MAPs without Direction:

Media Assistance Projects in Post-War Sierra Leone

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Abstract

Sierra Leone's brutal civil war devastated the country's population and left its infrastructure in disarray. Over the last decade, international organizations have provided financial and technical assistance to many areas of society, including journalists and the media. Media assistance programs, or MAPs, are designed to promote democratization and development by fostering a free and independent press. This free press – also known as the *fourth estate* – is intended to disseminate accurate and unbiased information upon which citizens can base informed choices in their personal and political lives. In this thesis, it is first argued that current underlying political and socio-economic conditions in Sierra Leone prevent the emergence of a true fourth estate, despite the efforts of MAPs. Secondly, it is argued that MAPs could have a greater impact through a more holistic approach to media assistance, engaging in institution-building to target the root causes of Sierra Leone's biased and politicized media landscape.

Résumé

La guerre civile au Sierra Leone a dévasté la population du pays et a détruit son infrastructure. Au cours de la dernière décennie, les organisations internationales ont fourni une assistance financière et technique à de nombreux domaines de la société, y compris les journalistes et les médias. Les programmes d'aide des médias (MAPs) sont conçus pour promouvoir la démocratisation et le développement en favorisant une presse libre et indépendante qui diffuse des informations précises et impartiales. Cette presse libre – connu aussi comme le quatrième état – est destinée à diffuser des informations sur la base desquelles les citoyens peuvent fonder des choix éclairés. Dans cette thèse, il est d'abord soutenu que les conditions politiques et socio-économiques au Sierra Leone empêchent l'émergence d'un véritable quatrième état, malgré les efforts des MAPs. Deuxièmement, il est soutenu que les MAPs peuvent améliorer leur impact grâce à une approche plus holistique de l'aide aux médias, en s'engageant au renforcement des institutions pour cibler la vraie cause du biais et la politisation des médias au Sierra Leone.

Preface

First and foremost, thanks are due to the people of Sierra Leone, who warmly welcomed me to their country and turned an intimidating undertaking into an enjoyable and productive experience. Those interviewed for this project are specifically appreciated for their generosity of mind and time, but all those who I had the pleasure of meeting left an indelible mark on this research.

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And last, but not least: to my family and friends. You have inspired and encouraged me to reach the top of this and other mountains. Thank-you does not even begin to cover it.

This project is dedicated to journalists worldwide who risk life and limb to report fairly, freely and without agenda. Everything else is just advertising.

Index of Abbreviations

APC	All People's Congress
AFRC	Armed Forces Revolutionary Council
CJFE	Canadian Journalists for Free Expression
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
CIMA	Center for International Media Assistance
CTN	Cotton Tree News
DFID	Department for International Development (U.K.)
FBC	Fourah Bay College
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNI	Gross National Income
GNP	Gross National Product
HDI	Human Development Index
IMC	Independent Media Commission
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IREX	International Research & Exchanges Board
JHR	Journalists for Human Rights
MAP	Media assistance project
NGO	Non-governmental organization
OSIWA	Open Society Institute for West Africa
RUF	Revolutionary United Front
SFCG	Search for Common Ground
SLAJ	Sierra Leone Association of Journalists
SLBC	Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation
SLBS	Sierra Leone Broadcasting Service (now SLBC)
SLPP	Sierra Leone People's Party
TDS	Talking Drum Studio
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United National Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

Introduction

As British publishing magnate Lord Northcliffe once said, "News is what somebody somewhere wants to suppress; all the rest is advertising." By disseminating information which some might prefer to sweep under the rug, the media are seen by many as a pillar of democracy, supporting the ideals of participation by providing information upon which citizens can make informed decisions in their political and personal lives. However, in many parts of the world the media does not – or cannot – fulfill this role. Authoritarian governments and systemic underdevelopment make it difficult for the press to operate freely, instead creating a media system in which biased, inaccurate and politicized information reigns – if information is shared at all.

In a bid to counteract these challenges to freedom of the press, international donors and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have developed media assistance projects – or MAPs – to promote and support democracy in the developing world. By providing aid to bolster the media's capabilities, it is believed that the press can play a role in spurring development and supporting democratic reforms through its role as the *fourth estate*, a function which will be discussed at length in the pages that follow. These MAPs originated in Latin America in the late 1980s and are now found in developing countries around the world. However, attempts to jump-start the democratic press have proven difficult in severely underdeveloped countries, and the case of Sierra Leone provides a prime example. Emerging from a brutal civil war which ended in the early 2000s,

Sierra Leone has struggled with the growing pains of democratization and socio-economic development, even with considerable foreign aid in many areas.

The challenges to the fourth estate in Sierra Leone extend beyond the scope of past and current MAPs in the country. First, it will be argued that the country's current political and socio-economic conditions create an untenable environment for a truly free press to emerge. Politically, the country's media landscape is characterized by repressive libel laws, lack of access to information and an absence of political will. Socio-economically, the media sector faces a lack of advertisers, low levels of education and literacy, and rampant bribery. These factors produce a politicized, impoverished and biased press which limits the effects of the fourth estate in Sierra Leone, despite media stakeholders' professed commitments to this ideal.

Second, it will be demonstrated that MAPs in Sierra Leone have failed to provide programming which deals with these systemic obstacles to the fourth estate, instead offering short-term "fixes" for the surface problems created by these challenges – such as donating recording equipment or conducting training on media ethics. It is argued that a more holistic view of development is required in order to affect significant and lasting change in the media sector, through a focus on MAPs which promote institution-building. Rather than treating the symptoms of the country's political and socio-economic ills, MAPs must dig deeper to identify the root causes of unprofessional media conduct, and develop strategies to strengthen news outlets for the long term.

After a review of relevant literature and methodology, this thesis will first explore the level of development in Sierra Leone. It will be shown that the poor

political and socio-economic conditions in the country preclude the media's ability to operate freely and objectively according to the ideals of the fourth estate. The following chapter will explore the activities of MAPs in Sierra Leone, assessing their effectiveness from the viewpoints of media stakeholders in the country and offering insight for future directions.

