

MEDIA REFORM COORDINATING GROUP-SIERRA LEONE
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**MRCG-SL
SECRETARIAT**

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“The National Fund for Public Interest Media (NaFPIM) would ensure that Sierra Leonean journalism hold all kinds of people to account, and media institutions which would fulfil set criteria would be offered grants to enhance their work. The Fund’s concept stems from the National Action Plan for Media Viability which was agreed with key stakeholders in the wake of the Sierra Leone National Media Viability and Investment Conference held in April 2022,” Dr. Sowa.



Statement from the National Coordinator, Dr. Francis Sowa

In the second phase of the year (July to December 2023), MRCG continued to implement projects and activities for the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) on Enhancing Press Freedom and Media Reforms in Sierra Leone, Minority Rights Group Africa on Engaging Media and Minorities to Act for Peacebuilding.

MRCG also completed the project activities for the International Media Support (IMS) by hosting a post-election National Police-Media Dialogue Forum, and Documenting a Learning Paper on lessons learnt, results and recommendations.

MRCG also partnered with the Ministry of Information and Civic Education (MoICE) in reviewing a Draft National Media and Information Policy for the country.

MRCG extends thanks to all its funders for the year 2023 and its partners for providing funds for its programs and activities. Special thanks and appreciation to the Board and Secretariat staff for their supports and commitments to the work of the MRCG.

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MRCG HOLDS AN EXIT MEETING WITH PROFESSIONALS AND MEMBERS ORGANIZATIONS OF ITS MEDIA SITUATION ROOM



In its stride to measure the level of professionalism of the media's coverage and reportage of the June 2023 general elections in Sierra Leone, the Media Reform Coordinating Group (MRCG) on 3 July 2023 held an exit meeting with professionals and member organisations of its Media Situation Room which was to mark the end of the strategic monitoring of the media during the 2023 general elections. [Click here](#)

Seven reports on the media's performance in covering and reporting the 2023 general elections in Sierra Leone were produced at the Situation Room and published on various media platforms.

In their assessments, the professionals noted that the traditional media (radio, television, and newspapers) generally did great work by providing professional media coverage and reporting on the elections.

As part of the many observations of the media's coverage of the multitier June 2023 elections, the professionals observed that social media posed some challenges regarding misinformation and fake news (before, during and after the elections).

They informed us that moving forward, MRCG will strategise ways of effectively dealing with social media in elections and conflict-sensitive reporting.

MRCG AND MOICE CONVENE A ONE-DAY WORKSHOP TO REVIEW THE DRAFT OF THE NATIONAL MEDIA AND INFORMATION POLICY IN SIERRA LEONE.



The MRCG, in partnership with the Ministry of Information and Civic Education (MOICE) with support from National Endowment for Democracy 7 September 2023, held a workshop at Dohas Hotel in Bo to review the draft National Media and Information Policy. [Click here.](#)

The event brought together a distinguished gathering of key figures from Sierra Leone's media landscape, including the Right to Access Information Commission, the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists, Women in the Media Sierra Leone, and the Independent Media Commission of Sierra Leone.

The National Coordinator of MRCG, Dr. Francis, explained that the document presented was not a policy they had developed but rather a compilation of discussions on key issues that could inform future policy decisions. He stated that the government had its own established process for policy development and added that the ministry's current document likely incorporates various stakeholders.

“It is important to note that this is a complex process with several steps, which the facilitators will elaborate on later. Our primary goal today is to acknowledge the existence of this draft document. However, before engaging with the minister and his team, we must not present an outdated document. Therefore, updating and contextualising these

documents will provide a solid foundation for our discussions,” he stated.

Dr. Massaquoi, Chairman of the Independent Media Commission and the MRCG Board, emphasised the critical role of a well-defined information policy in reducing confusion and enhancing coordination. He acknowledged the rich content of the policy document and anticipated improved information flow and quality in Sierra Leone.

The President of the Women in the Media Sierra Leone, Eastina Taylor, stressed the policy’s relevance in the digital age, particularly in addressing misinformation, disinformation, and cyber security issues. She highlighted the importance of gender equality in information dissemination, emphasising the policy’s potential to combat gender bias and harassment while fostering an environment conducive to women’s professional growth.

Emmanuel AB Turay, Acting Director of Information at the Ministry of Information and Civic Education, emphasised the significance of the National Information Policy. He highlighted the necessity of having a comprehensive national policy to ensure the effective implementation and operation of information resources, services, and systems. **"This policy aims to provide timely access to relevant information for citizens across the country, enhance coordination within the national information system, and align with existing legislation,"** he said.

Turay also stressed the importance of a dedicated session to assess the current state of affairs and align with international standards to improve the national policy further. He furthered that the primary objectives of this policy included supporting national development initiatives, enhancing the quality of life for the citizens by facilitating systematic and secure communication through information strategies and revitalizing investments in information and communication infrastructure.

Giving his keynote address, Hon. Chernor Bah, the Minister of Information and Civic Education, underscored the pressing need for reform in Sierra Leone's information ecosystem. Bah lamented the existing dysfunction, describing it as so poorly organised that it seemed deliberately designed for chaos. He emphasised the absence of cohesion in messaging, a dearth of values and principles in communication, and the need for adherence to international standards.

