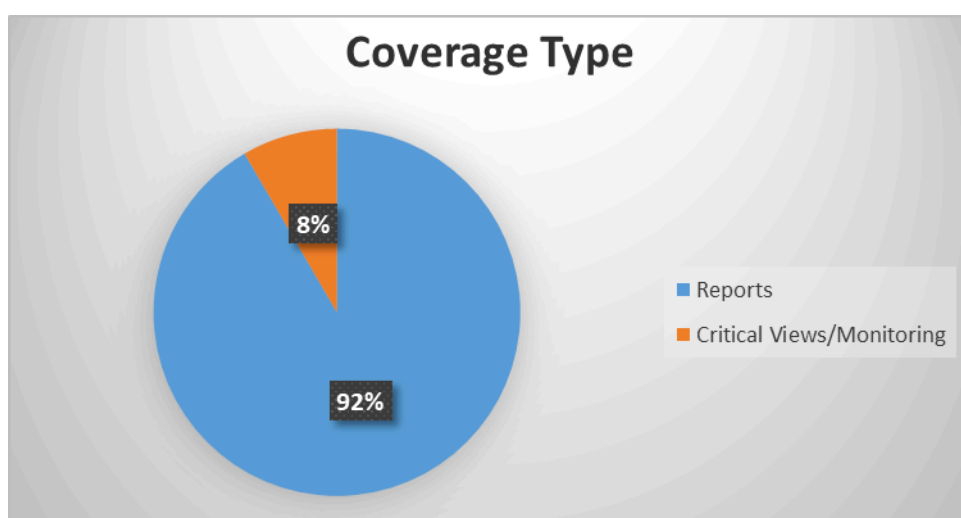


Figure 1 Coverage Type

The researcher developed themes from the content of newspapers. The themes are the central message of the newspaper articles on health, education and climate change. The themes are Donations/boost, challenges, gains/success, strike actions, awareness-raising, training of personnel, partnership, marginalised, emergency and covid-19. The table below shows the scores of the above-mentioned themes reported by the newspapers. Among the themes, Covid-19 shows the highest with 23.4% of news articles, features and opinions reported by newspapers. From December 2019 to April, 2022 Covid-19 has been the dominant issue discussed in local and international media. Apart from Covid-19, the result shows that donations/boosts regarding

health, education and climate change were also predominant in the news report with 23.4%. Challenges as a theme were also the central theme of the news report on health, education and climate change. The study's results showed that 12.9% of the newspaper reports were focused on awareness-raising on health, education and climate change. Gains/Successes regarding health, education and climate change were also reported but only 8.4% of the news captured it. The following themes: emergency service, training of personnel, partnership, marginalised all scores below a percentage of five, except for strike actions (5.5%) by personnel of health and education sector. The table below shows a detailed analysis of the themes.

Table 3 Themes from the articles

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Covid-19	131	23.4%
Donations/Boost	129	23.0%
Challenges	117	20.9%
Awareness Raising	68	12.1%
Gains/Success	47	8.4%
Strike Action	31	5.5%
Marginalized	11	2.0%
Partnership	10	1.8%
Emergency Services	8	1.4%
Training of Personnel	8	1.4%
Total	560	100.00

Discussion

The findings showed from 2018 to 2021 Global Times and Politico newspapers covered stories on health, education and climate change. Hence the researcher found 560 articles that focused on the areas mentioned. These articles focused on news, features and opinion. The articles were carried out through reports instead of critical views/ monitoring. As an essential organ of government, the study showed that the media (print) used their platform to report on the development and foster growth. However, little was done by the media (print) in putting out critical content that will serve as a check on the NMTDP/SDGs studied. This showed that the media is not doing much in investigating the government in their implementation of these SDGs studied, development of policy, and the negative part of these policies. Apart from its regular reports on development, the media through its monitoring mechanism can adequately review and follow up on the government to put them on their toes (UNDP and UNESCO, 2016). It is believed that proper monitoring by the media do not only expose the wrongs of government but also create a platform to give feedback on the difficulties in the SDGS implementation (Bhattacharya, Khan and Sabbih, 2020). Hence the media in Sierra Leone, should not only give news coverage

to news on SDGs but to ensure that it performs its watchdog function.