Literature Review

Before progressing further, it is necessary to offer a set of definitions to guide this study. In the context of this paper, the *media* are understood to be those channels used in an organized fashion to facilitate the spread of information to groups of people. Traditional Western journalism (newspapers, magazines, radio, television and – more recently – the Internet) remains at the forefront of this definition, but in the context of media assistance in the developing world some scholars expand the definition to cover more culturally-specific media outlets, such as street theatre, posters, traditional storytelling, and entertainment programming (e.g. soap operas) (Howard 2002). While these forms of information-sharing are discussed in passing, the focus of this paper mirrors the focus of most MAPs: traditional forms of journalism.

The *fourth estate* is a term used to describe the theorized role of the media in a democracy – an extra-governmental check on the power and conduct of the government and public-office holders, through dissemination of independently-collected information. (This concept will be explored in greater detail below, and is used interchangeably with the term *free press*.) The role of the fourth estate is

played by the *independent media*: those outlets whose content is not influenced or directly controlled by political figures or elites with personal motivations or particular viewpoints.[1]

Media managers are those who own or manage the business interests of a media outlet or group of outlets, responsible for long- and short-term strategy. In general they do not play a role in day-to-day news-gathering, although in Sierra Leone they can play a large role in influencing what is printed or broadcast. The specific functions of *MAPs* will be explained in further detail in later pages, but generally they are programs which provide training, material resources and support to individual journalists and media outlets in developing countries. For the purposes of this thesis, their effectiveness is understood in terms of how well they meet their stated goals of professionalizing and depoliticizing the media in order to promote a free and fair press devoted to the ideals of the fourth estate.

Overall, media assistance constitutes a small part of the development literature. According to preeminent media assistance scholar Krishna Kumar (2006b, 10), "despite substantial international investment in media assistance, little has been written about the field" due to the relative youth of such projects. However, the topic straddles two fields which offer more robust bodies of literature: aid effectiveness and the nexus of media and politics. In this chapter, current literature on the role of media in a political context will be explored and then tied together with a review of the smaller body of work on MAPs themselves, incorporating elements of the broader aid effectiveness literature.

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[1] In other literature, *independent media* sometimes refers to small-scale outlets not owned by media conglomerates.

Theories of the Press and Politics

A free press has long been theorized to play a central role in democratization, and much has been written on the role of media in politics and development. The media is seen as a conduit of information between the government and its population – an opportunity for civil society and the citizenry to gain insight upon which to make informed political decisions, and an arena in which the government can take stock of public mood and communicate their messages (O'Neil 1998, 1).

Although criticized for what some call a Western bias, Siebert, Peterson and Schramm (1963) provide a central political-press theory still relevant today. They pose "four theories" of the modern press, dividing press systems into the categories of *authoritarian*, *libertarian*, *communist* and *social responsibility*.[2] They argue that the press "takes on the form and coloration of the social and political structures within which it operates. Especially, it reflects the system of social control whereby the relations of individuals and institutions are adjusted" (Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm 1963, 1-2). This seminal work expands the two traditional theories of the press: the *authoritarian* theory, grounded in political thinkers such a Plato and Machiavelli, where "truth" is centred in the hands of those in power and thus the press functions from the top down; and the *libertarian* theory, grounded in the ideas of Milton, Locke and Mill, where every person is

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[2] Other notable scholars argue for similar but not identical classifications of the world's media systems: Altschull (1984) delineates three categories (*market*, *communist* and *development*) and Hachten and Scotton (2006) add *revolutionary*, *developmental* and *Western* theories of the press to Siebert, Peteron and Schramm's *authoritarian* and *communist*.

rational and can seek "truth," a journey in which the press becomes his/her partner.

For Siebert, Peterson and Schramm (1963, 5), libertarian theory is the precursor to the *social responsibility* theory of the press, which is most relevant to a discussion of the fourth estate. In the social responsibility theory, "the power and near monopoly position of the media impose on them an obligation to be socially responsible, to see that all sides are fairly presented and that the public has enough information to decide." This function of the press was first described by the 1947 Hutchins Commission (an American commission on freedom of the press) and endures today as the dominant model of journalism in the Western world.[3] It is within this theory of the press that the modern fourth estate is centred, drawing on libertarianism's Enlightenment-inspired value of reason. The Hutchins Commission laid out five responsibilities of the press: (1) provide a "truthful, comprehensive and intelligent account of the day's events in a context which gives them meaning," (2) function as a "forum for the exchange of comment and criticism" reflecting public opinion, (3) project to the public a "representative picture of the constituent groups in the society," (4) present and clarify the goals and values of society, and (5) provide "full access to the day's intelligence" (A Free and Responsible Press 1947, 20-28).

Drawing upon the legacy of the Hutchins Commission, the media's functions in a democracy are divided here into three, following the lead of Voltmer (2006): information provider, forum of ideas, and government watchdog.

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[3] The social responsibility function of the press was first posited by the Hutchins Commission but Siebert, Peterson and Schramm did much to popularize the theory (Merrill 2006, 4).

First, the media function as a *conduit of reliable information* upon which citizens can make informed political choices in their political and personal lives. The media work in what Habermas (1981) termed "the public sphere" – a space existing between the private family unit and the government, where public opinion develops on matters of common interest. This function of the media overlaps with its second function – the '*marketplace of ideas*' – a forum in which ideas can be openly and freely debated (Voltmer 2006).

However, there are inherent tensions in the media's proposed function as the marketplace of ideas. Gutmann and Thompson (1996) question whether public debate is really the best way of revealing "truth," or whether it may simply aggravate existing tensions, a concern which is brought up among MAPs which aim to promote reconciliation (one of which will be discussed in the following pages). Worse still, it may not be the "truth" which prevails, but rather the group which is able to present its argument most convincingly. There is also the question of partisan media and editorials: is the media is doing its job if it actively contributes opinions to the public debate, rather than reporting fact? (Voltmer 2006, 3)

The final function of the media in a democracy is as a *watchdog*. Reporters are meant to keep tabs on political actors and issues, reporting what they find to the public. A liberal democracy is supposed to (indirectly) devolve power to the people, meaning this information is crucial in the political decisions of the citizenry. As Dahl (1989) writes, in a democratic system where power is ultimately in the hands of the population, the capability of citizens to make informed choices is essential to the legitimacy of elections.