The Minister said that government institutions with outdated or non-functional websites face credibility issues when applying for grants from international organisations. **“If they have a reasonably good website, they will say that it is an institution with some credibility. That is a foundational step, but we have government ministries in Sierra Leone that do not even consider updating their websites,”** he stated. He emphasised that proactive information dissemination, rather than defensive measures, is key to countering fake news and negative propaganda.

He revealed that, at President Bio's request, they were conducting an assessment of Sierra Leone's information architecture, aiming to map information flows and improve government-citizen interaction. **"We want to see and map out where we are now in terms of information flow and use that map to propose how it ought to be for the government to function well,"** he said.

The Minister of Information furthered by stressing the importance of civic engagement and feedback mechanisms, stating those citizens’ voices must be heard. **“To achieve these goals, the development of comprehensive policies, such as the National Media and Information Policy, is essential,"** he stated. The Minister commended MRCG for its efforts and called on all stakeholders to collaborate to achieve the outlined objectives. The workshop concluded with a facilitative session led by Dr. Isaac Massaquoi and Umaru Fofana, followed by group work where members collaborated to generate ideas for developing the information policy.

MRCG AND MRGA ORGANISE NATIONAL RETREAT FOR JOURNALISTS AND CIVIL RIGHTS ACTIVISTS ON MINORITY RIGHTS REPORTING



The Media Reform Coordinating Group (MRCG) and Minority Rights Group International (MRGI), with support from the European Union, organized a three-day retreat at the Dohas Hotel in Bo. The retreat brought together 10 journalists and civil rights activists participating in an online course titled “Engaging the Media and Minorities to Act for Peace building (EMMAP) project implemented by MRGI. [Click here.](#)

According to Dr. Francis Sowa, the National Coordinator of MRCG, the retreat was designed to train participants on mental health and fatigue and deepen their understanding of critical issues relating to exclusion and discrimination against minority and Indigenous communities.

He continued that the retreat was crucial in promoting minority rights issues as it sought to address the psychological impacts on the journalists and activists. At the same time, they deal with the problems and hear the stories of the minority communities they cover. **“The most important aspect of the training is to prepare the minds of these journalists and activists in reporting disturbing minority issues,”** he said.

Dr. Francis Sowa continued by providing insight into the experience of journalists who took part in previous field trips and reacted emotionally to the stories of minority communities. He gave the scenario of a female journalist who cut short her interview with amputee victims of Sierra Leone’s 1991-2002 civil wars in the eastern

Kenema district. **“Seeing them express emotions by shedding tears shows that, being journalists and activists, they are also capable of showing emotion,”** said Dr. Sowa.

During the three-day event, presentations were given on a wide range of topics, including conflict in Sierra Leone, the media, migration, and minority issues. The participants also discussed the roots and consequences of conflict and community tensions, ethical and privacy standards for engaging minority issues, and techniques for dealing with psychological problems associated with reporting on minorities.

The three-day retreat ended with a facilitative session. Dr. Victor Massaquoi, Communication, social and Governance Expert and Mary A. E Bockarie, Psychology lecturer, University of Njala, served as the key facilitators.

MRCG AND BBC MEDIA ACTION CONCLUDE A TWO-DAY POST-MEDIA-VIABILITY-AND-INVESTMENT CONFERENCE WORKSHOP



The Media Reform Coordinating Group Sierra Leone (MRCG), with support from BBC Media Action Sierra Leone through PRIMED and in collaboration with other media stakeholders, has concluded a two-day post-Media Viability and Investment Conference Workshop at Companero Resort, Bureh Village, Western Rural district. [Click here.](#)

The workshop was to review the implementation of the National Action Plan and develop a new strategy for implementing the seven (7) recommendations derived

from the National Media Viability and Investment Conference held in April 2022.

The workshop brought together heads and representatives of national media organizations, who extensively reviewed the existing implementation plan and drafted a new strategy for implementing the conference's recommendations.

In his remarks, the National Coordinator for MRCG, Dr. Francis Sowa, told participants that the meeting was highly needed as the National Action Plan, developed almost a year ago, needed a holistic approach to implementing all the recommendations. He thanked all stakeholders who have supported the successful implementation of recommendation 6, especially with establishing the National Fund for Public Interest Media (NaFPIM), which the MRCG is coordinating. **“We now have the Fund. We look forward to implementing the Framework for the grants to the media,”** said Dr. Sowa.

The Country Director for BBC Media Action, Edward Kargbo, emphasised the need for the stakeholders to thoroughly review the document and contribute to the new National Action Plan for implementing the recommendations. The meeting recommended expanding the NaFPIM Board to serve as a Steering Committee to assess the implementation of all the recommendations. Lead organisations were also identified for each thematic working group.

MRCG WITH SOME JOURNALISTS ON A WORKING VISIT TO SENEGAL



In September 2023, a team of participants from the Minority Rights Group Africa (MRGA) and [MPEC](#), in partnership with Fahamu Africa, commenced a two-day exchange meeting between journalists and minority activists in [#Senegal](#) to teach interconnections on minority issues, community tensions, and conflict and to build and consolidate peace in Ghana, Senegal, and Sierra Leone.

