

NATIONAL MEDIA VIABILITY AND INVESTMENT CONFERENCE

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A NATIONAL ACTION PLAN

1. The Government of Sierra Leone should continue to show the political will necessary to drive media market reforms

- The Government should finalise the National Media and Information Policy which demonstrates its commitment to media freedom and unimpeded access to information.
- Government ministries need to simplify and publicise procedures for taking advantage of indirect subsidies and customs duty waivers.
- While reform processes are being enacted, the government should issue clear guidance to public officials on the provisions and the application of existing legislation.
- The Government should finalise the Digital Migration Policy and support initiatives aimed at providing access to standard digital broadcasting and printing equipment.

2. The existing legal and regulatory framework for the media needs to be reviewed

- A standalone chapter on media and communication should be added to the constitution, establishing the principles for organising and regulating the sector.
- Steps should be taken to remove or modify any provisions in existing legislation that could act as obstacles to investment.
- The Government should provide a timely operating grant to the Independent Media Commission (IMC) that will enable the Commission to review the national strategy for allocating licences and setting associated fees, thereby easing market overcrowding while ensuring that the public interest is served.
- The Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ) should take concrete steps to enhance and safeguard its independence, thereby ensuring that it is able to function as a trade union acting in the interests of its members. It should seek to secure its funding largely from members' fees and play a role in self-regulation and upholding professional standards.
- The IMC and other stakeholders, including duty-bearers and media freedom advocates, need to agree on a definition for public interest content that can inform policy-making on direct subsidies and market regulation.

3. The media should commit to re-engineering the industry in order to boost the potential for attracting private-sector investment and public subsidies

- The IMC, the SLAJ, the Ministry of Information and Communications, the Independent Radio Network (IRN) and the Guild of Editors (GoE) should come together to review and strengthen the existing governance and management requirements for media institutions and agree on compliance mechanisms.
- Proper systems for measuring broadcast audiences and newspaper circulation figures should be introduced, thereby ensuring that advertisers and state institutions can make informed decisions based on empirical evidence.
- Media organisations should develop and publish clear editorial policies as well as introduce proper governance structures that ensure full accountability.

- Media outlets should consider mergers and alliances that make them institutionally viable and investment-ready; that enhance the diversity of content; and that offer a framework for collaboration on investigative or public interest journalism projects.
- Media institutions should explore new business and revenue-generating models.
- The SLAJ, the IMC and academic institutions providing media and journalism education should work with the Government and development partners to provide and encourage scholarship, training and capacity-building programmes for all categories of media practitioners.

4. The Government should take affirmative action to promote community media and the public service broadcaster, the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC)

- New tax incentives and waivers should be introduced for community media (e.g. reduced taxation on equipment) and awareness should be raised of existing subsidies and procedures.
- Local councils should be encouraged to provide support to community media, thereby improving information provision as well as civic engagement around local development policies.
- The SLBC's governance and funding models should be reconsidered with a view to giving the broadcaster greater independence and financial freedom to improve its infrastructure; enhance its content; and devise a longer-term business plan.

5. A national policy on advertising should be introduced

- The Government should introduce regulations for the fair and transparent allocation of public sector advertising using criteria including adherence to IMC, NATCOM, NRA and NASSIT requirements.
- Media stakeholders should develop statutory market regulations (for example, through the IMC).
- The Government must honour its obligations to pay for state advertising, including agreeing to advance payments of 50% of the total cost.
- The review of Section 4 of the IMC Media Code of Practice should be completed and changes introduced to ensure that professional standards are maintained and to eliminate sharp practices.
- A standalone advertising policy should be considered that includes a monitoring role for the IMC.
- An umbrella body for advertising agencies should be established with a view to regulating pricing and introducing quality control measures based on agreed industry standards.

6. Government and development partners should commit to a national fund for public interest media

- The Government should allocate at least 3% of the annual national budget to media investment and development.
- The scope and focus of the fund should be established as well as criteria for the allocation of funding.
- A multi-stakeholder governance mechanism and operating guidelines should be developed for the fund.
- The Government of Sierra Leone should engage with development partners to seek complementary support for the fund and to help coordinate the efforts of international actors.

7. Stakeholders should seek to address the existing gender imbalance in the media industry

- The SLAJ and women rights' organisations should undertake research on the status of gender representation in the media.

- Media houses should encourage women entrepreneurs to enter the industry and should offer women employees clear opportunities for self-advancement in their chosen field.
- Media institutions should devise clear policies that support gender equality, creating the space for women journalists and content creators to thrive and, thereby, achieving greater diversity in the workplace and in the content that is offered to the public.
- The Government and civil society should work with the media to support efforts to improve the gender balance across the sector.

More information about the studies undertaken, the national consultations conducted and progress made with regards to the development of a National Action Plan can be found here:

[A national conference on the future of media in Sierra Leone - Media Action \(bbc.co.uk\)](https://www.bbc.com/news/health-55111111)