This function of the press is most closely tied to the term "fourth estate." The terminology takes its origins from Edmund Burke, a theorist of the British constitution who added the media to the three estates of Britain's Parliament.[4] Quoted by Thomas Carlyle towards the end of the eighteenth century, Burke said of the press: "whoever can speak, speaking now to the whole nation, becomes a power, a branch of government, with inalienable weight in lawmaking, in all acts of authority" (Ward 2004, 170). Free and fair elections constitute only a portion of a liberal democracy, and freedom of the press is one of the components of a democracy which remains active between elections in order to hold the government to account. Neatly summarized by Patrick H. O'Neil (1998, 1-2), the media's watchdog role in a democracy is as a

> vital conduit of relations between state and society. . . . Democracies are political systems that allow for the dispersal of power and public access to it, but liberal democratic theory also notes that such systems can be easily corrupted, thereby undermining participation and voice. . . . The media are expected to critically assess state action and provide such information to the public. Ideally, then, the media not only provide a link between rulers and the ruled but also impart information that can constrain the centralization of power and the obfuscation of illicit or unethical state action.

As a result of these theorized functions, the content of a democratic media is expected to be objective and fact-based,[5] as its job is to communicate "to the public, for the public" (Ward 2004, 26) and any bias or false information would

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[4] The Lords Temporal and the Lords Spiritual of the House of Lords, plus the House of Commons.
[5] Refers to news content, not editorials or commentary. The debate rages in the literature over whether true objectivity can be achieved, but for the purposes of this research it is enough to accept that objectivity is a goal towards which the media strives.

undermine this responsibility by tainting public opinion and dishonestly influencing citizens' actions.

It must be noted that this view is not universally held: Keane (1991) takes issue with the concept of the fourth estate in today's Western liberal democracies, developing an inherent tension between the fourth estate and market capitalism. He argues that the decline of public service broadcasting and increase in private media conglomeration has led to a form of "market censorship" as journalism becomes a money-making venture (influenced by advertising and elite interests). While Keane sees the media as a central tenet of liberal democracy, he emphasizes that this label applies only to public service broadcasters.

As most MAPs hold democratization as their chief goal, they are designed with the assumptions that (1) democracy is desirable, and (2) freedom of the press is a central tenet of democratization. However, the fact remains that all nations face – or have faced – barriers to media development and the consolidation of the fourth estate (Parsons 2004). The role of the press in Britain or Canada today is much different than the roles and capabilities of the press in these nations 200 years ago. The creation of a free media sector which can promote democracy depends not only on the skills and resources of the media actors within a country, but also many factors outside the media's control (Hamilton and Krimsky 1998).

According to the media paradigm constructed by Hiebert, Ungurait and Bohn, the relationship between the media and society moves in both directions: "a country creates a national media system, and this media system in turn modifies that country" (1979, 35). They identify six types of possible barriers to media development: (1) physical/geographical, (2) access to technology, (3) cultural

attributes, (4) economic conditions, (5) political environment, and (6) media qualities. Some of these challenges are present in Sierra Leone and will be discussed in the following chapter, directly relating to the work of Jones (2001). He offers what he sees as the two most important variables which condition the development of the media: (1) the degree of underdevelopment, and (2) the degree of regime authoritarianism, both of which are important variables in the case of Sierra Leone.

The fourth estate, as it is discussed here, is an inherently Western concept. It is, however, the function of the press that media development programs generally propagate, as MAPs are almost exclusively designed and funded by Western countries. Merrill notes that considering the topic of the fourth estate internationally can problematic, as the importance of freedom of the press stems from Euro-American assumptions which may not be shared by those living in Africa, the Middle East and parts of Latin America and Asia (2006, 17). This tension will be explored in the following section.

International Media Assistance and Aid Effectiveness

There is a small but growing body of literature on MAPs. MAPs fit into the larger category of international development and democracy assistance, and for this reason relevant portions of the aid effectiveness literature have been incorporated into this review of current literature on the topic of MAPs.

By way of definition, Price, Noll and DeLuce (2002, 2-4) offer a comprehensive list of initiatives that should be considered media assistance activities:

- Journalism education and training for reporters and editors

- Training for media managers in marketing, business management and financial independence

- Efforts to transform state broadcasters into public service broadcasters

- Training for media actors in journalism ethics, accountability and professionalism

- Material assistance in the form of funding and/or equipment

- Developing networks of independent media

- Promotion of democratic legal and regulatory frameworks for media

- Development of trade associations for journalists and media actors

- Support and training for legal defence for journalists, and support for legal advocacy

- Conflict-prevention initiatives which provide education for journalists on methods of reporting conflict which will not exacerbate the situation

- Security training for journalists working in dangerous and/or volatile situations

- Social and cultural development for community journalism

- Assistance for incorporation of new communications technology (such as mobile phones or the Internet)

Kumar (2006a) is one of the best-known scholars on media assistance, detailing the origins of MAPs and the issues they face today. He places the roots of media assistance in the democratic reforms which swept Africa, Asia and Latin America in the late 1980s, during what Huntington called the "third wave" of

democratization. In order to support these democratic changes, international donors hurried to develop programs to encourage democracy through civil society, rule of law, economic and political decentralization, and free and fair elections. However, these donors soon concluded that a free press also is a crucial element of democratic consolidation, to promote the "free and unfettered flow" of information and ideas.

MAPs emerged first in Latin America during this era, but were modest endeavours (Kumar 2006a, 653). The underground press's role in the fall of communism in Eastern Europe and Central Asia further solidified the potential of media assistance, and by the mid-1990s projects were being implemented in civil-war-torn countries around the world. Kumar suggests that MAPs have been generally successful insofar as they have established independent media outlets, improved professional standards, improved viability and profitability, reformed media legislation and promoted civil society organizations committed to press freedom (2006a, 661).

However, Kumar (2006b, 157-165) raises a series of shortcomings in current MAPs: a lack of attention paid to closed regimes (authoritarian or semi-democratic), a short-term focus, an ignorance of the importance of local radio, a failure to exert political pressure on repressive press laws, a lack of engagement with non-Western democracies (such as Brazil or Japan), poor coordination, and blurred lines between media development and public diplomacy (projects designed to promote the interests of a foreign power through sponsored media content). Price, Noll and DeLuce (2002) also highlight areas for improvement in MAP implementation, some of which overlap with Kumar: donor coordination,

small pool of expertise, conflicting philosophies of the press, lack of evaluation, underdeveloped support structures, lack of local partner involvement, and a failure to incorporate "new media" (i.e. the Internet). These criticisms – primarily those centring on a short-term focus, lack of donor coordination and an emphasis on Western discourse – will be discussed in more detail in the pages that follow.