In 2020 and 2021 these newspapers covered 276 and 171 articles, respectively, and in 2019 there were 105 articles on health, education and climate change. However, in 2018 there were 9 articles on the Global Times newspaper website that covered the three SDGs studied. For Politico Newspaper, there were no news articles published on their website for 2018. This result showed that the media in Sierra Leone did provide a space for reporting on the SDGs studied and was frequently done.

These research findings showed that 88.8% of the articles on health, education and climate change were reported as news; either hard news or event news that has to do with project launching, donations/boosts, partnership, or press conferences. The analysis revealed that 10.2% of articles were based on features. It is believed that feature stories focused on one angle of an issue, hence they give a detailed analysis of the said issue.

From the themes developed, the researcher found out that apart from Covid-19 which got the highest coverage from 2019-to 2021, donations/boosts were one of the central

focuses of these newspapers on the SDGs studied. The print media in their publications regularly reported the news on donations from development partners, allocations from government, constructions, improvements or upgrades of learning institutions and health facilities. Challenges in government institutions regarding development implementation were also a dominant theme in the newspapers' articles. The challenges covered were lack of drugs in health facilities, shortage of essential equipment in both health and education institutions, issues of maternal death, and a poor environment for hospitals and learning institutions. There were also reports on the gains and successes of the government in the implementation of the NMDTP/SDGs. This showed the print media in their agenda-setting function, thus letting the citizen know about government development plans and trends of implementation.

Even though these were all means of letting the public be aware of the government's efforts, much premium was not given to proper awareness-raising on them by the media (Talabi, Tokunbo and Sanusi, 2019). Doing proper awareness-raising on these SDGs by the media should not only be what is of interest to the media but to consider the needs of the citizen and their importance in development (Thi Phuong, 2020). This could be by sensitizing citizens on development policies, their roles and rights.

The study implies that even though the aim of the SDGs, is inclusive by leaving no one behind, the news did not cover stories that focused on the marginalised people of the society. It also brings to light that these newspapers carried less critical/monitoring content on the government plans. Even though Sierra Leone continues to suffer the effects of climate change, it seems that the media is paying less attention to its adverse effect.

Conclusion

The media are an integral part of development; they do rely on society for their growth, and society, in turn, needs the media for survival and development. Through setting an agenda and framing news, the media are powerful weapons for bringing development to the masses. The SDGs focus on human and environmental development with information as its main resource. Hence, this study has showcased that the media in Sierra Leone report on the SDGs/NMTDP, thereby informing the people of government implementation progress. However, the media were unable to critically review/monitor the implementations. It is believed that critical monitoring of government plans and policies can make the government transparent and accountable (Abdulai, Kagumire and Geoghegan, 2018). To do this, journalists should be trained in data collection on government progress and know how to probe the various clusters in the NMTDP.