MRCG CONVENES A POST-ELECTION POLICE-MEDIA DIALOGUE FORUM



In the post elections package, MRCG, with support from the IMS, on 29 September 2023, held a one-day event titled: Post-Election Police, Political Parties, CSOs and Media National Dialogue Forum at Hotel Cabenda in Freetown. The essence of the dialogue/cooperation between the different sides was to consolidate the progress made by all parties in ensuring not just the safety of journalists in their lines of duty but to reinforce collaboration between the media and the other parties in reporting on election-related activities, as has been the case with media-police relations since the dialogue in 2018. [Click here.](#)

MRCG's Programs Officer, Augustine James, called the Forum to order and reminded the participants that it was a continuation of the Regional Police Media Dialogue Forum held before the June 24th general elections. The post-election session was to count the gains and highlight challenges encountered by security and the media in ensuring media safety and a good media-security relationship while covering the general election. James noted that at the end of the session, participants

were to come up with key recommendations for the future.

The National Coordinator, MRCG, Dr. Francis Sowa, thanked all for attending and anticipated fruitful deliberations. He pointed out that the overall objective of the IMS rapid response intervention was to ensure the safety of media workers so they can produce reliable and professional reporting that will contribute to providing a credible and peaceful election in Sierra Leone. He noted that the activities in the IMS project description were to among other things, strengthen the relationship and coordination between the media and the security sector, strengthen the capacity of journalists to be safe while covering the elections, build the capacity of journalists to report effectively on election-related issues, develop a good working relationship between the media and elections officials, political parties, and to provide for an opportunity to identify best practices and lessons that can be learnt from such a rapid and one-off intervention. [See his statement here.](#)

MRCG PRODUCES AND LAUNCHED THE STATE OF THE MEDIA REPORT 2022



The central philosophy of the MRCG is to strengthen quality journalism, promote media initiatives, coordinate media development, and monitor the subtleties among the media, as well as state and non-state actors. This publication provides the latest contribution in fundamental knowledge production, from the Introduction to the last article. The MRCG takes media freedom, media development and media safety and protection very seriously, and their criticality is evident. This edition of the State of the Media Report (2022, Sierra Leone) has a central question: How do we expand

opportunities for continued free expression and deepening our democratic participation, principally in the rural areas of Sierra Leone? [Read the report here.](#)

MRCG HOLDS FIRST INCLUSIVE AND ANTI-CONFLICT JOURNALISM AWARDS



The Media Reform Coordinating Group - Sierra Leone (MRCG-SL) on 25 October 2023 celebrated the outstanding achievements of journalists in the country through the '2023 Inclusive & Anti-conflict Journalism' awards. The initiative aimed to recognise and reward journalists for their exceptional contributions to inclusive and anti-conflict journalism throughout the year.

The application process, launched in September 2023, received a positive response from journalists across various media platforms in Sierra Leone. Three distinguished evaluators meticulously reviewed the submissions based on criteria such as originality, investigative work, impact, authentication, and a call to action. The top five awardees were shortlisted and announced on the specified date.

Giving the background of the award, the Project Officer for EMMAP, Patricia Christiana Sankoh, stated that the application was opened to all journalists from various media houses to submit already published articles or broadcasts within the period of 1st July 2022 to 30th August 2023, which should be focused on inclusive and anti-conflict journalism. She disclosed that three experts in the media shortlisted five (5) entrees from those who applied for the award, adding that the theme of the event was "Raising Public Awareness of the Interconnections between Conflict, Migration, Climate Change, and

Minority Exclusion" under the Engaging Media and Minorities to Act for Peace Building (EMMAP) Programme.

Chairman of the Independent Media Commission (IMC), Dr. Victor Massaquoi, serving also as one of the evaluators, emphasised the robust scrutinising of all the stories submitted, noting that the contents of the journalists' presentations represent hope for journalism in Sierra Leone. He said one of the central functions of the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ) and the Independent Media Commission (IMC) is to ensure that they develop the media landscape in the country, especially some shortcomings such as uninspired introduction and insufficient inclusion of the minority persons.

President of Women in the Media Sierra Leone, Eastina Marian Taylor, highlighted how impressive they were of all the entries they received. She stated that during the evaluation process, so many entries were evaluated featuring articles, videos, and audio. She added that some journalists submitted multiple stories with the understanding that the evaluators would process the most compelling stories from each of them.

She revealed that the evaluation process was focused on five thematic areas: the originality of the story and the issues addressed, investigative work put into the story, the impact of the story, authentication and call to action, stating that the judges considered the uniqueness of the topic explored and the depth delved into issues.

Patricia Sia Gevao, a reporter from the Awoko Newspaper, claimed the top prize, while Cecilia Alice Sesay of the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation and Mohamed Sahr of A-Z Newspaper secured the second and third positions, respectively.

The awards ceremony was attended by prominent figures, including top media personnel, dignitaries, and participants from the "Engaging the Media and Minorities to Act on Peacebuilding (EMMAP) course.