Taking a more theoretical and historical approach, O'Neil (1998) roots the origins of media assistance in modernization theory, which equates a Western-style fourth estate with modernity. As modernization theory fell away as a paradigm for understanding the media, he writes that it was replaced in the 1970s with an idealist view of media as an "agent of positive social change" (drawing its roots from dependency theory). This idealist view was then replaced by "a more radical view of the media as a tool of (global) capitalist domination and imperialism" (O'Neil 1998, 4-5). O'Neil criticizes these theories for their state-centred analysis which presents the public as an entity to be acted upon by the media, instead of a force which can use the media towards their own ends. O'Neil also explores what he sees as a trend of ignoring the media's role in shaping a country prior to its democratic transition, and criticizes an overemphasis on elites' power to shape the future, stating "the wider institutional environment – existing political, cultural and market patterns – is likely to constrain and inform political choices, influencing the kinds of changes that can occur" (1998, 7). These broader constraints of society are certainly present in Sierra Leone, a topic which will be explored in-depth in following sections.

Miller (2009) also takes issue with the underlying assumptions of most MAPs: that the Western media is a suitable model for media development

worldwide. Citing the "inescapably political character of Western media assistance," Miller roots his argument in the shortcomings of modernization theory and adds a second variable: the self-interest of Western nations in the "war of ideas" during the Cold War. He characterizes MAPs as seeking to "universalize the local" through the imposition of Western ideas and methods (2009, 15). His analysis focuses on the power of NGOs in media assistance, as NGOs are almost always the intermediaries in MAPs. Using funding from donor governments, they are generally the entities that carry out the programming on the ground. Miller argues that NGOs further reinforce attempts to universalize journalism, as they are primarily a product of the developed world and therefore are shaped by the Western experience. Jones (2001) adds to this viewpoint, asserting that it is impossible to speak of the "universal journalist," as a journalist's professional values are contingent on political, social and economic forces.

Hamilton and Krimsky (1998) also caution against a West-centric approach to media development, highlighting countries in which diverse approaches to media have supported democracy. They emphasize the importance of considering a media system in the context of its greater political and economic constraints, promoting a more "culturally-sensitive" approach to MAPs. Berger (2000, 90) expands on this view, stating, "Much of this theorizing – about media and democracy, the information society, globalization . . . – is often conducted in splendid oblivion of conditions in the Third World. It would be wrong, therefore, to assume that what might constitute an emphasis for democratic journalism in the First World is the same as the Third, although the influence of the dominant First on the Third is highly significant." O'Brien (1979) writes of the double impact of

media training designed in the West: it impedes autonomous development by limiting groups' initiatives and originality, and it reduces local ownership by drawing the media away from the cultural base and resources of the target communities.

Essentially, according to these theorists, the Western concept of journalism practices "value exclusion," meaning the skills and institutions of the profession are constructed in such a way to place objectivity and press freedom as the paramount goal (Jimada 1992), with little attention to the unique constraints of each individual case. Western media practitioners construct institutions in the developing world in the image of Western institutions, with little consideration of the applicability of such institutions to recipient countries. Such concerns stem in part from cultural relativity theory, which holds communication to be culture-bound (Jimada 1992). As a step towards a more relevant system of media assistance, Kumar (2006b) advocates the inclusion of non-Western democracies in program design, such as Brazil or South Africa. "As compared to their Western counterparts," he writes (2006b, 163), "media experts from non-Western democracies are more likely to have a deeper understanding of the media landscape of a recipient country and the challenges posed by it."

This concern over Western-centric aid is explored in the broader aid effectiveness literature, as well. As the international donor community is largely comprised of rich industrialized nations, it is not surprising that most aid programs are designed by Western practitioners. Many academics have criticized the approach taken by some of these programs, which impose on the developing world institutions and structures which are modelled on the experiences of North

America and Europe. As some argue, these programs are often based on flawed assumptions, or disregard country-specific approaches (deZeeuw 2005). African development scholar Yash Tandon (2008, 128) writes, "For far too long the debate on development aid has been constrained by conceptual traps and the limitations of the definitions provided by donors." While he does not discount the Western liberal ideals such as rule of law or democracy, he contends that these ideals cannot be imposed on the developing world from outside, and "certainly not loaded on to the wagon called 'development aid,'" but instead the framing of conceptual issues in development must be transferred from the global North to the South (Tandon 2008, 129).

Aid economist William Easterly (2008, 6) reinforces this point, writing, "The utopian expectations of what foreign aid should do often create an unfortunate approach to aid. Seventeen years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, there is only one major area of the world in which something that sounds a lot like central planning is still seen as a way to achieve prosperity: countries that receive foreign aid." Easterly emphasizes the misguided approach of "planners," who equate plans, strategies and frameworks developed in the West with a solution to global poverty. Instead, Easterly advocates for "searchers" who "explore solutions by trial and error, have a way to get feedback on the ones that work, and then expand the ones that work, all of this in an unplanned, spontaneous way" (2008, 6). Of course, the idea is not to dispense with planning altogether – small-p plans are still necessary in order to "scale-up" the programming that is found to be successful. Essentially, he argues that aid practitioners must abandon inflexible development strategies and instead engage with the populations in developing

countries to actually pinpoint plausible solutions. As Easterly (2008, 12) writes,
"Planners in the West have no way to use the knowledge of the poor people
themselves about their own needs and problems."

The non-academic literature (reports, project assessments, etc.) on MAPs
offers insight as well, and the Center for International Media Assistance (CIMA)
provides a considerable amount of this background information. Particularly
relevant in the discussion of Western-centric programming is a CIMA report by
Farah and Mosher (2010) which outlines China's increasing involvement in
providing media assistance to developing countries, aiming to model emerging
media systems in the image of its own state-run outlets. While Chinese
involvement in the media sphere offers an alternative to the Western constructs of
media, the same concerns over cultural imperialism and value exclusion can be
levelled at China's media development programs.