Reference

- Abdulai, J., Kagumire, R. and Geoghegan, T. (2018) 'Africa ' s Agenda 2030 : channeling the SDGs towards inclusive , resilient and accountable development', *Independent Research Forum*, (August), pp. 1–37.
- Bhattacharya, D., Khan, T. I. and Sabbih, M. A. (2020) 'Role of Media in Delivering the SDGs- A Mapping Exercise on Bangladesh', *Center for Policy Dialogue*.
- Coe, K. and Scacco, J. M. (2017) 'Content Analysis, Quantitative', *The International Encyclopedia of Communication Research Methods*, pp. 1–11. doi: 10.1002/9781118901731.iecrm0045.
- Farina, A. (2014) *Communication Theories, Soundscape Ecology*. doi: 10.1007/978-94-007-7374-5_4.
- Hák, T. and Svatava Janoušková, B. M. (2015) 'Sustainable Development Goals: A need for relevant indicators', *Ecological Indicators*, 60, pp. 565–573. doi: 10.1016/j.ecolind.2015.08.003.
- Janoušková, S., Hák, T. and Moldan, B. (2018) 'Global SDGs assessments: Helping or confusing indicators?', *Sustainability (Switzerland)*, 10(5), pp. 1–14. doi: 10.3390/su10051540.
- McCombs, M. (2015) 'The Agenda-Setting Role of the Mass Media in the Shaping of Public Opinion', *University of Texas at Austin*, 43, pp. 66–70. doi: 10.13245/j.hust.15S1016.
- Saner, R., Yiu, L. and Nguyen, M. (2020) 'Monitoring the SDGs: Digital and social technologies to ensure citizen participation, inclusiveness and transparency', *Development Policy Review*, 38(4), pp. 483–500. doi: 10.1111/dpr.12433.
- 'Sierra Leone ' S National Development Plan' (2019), I.
- Talabi, F. O., Tokunbo, A. A. and Sanusi, B. O. (2019) 'A Content Analysis of Newspaper Coverage Of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Campaign', 24(1). Available at: <https://journal.ijcunn.com/index.php/IJC/article/view/9%0Ahttps://lens.org/005-247-845-711-194>.
- Thi Phuong, V. (2020) 'Media for the Sustainable Development and the Strength of the Press', *International Journal of Social Science and Humanity*, (February), pp. 22–28. doi: 10.18178/ijssh.2020.v10.1008.
- UNDP and UNESCO (2016) 'Entry Points for Media Development to Support Peaceful Just and Inclusive Societies and Agenda 2030'.
- Wagh, R. V. and Ambedkar, B. (2019) 'Sustainable Development Goals And Role of Media', *IJARIIIE*, (6), pp. 1756–1758.
- Wimmer, R. D. and Dominick, J. R. (2011) *Mass Media Research*. United States of America.
- Wittels, A. and Maybanks, N. (2016) 'Communication in Sierra Leone: An Analysis of Media and Mobile Audiences', *BBC Media Action*, (May), pp. 1–54.
- Zain, mohd nor R. (2014) 'Agenda setting theory', (19027), pp. 1–6.

PART THREE: MEDIA PERFORMANCE AND ETHICS

6. Professional Journalism: Media Freedom and Responsibility

By

Sheku Putka Kamara

*Former Lecturer and Director of Marketing-Canadian University of Modern Technology (CUMT),
Mile 91- News Editor-Capitol Times Newspaper, Freetown*

Abstract

Nation-states that opt for the democratic political culture must map out the role of the media in the arena of politics as a key driver of success of this paradigm. The goal, historically, has been to create a delicate balance between media freedom and media responsibility with little or no state control. This has not always been an easy task. However, democratic states have historically resolved this conundrum with relative success, given the fact that media freedom and responsibility are key variables of the legitimacy of the state (M'Bayo 2020). This paper analyses the assertion above by ascertaining the extent to which the media in Sierra Leone has enjoyed press freedom, but also living up to their responsibility without or little external control. The paper argues that the attainment of professional journalistic practices comes with taking into consideration several concepts. It makes a case that attaining the status of professional journalistic practices requires a blend of high ethical considerations and adhering to functional media perspectives that are in line with democratic participant

models. The key research question is, what is the balance between Sierra Leone's media freedom and media responsibility with little or no state control? The key concepts and theories reviewed include the Four Theories of the Press and the Democratic Participant Theory. The paper further establishes how Sierra Leone as a nation-state opting for a democratic political culture has mapped out the role of the media in the arena of politics with specific reference to addressing the conundrum of ensuring media freedom, while at the same time advocating for media responsibility. Interviews and participant observation are used as research instruments for this paper.

Key Words – Democratic political culture, Media freedom, Media responsibility, External control, Professional journalistic practices

Introduction

The world over, it is a fundamental assumption that the powerful nature of the media is an incontestable reality. Such arguments are in line with beliefs of functional media perspectives which argue that the media

have the ability to inform, educate, sensitize and entertain society at all times. In performing such roles however, care has to be taken. In Sierra Leone, the Independent Media Commission Code of Practice provides that at all times ‘journalists should check and cross check the accuracies’ of their publications and broadcast. This implies that the quest to set a media agenda is required to match social responsibility standpoints. Arguments of such nature suggest that one has a right to say what he or she feels like saying, but that there has to be some sense of responsibility in thoughts and in actions too.