In addition to his academic work, Kumar (2009) wrote a report for CIMA
in which he echoes some of the concerns raised regarding project design. In
arguing that international media assistance must be tailored to the landscape of a
recipient country, Kumar categorizes developing countries as *authoritarian*,
democratizing, *war-torn* or *post-conflict* and advocates for individual approaches
to programming based on these categories. However, LaMay (2007) notes that
media aid to authoritarian and war-torn countries can only be minimally effective
due to logistical constraints, aside from direct material assistance to underground
or opposition media.

Also writing for CIMA, Myers (2009) notes that media assistance is on the
rise (or at least holding steady), the five top donors being the United States,

Germany, France, the United Kingdom and Japan. Myers found that media assistance trends and issues are difficult to pinpoint as program approaches are very diverse, but she highlights ad-hoc programs and a lack of institution-building as a hallmark of MAPs. This shortage of institution-building is central to criticisms of MAPs in Sierra Leone, and is present in the academic literature as well – as Ghani and Lockhart (2009, 108) write about the international aid complex, "Despite having operated for sixty years in some countries, the aid system still retains a short-term horizon." For many years, the prevailing view within the democratization literature held that democracies were likely to emerge if certain structural preconditions were met, however de Zeeuw (2005) notes the complexity of promoting institutions that are sustainable in the long term. Looking at the fields of elections, human rights and the media in eight developing countries, he highlights the success of international democracy assistance in setting up new institutions and organizations, but argues that this short-term aid has not resulted in the consolidation of effective democratic institutions which remain functional in the long term.

Moreover, a lack of donor coordination further complicates any institution-building efforts. Uncoordinated aid leads to the creation of aid darlings and aid orphans – whereby some countries or regions are flooded with aid while others are left out in the cold (DFID 2005). Similar issues of coordination are found at the state level, where there is a risk that uncoordinated donors will replicate one another's work or, even worse, work at cross-purposes. As Grindle (2004, 528-530) points out, the "long and lengthening" aid agenda creates "a multitude of governance reforms [that] are being undertaken at the same time,

differentially supported by a plethora of donors often with little thought to their sequencing, their interdependence, or their relative contributions to the overall goal." Institution-building cannot happen overnight, nor does any one agency have the resources and capacities to foster such undertakings on their own – it requires cooperation. But because aid is overwhelmingly short-term and lacks coordination between agencies, the results cannot lay the groundwork for any meaningful long-term institution-building.

Such issues have been observed in the media assistance realm specifically. Generally speaking, media assistance programs worldwide have sought to solve immediate problems faced by media sectors (e.g. lack of audio recorders or trained reporters) but as Kumar (2006b) writes, "Such assistance does not necessarily build indigenous capacities to deal with such problems in the future." Rather than developing local marketing savvy and business plans, international actors sometimes run the business operations of media outlets using external donor funding – which is not a long-term solution to the void of successful media operations. Kumar also details the importance of donor coordination in media assistance programming, to use resources efficiently towards the common goal of institution-building.

The theoretical approach of this paper draws upon this legacy of contributions to the fields of aid effectiveness and media development. While research indicated that media stakeholders in Sierra Leone were not opposed on an ideological level to a Western-style fourth estate, problems of aid effectiveness remain in actually implementing such a system. The media corps in Sierra Leone do not take issue with the inherent Western assumptions regarding the fourth

estate as an ideal function of the media system. However, they do express more nuanced concerns about the methods and strategies with which MAPs attempt to foster a fourth estate, suggesting that international media practitioners do not fully recognize the reality on the ground in the country.

Research Methodology

The following research was conducted in May and June 2010, in Freetown, Sierra Leone. Eighteen media stakeholders[6] were interviewed in-person by the author. The interviews were semi-structured to compensate for the lack of established literature on the topic and to allow for exploration of topics revealed after arrival in the field. All but one of the interviewees were Sierra Leonean nationals, as the intent of the research is to offer an ethnographic approach to media development in the country.

The limited past research in this field dealt with issues of programming relevance from an outsider's perspective, while the aim of this thesis is to assess programming shortfalls from viewpoints within Sierra Leone's media sector. Therefore, an ethnographic approach was chosen to allow for assessments of the applicability of current media programming to the promotion of press freedom, and the possible underlying reasons for any lack of applicability. Of course, ethnographies present the possibility of subjectivity through researcher and

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[6] Each interviewee self-identified as falling into one or more of these categories: Journalist, photojournalist, editor, media manager, democracy activist, communications student and/or government actor.

participant bias, but the potential benefit of acquiring a deeper, fresh context for media assistance in Sierra Leone outweighs this drawback.

A snowball sampling technique was used to select interview participants. An initial list of potential interviewees was supplied by Stephen Douglas, the Sierra Leone country director for Journalists for Human Rights, a media development NGO based in Canada. As communications systems in Sierra Leone are rudimentary and social connections rely on personal relationships, it was not possible to identify a comprehensive list of potential participants before entering the field. Appendix A provides a complete list of participants. Informed consent was obtained orally for each participant, and three participants remain anonymous as per their wishes. The interview research was conducted in compliance with the McGill Research Ethics Board, and has been bolstered with documentary research.

Systemic Challenges to Media Development in Sierra Leone

Before asking whether the fourth estate is something that *can* be achieved in Sierra Leone (and if so, how), a more basic question must be answered: do media stakeholders in Sierra Leone think it *should* be achieved? This relates to a central tension explored in the media development literature, centring on the criticism that media development practitioners take a Western approach to MAPs, ignoring the local and cultural landscapes in which they operate. As most programs in Sierra Leone state their aims of developing the fourth estate (an

inherently Western construct), the question must be asked: does the ideal of the fourth estate resonate with media stakeholders in Sierra Leone?

Resoundingly, the answer is yes. Of those media stakeholders interviewed, all indicated that they saw a place for the media as a watchdog over the government, providing a marketplace of ideas for the citizens of Sierra Leone. While no baseline study exists to indicate whether this is a product of Western influence in the country or if it was the case before MAPs became widespread in Sierra Leone, the fact remains that media stakeholders in Sierra Leone today respect the ideal of the fourth estate and wish to see their media system progress towards that goal. Most participants expanded their definition of the media's role beyond the fourth estate, including responsibilities such as informing the public on social issues (taking care to explain complex issues in accessible ways), promoting development and entertaining their audiences. These perceived roles are not unique to Sierra Leone – such aims can be found in the Western media, as well.

Having established that media stakeholders in Sierra Leone recognize and strive towards the ideal of the fourth estate, the challenges in reaching this level of press freedom can be discussed. The media of Sierra Leone do not operate in a vacuum. As in any country, the political and socio-economic conditions in Sierra Leone are an integral factor in fostering a free press, and until these conditions are ripe the media cannot fully step into a role as the fourth estate. It remains to be seen whether the future media will play this role in Sierra Leone, but this chapter argues that journalists certainly cannot be expected to play that role at the present, due to systemic obstacles to media development. In short, Sierra Leone's low

level of development erects political and socio-economic barriers to the growth of a free press, inhibiting the domestic media's ability to function as the fourth estate – despite international assistance to the media sector.

This chapter will begin with a brief discussion of the relevant history of Sierra Leone in order to provide context for the bulk of the section: the current obstacles to the fourth estate in Sierra Leone. These obstacles are roughly divided into political and socio-economic categories, although many factors are interlinked and co-dependent. In this section it will be demonstrated that Sierra Leone still faces considerable challenges to media development 10 years after MAPs first made an appearance in the country. The intent here is to demonstrate the dependence of media systems on other developmental factors; the media cannot be developed in isolation. For this reason, MAPs will be discussed only in passing throughout this chapter. The bulk of the discussion on the actual impacts of MAPs in Sierra Leone will be discussed in the following chapter, highlighting the reasons that these challenges remain.

A Brief History of Sierra Leone

In January 1801, the *Sierra Leone Gazette* – one of the first newspapers on the continent of Africa – rolled off the presses in Freetown. The country became a hub of journalistic activity in the region, and its pioneering trend continued in 1934 when Sierra Leone became home to the first wireless radio service in British West Africa. In this era, the press was subject to Britain's common law and enjoyed relatively free conditions, eventually becoming a catalyst for the national independence struggle (Cole 1995).

However, by the time Sierra Leone achieved independence from Britain in April 1961, the country's media no longer boasted leadership in the field. Broadcasting infrastructure had fallen behind that of its neighbours Nigeria and Ghana (Holmes 1999) and newspapers remained an urban phenomenon (Cole 1995). Moreover, only eight percent of the population was literate, prompting low newspaper circulation and therefore preventing the growth of newspapers' economic bases. The legacy of the colonial regime also influenced new rulers' attitudes towards the press: the strength of the media in bringing down the colonial regime led them to repress the media out of fear that the media could erode their own bases of support (Cole 1995, 17). This supports the argument that a free press is an essential force in political mobilization and democratization, as authoritarian leaders the world over tend to engage in repression of the media.

Between 1961 and 1991, Sierra Leone was governed by a series of authoritarian leaders, "trampling individual freedom and undermining the growth of democratic institutions" (Kumar 2006b, 142). In 1991, the ruling All People's Congress (APC) responded to domestic pressure and began to liberalize public life, only to be embroiled in a civil war with the rebel Revolutionary United Front (RUF), which aimed to oust the APC from power with the support of Liberia's Charles Taylor (Sesay and Hughes 2005). Domestic political mismanagement and foreign exploitation of diamond resources – not ethnic or religious tensions – were at the heart of the conflict, but the warring factions exploited ethnic identities to "prolong and sustain violence" (Kumar 2006b, 142). By the time the fighting officially ended in 2002, approximately 75,000 Sierra Leoneans had perished, at least 40 percent of the population was displaced and between 45,000

and 70,000 fighters were demobilized and beginning the difficult task of reintegration (Zack-Williams 2010, 26). Moreover, the physical and institutional infrastructure of the country was in disarray (Kumar 2006b, 143).

During the civil war, the media did not speak with a single voice. While individual news outlets were critical of the government and/or rebels, the circumstances did not devolve into a situation akin to Rwanda, where radio programs deliberately encouraged violence through broadcasts based on ethnic divisionism. Sierra Leone's media also played a role in mobilizing the population in defence of democracy, after the military coup of 1997 overturned the democratic election of the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) to establish the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC). However, the strength of the media in speaking out against the AFRC ultimately led to harsh penalties for media outlets and freedom of the press during this period.

During the war, safe operating environments for the media were mainly in government-controlled areas, which introduced a natural bias to reporting. Furthermore, the lack of professionalism and education among media actors meant reporters had a difficult time properly contextualizing conflict-related stories. Editorial subtleties were overlooked, and some reporting actually constituted a security threat (such as the reporting of troop movements and deployment). This lack of professionalism did nothing to strengthen relations between the government and the press (Sesay and Hughes 2005). The media's reputation was sullied by accusations of biased reporting, which Khan (1998) found to be a legitimate criticism of the media during the war. He noted the difficulty of distinguishing between deliberate and unintentional bias when

reporting in difficult conditions such as a war zone, but the fact remains that the perception of bias within the media did not win any friends for the profession. Moreover, the hostilities prompted about 70 percent of trained media professionals to flee the country, although some returned when the fighting subsided (Wahl-Jorgensen and Cole 2006).

At the end of the war, the media sector was in total disorder: fewer than 10 independent newspapers remained and published at irregular intervals, depending on the supply of newsprint and other resources such as electricity. Only two papers owned printing presses, meaning the remaining papers had to count on unreliable commercial presses. The biggest newspaper sold no more than 3,000 copies per day, and no distribution network existed to transport newspapers to the provinces (Sesay and Hughes 2005). Four radio stations remained, two in Freetown and two in the provinces. The government owned the only television station, as well as an FM radio station and a newspaper, all of which were mouthpieces for government interests. Lacking viable economic models, independent media outlets "depended on the generosity of important clients, particularly international donor agencies" (Kumar 2006b, 143). Professional standards in the media had sunk to an all-time low – most journalists were in the profession simply because they lacked any other employment options (Sesay and Hughes 2005). Finally, the only training facilities for journalists existed at Fourah Bay College (FBC, the only national university), with extremely limited resources – no computers, editing suites or television and radio equipment, a shortage of classrooms and few qualified lecturers or professors (Sesay and Hughes 2005, 98).