Literature Review

This paper draws on the four theories of the press. It is important to understand media theory to understand the context in which the press operates. The press in any society is a reflection of the society and its norms and therefore will more often than not ‘take on the form of the social and political structures of the environment within which it operates.’ (Siebert, Peterson, & Schramm, 1956, pp. 1-2). The four theories of the press are the Authoritarian, Libertarian, Social Responsibility and the Soviet Communist theories. They focus on the relationship between the media system and those that own this system; and the effect of this relationship on journalism.

The authoritarian theory explains that the government authority directly controls the

communication outlets. The government controls the press, information, and communication systems directly and indirectly (Siebert et al 1956). Sometimes, the government assigns authority to regulate the whole process of the information and communication system in the country.

Libertarian theory refers to the freedom of the press to disseminate information (Siebert et al., 1956). Therefore, it is also known as the normative theory of mass communication. The mass media outlets are entirely free to publish any ethical news and information. The press works as the watchdog of the community and society in the country. In the 1700s, authorities applied the libertarian theory of the press in the USA, and in the 1900s in Europe. As per the Libertarian press, human beings have the right to know the accurate information published by mass media outlets. The press should disseminate the actual news for society..

Social responsibility theory explains that the press media do not need to take permission from the government to distribute news and information; however, they think about society when publishing news. Therefore, the social responsibility theory of the press has linked the libertarian and authoritarian theories. It lies between those two theories. The media are somewhat free from the government but controlled by the people from the country’s society (Ibid).

Communist Soviet Theory describes that the ministry of the respective government controls the press media, but they are free to work for the society. The government regulates and guides the mass media outlets for the benefit of the people. They can publish any news without taking permission from the authority, but the government agency controls the entire system at the end of the day (Ibid).

The democratic participant theory is, in a way, the technological version of the libertarian theory. People can and must express their views freely, exchange ideas without fear, and with absolute freedom, making use of innovations in technology.

Editorial independence is needed to ensure a free and responsible media; tested, for instance, if a newspaper runs articles that may be unpopular with its advertising clientele or critical of its ownership. The concept of media independence has often been contested as a normative principle in media policy and journalism. Nick Couldry (2009) considers that digital transformations tend to compromise the press as a common good (with a blurring of the difference between journalism and advertising, for example) by the technological, political and social dynamics that it brings. For this reason, authors such as Daniel Hallin, Kelly McBride, and Tom Rosenstiel consider other norms (such as transparency and participation) to be more relevant. Karppinen and Moe state that

"what we talk about when we talk about media independence, then, are the characteristics of the relations between, on the one side, specific entities ranging from media institutions, via journalistic cultures, to individual speakers, and, on the other, their social environment, including the state, political interest groups, the market, or the mainstream culture."

Methodology

Cresswell (2006) discussed that several philosophical and psychological traditions have influenced investigators' approaches to qualitative research, including phenomenology, social constructionism, symbolic interactionism, and positivism. This study used interviews and observation as research methods/instruments so as to complement the selected qualitative study design. Interviews were conducted with senior journalists including editors, station managers, publishers and media owners and some active journalists in Sierra Leone's media landscape. On the observation, since the writer is himself a journalist that has worked and is still working as editor and broadcast manager for years, he has used his experience plus the data collected from colleagues and seniors alike to present the findings of the study.

Findings

Mass Communication Lecturer at Fourah Bay College, James Tamba Lebbie, who also doubles as a Commissioner of the Independent Media Commission (IMC) in Sierra Leone,

said that professionalism in the Sierra Leone is a ‘mixed bag as there are young people who are trained and there are those who decide to do things out of passion, satisfaction, jobs, employment and survival purposes.’ He stated that generally, the media in Sierra Leone ‘is doing well, but that ‘we still have a long way to go.’ Commissioner Lebbie said ‘some media houses are doing fine and practising in line with the IMC Code of Practice and the SLAJ Code of Conduct. That, to him is a sense of ‘degree of professionalism in the Sierra Leone media.’ Mr. Lebbie also said that some people come into the media as ‘a means to an end.’ He therefore suggested the need for constant training in line with the ‘laws and ethics of the profession.’ He said journalism is more of ‘a right based practice and that it is difficult if not impossible to legislate the practice itself.’ He highlighted the ‘poverty in the media’ as one of the challenges in attaining journalistic professionalism.