It was in this atmosphere that the international community began to provide large-scale aid to Sierra Leone. A 17,000-strong U.N. peacekeeping force was installed in the country in 1999, stabilizing the region and creating the opportunity for rebuilding to begin.[7] Immediate international aid focused on emergency relief, but by 2003 longer-term development strategies began to replace short-term relief (M'Cormack-Hale 2010). Media assistance was provided in the form of financial and technical assistance, ranging from training of journalists to provision of equipment to media outlets (Kumar 2006b). The main providers of financial assistance were the U.K.'s Department for International Development (DFID), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Open Society Institute for West Africa (OSIWA).

As is common in development projects, these funding agencies worked through intermediary organizations which delivered the programming in-country. The main media development NGOs in Sierra Leone were/are: the Thomson Foundation, Search for Common Ground (SFCG), Fondation Hirondelle, Canadian Journalists for Free Expression (CJFE), the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ), and Journalists for Human Rights (JHR). While each project has its own specific goals, these programs focused on the creation of a free press,

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[7] The Lomé Peace Accords were signed in July 1999 by the RUF and the Government of Sierra Leone, laying out provisions for a cease-fire, a U.N. peacekeeping force, future governance structures and a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Mustapha and Bangura 2010). The war was declared officially over in 2002.

improved journalistic standards based on the ideals of objectivity, and the promotion of democracy and democratic discourse (Sesay and Hughes 2005).

While it is not disputed that these MAPs have made a difference in the media landscape in Sierra Leone, too many factors integral to the growth and independence of the media fall outside the realm of these programs, leading to an untenable environment for the emergence of a true fourth estate in the country. Instead, the media environment in Sierra Leone today can be characterized as politicized, biased and unstable – the reasons for which will be elaborated upon in the following sections.

Sierra Leone Today: Political Challenges to the Fourth Estate

The role of the media in placing pressure on public officials is not a one-way street. The political environment of a country plays a role in shaping the actions of the press – restrictive media legislation or an unfriendly mentality can influence the behaviour of journalists and media actors (Hyden and Leslie 2002). State barriers to press freedom are currently strongest in Africa and the Middle East, where political elites fear that the mass media can be used to mobilize public opinion against elite interests. Where governments do not (or cannot) directly control the media, barriers to control the press – such as censorship or licensing – are often erected or retained from previous governments (Parsons 2004).

In Sierra Leone, this phenomenon is best exemplified by the Public Order Act. The statute was passed in 1965, and aims at promoting public peace and order through provisions dealing with issues such as weapons, trespassing, and public drunkenness. Of specific relevance to journalists is Section V, which deals

with defamation and renders libel a criminal offense (*The Public Order Act, 1965*). While this is seen by many journalists in Sierra Leone as a draconian law, in fact some developed countries have criminal libel laws on their books.[8] The difference is that criminal libel charges are brought only in extreme cases in the developed world, while journalists in Sierra Leone see the government's frequent use (or threat of use) of the Public Order Act as a major impediment to free speech in the country.

Libel laws are a necessary component of a democratic society (to protect citizens from unjustified and damaging public claims, mitigating problems of biased reporting), but the Public Order Act has been used by government officials to punish or intimidate journalists who speak out against policies or individuals within the government. Under the act, truth is not considered a defence – the journalist must prove that the claims are true *and* that it is in the public interest for the claims to be disseminated. As "public interest" is not an easily-defined term, the fate of the case comes down to individual judges' interpretations – and in a country ranked as one of the most corrupt in the world, the judicial system does not escape this label (Corruption Perceptions Index 2010).

Moreover, the law allows prosecutors to charge all those who played a role in the dissemination of the material. Everyone from the newspaper's financiers to the owner of the printing press can face criminal charges, whether or not they were aware of the content in question. More than one interviewee indicated that the Public Order Act discourages investment in the media, for fear that an investor

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[8] Canada's criminal code contains provisions for libel and slander, but the law is used infrequently.

could be arrested if his or her outlet publishes or broadcasts something the government does not like. Wahl-Jorgensen and Cole (2006, 15) quote the editor of *The Democrat* newspaper: "in my opinion, the Public Order Act is infringing on the freedom of expression. Most people are afraid to invest in the newspaper industry because of the Public Order Act. If there is a libel suit against any newspaper the proprietor might lose everything." The act also prompts censorship on behalf of printing press owners, who inspect the content of newspapers and decline to publish it if they are concerned it may anger political elites. The country's main association for journalists, SLAJ, is one of the most outspoken opponents of the Public Order Act and launched a court challenge to the law, but the Supreme Court upheld the libel provisions of the act in November 2009 (Freedom of the Press 2010).

In the interest of providing a rounded viewpoint, it is necessary here to extrapolate the argument for upholding the Public Order Act, as explained by SLAJ's Public Affairs Officer, Sayoh Kamara. The alternative to criminal libel laws is civil libel legislation, but civil court cases are not necessarily realistic in Sierra Leone. First of all, those who feel they have been libelled may not be able to afford to hire an attorney and take the case to court (the law covers seditious libel as well as defamation of private citizens). Second, many media outlets would have little to lose by being sued. The low economic development of the media sector (which will be discussed at length in the following section) leaves outlets hungry for sales, and salacious headlines can sell papers even if the stories are untrue. If an outlet was to be sued under civil legislation it could simply declare bankruptcy, since the newspaper business is not particularly lucrative from the

outset. Thus, financial damages are not seen as an adequately powerful deterrent – but jail time is. Although they recognize the need for the protection of citizens, SLAJ remains opposed to the Public Order Act because, as Sayoh Kamara points out, the major flaw with this argument is that the Public Order Act is not used for its intended purpose of protecting citizens. Instead, it is used to threaten journalists who are seen as enemies of the government, whether they have actually disseminated libellous stories or just stories which displease political elites.

The regulatory framework for the media in Sierra Leone is also left wanting. The Independent Media Commission (IMC) was created in 2000 as a regulatory body for journalistic practice. It was given the task of granting newspaper and broadcast licenses (and retains the ability to revoke them), as well as developing a code of practice for journalists and media outlets. The IMC has long been criticized for its inefficacy and lack of enforcement: one of the IMC's first acts after inception was to ban an independent paper, the *African Champion*, but the newspaper ignored the ban and continued to publish without further reprisal (Sesay and Hughes 2005). The IMC has increased in strength in more recent years, successfully ending the broadcasts of Unity Radio and Voice of the Rising Sun. The stations were owned by the two major political parties in Sierra Leone – the ruling APC owned Voice of the Rising Sun and the SLPP ran Unity Radio – meaning the reasons for the closures are unlikely to be politically

motivated.[9] These competing radio stations were deemed to be broadcasting

inciting and inflammatory material to "stigmatise and demonise each others'

political leaders and parties, resulting in reprisals that threaten the peace and

security of the state," and the IMC played a central role shutting them down (IMC

2008). These closures were highlighted by participants as a triumph for the fourth

estate in Sierra Leone.