Publisher of the Calabash Newspaper, Amin Kef Sesay, disclosed that ‘over the past twenty years, the media landscape has diversified with the increase of radio and TV stations and increased use of mobile phones and the internet. To further enhance professionalism, media owners, publishers and practitioners have to remain conscious and aware of their role and responsibility to serve the public interest at all times. Journalists in pursuing academic training can raise their ethical and professional standards and ensure effective

self-regulation mechanisms.’ The media through the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists, and the media watchdog, the Independent Media Commission committed themselves to promoting professionalism within the media landscape. SLAJ and IMC have developed codes to address ethical excesses of members that have been effective in restraining the conduct of practitioners, including setting up disciplinary committees. The media, despite challenges continues to work professionally. During the civil war, the media played a significant role in the restoration of democracy and peace by ensuring that citizens and the world were properly informed. In the years after the war, the media have performed professionally in reporting on national events, including on presidential and parliamentary elections to high acclaim locally and internationally.’ Without a vibrant press, a nation’s democracy cannot survive, especially in terms of tackling corruption, effectively promoting a proper justice system and in ensuring effective multiparty democracy. Accordingly, the role of the media in a democratic Sierra Leone is principally to facilitate a national dialogue among civil society, government and citizens by providing space to host debate and to provide substantive information, as well as serving as a watchdog on the government and public officials to ensure that they work in the interest of the people that elected them into office. This role includes producing and publishing human rights stories; interfacing

with high level institutional authorities, NGOs and local communities, stakeholders, their respective needs and the various messages that should be addressed to them in order to spread far and wide public knowledge on development issues affecting the lives of citizens. Other business related challenges include dwindling advertising revenue and income from sales; distribution problems (such as reliance on street vendors who demand a large share of the profits); lack of basic technology, electricity shortage, etc. The operational challenges problems facing journalists are linked to poverty. Economic insecurity remains a major obstacle to press freedom. While the number of trained practitioners has increased due to colleges and universities offering journalism courses, journalists are still poorly paid and susceptible to editorial pressure from owners, advertisers, and other businesses. This has led to recklessness by some journalists, with some journalists resorting to blackmail. This includes demanding money to cover an event, or story, or requesting payment to keep information secret. Also, the small market and strong competition has enticed some media practitioners to publish sensational stories, engage in brown envelope journalism and allegiance to certain political and economic interests that finance some of the media, thereby compromising severely their independence and objectivity.'

Kemo Cham is former editor of the Politico Newspaper. To him, the state of professional media is in a 'chaotic mode.' Even among journalists, he said, 'we find it difficult to know who is professional and who is not.' This is not unconnected to the fact that, as he puts it, 'journalists are no longer interested in informing people. They are just interested in what they get as individuals.' Mr. Cham added that 'it is difficult to uphold professionalism in the country's media. Very few of us are making efforts and that effort is difficult to see because the majority of journalists are not making any effort as views are clouded by bias reporting.' On the challenges, Cham said that 'one major challenge has been plurality in the media' which he said has been used 'negatively.' He added that 'it is so easy to open a media institution in Sierra Leone to an extent that such privilege has been abused.' Where this happens, he said, media houses may be used as instruments of politicians and 'sponsors.'

Abass Jalloh, is a young Mass Communication graduate from the University of Sierra Leone who believes that the poor state of the nation could have an effect on media productivity. To him, reporting the news the way people perceive same could be difficult, especially where journalists and reporters 'are not well paid.' On upholding media professionalism in the country, Abass said that it will make sense if practitioners are schooled on the theoretical and practical strands of media and communications. He spoke about the need to

be accurate, accountable, independent, and impartial. He said that such attributes are in line with professional journalistic practices etc.

One of the newspaper editors in Sierra Leone, Kemoh Saidu Sesay, said that ‘we have few professionals in the media business and that is a stout challenge in enhancing a professional media landscape in Sierra Leone.’ He stated that ‘the inconsequential neglect of academic qualification is a big problem to attain professionalism in the trade.’ He, however, argued that ‘few professionals are making indelible strives to uphold professionalism, but that they are harshly altered by the vast majority of quack journalists.’ Making a point on the challenges, he said that ‘the profession is not lucrative and that is an escape route for most journalists to compromise professionalism in Sierra Leone’s media landscape.’

For Mohamed Lucky Sesay, a reporter in Freetown, ‘professionalism in the media is yet to be fully achieved due to multiple elements and among them is media poverty.’ He said that ‘most journalists trade themselves at the expense of professionalism.’

James Kamara-Manneh is another young journalist in Freetown who said that the fact that the public sometimes questions the credibility of some news implies that professionalism is still questionable. He added that ‘professional journalism is also greatly

affected by citizen journalism.’ Cecilia Mabinty Scott is a female journalist that worked with Cotton Tree News (CTN), Radio Mount Aureol (RMA) as a presenter and reporter. She said that ‘the state of professional media in Sierra Leone is in between.’ For her, only ‘a few journalists strive towards objectivity as most practitioners are partial.’ She considered the ‘eagerness in publishing stories without proper probing’ as a major journalistic challenge.

Alieu Alvin Kargbo works with the AYYV Television in Freetown. To him, ‘professionalism is encouraging in the media, but there are still issues of financial disparities.’ Lansana Fofanah reports for the Global Times Newspaper and edits the News24 newspaper. As far as he is concerned, ‘the state of media professionalism in SL is something that is worrisome.’ He said that ‘the emergence of citizen journalism and the new media have polarized the media landscape because anyone with an android phone with data connection now considers him or herself as a journalist.’

Conclusion

The research concludes that the four theories of the press discussed above are very relevant and media freedom and responsibility cannot be addressed without understanding them. In the end, what the researcher discovered (having conducted interviews with some industry professionals) was that, there is still

room for the enhancement of media freedom in Sierra Leone) based on the postulations in the theories. Also, while press freedom is significant, there has to be a way newsmen fully comprehend the virtues of media's responsibility and professional agenda setting. This is in line with one of the theories discussed (Social Responsibility Theory of the Press). The media needs freedom, but such freedom should go with absolute responsibility and so, without a doubt, there is need for editorial independence at all levels in the Sierra Leone Media. This will greatly aid towards the attainment of journalistic professionalism. Sarah, (2000) emphasized that editorial independence is the freedom of editors to make decisions without interference from the owners of a publication. Proper media management systems are also crucial in realizing such media objectives. The need for effective teaching and training is also an obvious reality as same will help newsmen to make informed decisions in so far as their agenda-setting functions may be concerned.

References

- Creswell, John (2008). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. Sage.
- Grimsey, S. (2013, September 9). Horizontal Communication: Definition, Advantages, Disadvantages & Examples. Retrieved from Education Portal: <http://education-portal.com/academy/lesson/horizontal-communication-definition-advantages-disadvantages-examples.html>
- Kobiruzzaman, M. M. (2021, September 11). Four Theories of the Press- Authoritarian, Libertarian, Social Responsibility & Communist Soviet. Newsmoor- Educational Website For Online Learning. <https://newsmoor.com/four-theories-of-the-press-authoritarian-libertarian-social-responsibility-theory>.
- Lichtman, Marilyn (2013). *Qualitative research in education: a user's guide* (3rd ed.). Los Angeles: SAGE Publications. ISBN 978-1-4129-9532-0.
- Siebert, F., Peterson, T. B., & Schramm, W. (1956). *Four theories of the press: The authoritarian, libertarian, social responsibility, and soviet communist concepts of what the press should be and do* (Vol. 10). University of Illinois Press.