Nevertheless, interviews with media stakeholders revealed mixed feelings

on the commission's role in the country. Overall, the main complaint – raised by

more than half of the interviewees – was the IMC's lack of "teeth" in enforcing its

regulations and rulings. Those media outlets which violate the IMC's code of

practice[10] are not punished unless a complaint is made by a member of the public.

And, when a complaint is brought in front of the IMC and the media outlet is

found to be in the wrong, it is not compelled to pay its fines because of lax

follow-up by the commission.[11] In all, many interviewees advocated for a more

active IMC which independently monitors media activity in the country and

punishes those who violate the code of practice, taking stronger measures to

ensure compliance (such as revoking broadcast or printing licenses).

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[9] Together, the two parties hold 102 of the 124 seats in the legislature (of the remaining 22 seats, 10 were won by the People's Movement for Democratic Change and 12 are reserved for traditional chiefs). Combined, the APC and SLPP garnered about 80 percent of the popular vote in the last election, indicating that they represent the main political currents in the country.

[10] The IMC Code of Practice is an 83-page document outlining rules and regulations to guide journalists' day-to-day activities. It states that the media should follow the objectives of democratization, popular participation, equity and access to information and communication, freedom of expression, pluralism and diversity, cultural promotion and preservation, responsibility, communication rights, and coherence with other social/sectoral policies. Interviewees held a generally positive view of the document and its objectives and ideals.

[11] These assertions were confirmed by the high commissioner of the IMC, Bernadette Cole, who stated that the IMC's lack of enforcement is aimed at slowly acclimatizing media outlets to the IMC's rules and code of conduct. She said rulings will be enforced more stringently at an undetermined point in the future.

Existing legislation and regulation are not the only political obstacles found in the country – a lack of legislation also plays a role in impeding freedom of the press in Sierra Leone. Without legislation which guarantees access to information (such as the *Freedom of Information Act* in the United States, or Canada's *Access to Information Act*), journalists rely on individuals within the government to provide reliable information. Left to the discretion of public officials, journalists find it difficult to attain any information which the government does not want released. Benjamin Pratt, a freelance reporter, says government officials regularly claim that it is against government policy to give out certain information, or that it violates the secrecy legislation. Without access to information, SLAJ's Sayoh Kamara says, "as long as government continues to maintain secrecy, journalists will continue to speculate and report inaccurately." The removal of the Public Order Act and the creation of an access to information act are currently SLAJ's two central goals for political advancements in the country.

Taken together, the oppressive libel laws and the lack of media-supporting legislation indicate that political will in Sierra Leone is lacking when it comes to the rights of journalists and freedom of information. This unfriendly regulatory environment also speaks to the ineffectiveness of civil society and independent media organizations in pushing their agendas forward – they lack the institutional strength to impact government actions. Despite many other changes to the general legal and regulatory framework of Sierra Leone over the last 45 years, and despite the widespread civil society opposition to the Public Order Act, the law remains on the books.

This lack of political will ties into the final, and perhaps most pressing, element of the political barriers to the fourth estate in Sierra Leone: the culture of media relations within the government. The fourth estate is reliant on a political culture which values and works with the media (Hamilton and Krimsky 1998) and in the case of Sierra Leone, the attitudes of political officials do not lead to a fruitful relationship. Because there are no laws which compel the government to share information with reporters (or the public), officials only cooperate with the media when they see it as in their best interests to do so. As Kelvin Lewis, editor of the newspaper *Awoko*[12] says, "the government wouldn't admit it, but they need to be trained how to talk to the media so that there will be more access to information." However, democracy activist and former journalist Charlie Hughes says the government is unlikely to welcome more information-sharing or professional relationships with journalists, as political actors benefit from an unprofessional media. "It is difficult for the government to have any desire to raise the quality of the media in Sierra Leone," he says, because a poorly paid and untrained reporter does not take his/her job seriously and will not strive towards the ideals of the fourth estate. Furthermore, politicians can benefit from the willingness of "bad" journalists to take bribes in return for favourable coverage, a topic which will be further discussed in the following section.

More seriously, journalists have reported physical violence at the hands of political supporters of the APC and the SLPP. In May 2009, editor of the *New People* newspaper, Sitta Turay, was stabbed by APC loyalists for "allegedly

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[12] In a recent study, *Awoko* was favoured by the Sierra Leonean public in terms of regularity, clarity, newsworthiness, reliable information and quality printing (IMC 2008).

defaming the president" (Freedom of the Press 2010). David Jabati, editor of the newspaper *The Exclusive*, said he has been beaten twice in political contexts – once by supporters of the APC when he was covering politically-motivated violence outside the SLPP headquarters, and once by SLPP officials while taking pictures at a party convention (to which he had been invited as a journalist). He said, "I really wanted to show to my readers that [the SLPP] finally amended their constitution but it was not an easy job, so I had a camera to capture the scene and I was beaten seriously . . . by the supporters of the party youth." Jabati said there is a need for an association for journalists who have been physically assaulted in their line of work, as he is "not alone, there are a lot of us who have been violated." More than half of interviewees had experienced violence, witnessed it, and/or felt it was a large obstacle to journalists in Sierra Leone.[13] This lack of respect for the media extends into society as a whole. Many interviewees reported experiencing poor public attitudes towards journalists, which reflects a wider trend of low expectations of journalists in Sub-Saharan Africa (Wahl-Jorgensen and Cole 2006).

In a sense, the political environment in Sierra Leone is a self-perpetuating problem: unable to attain the resources needed to behave as a proper fourth estate, the media acts unprofessionally (publishing sensational, biased, inaccurate, and even outright false stories). As a result, the media can be discounted as "unprofessional" by the political elite, and therefore they are not provided with the resources that are available to the media in the developed world (access-to-

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[13] Some journalists were simply in the wrong place at the wrong time, but others were attacked for their reporting on political issues – whether or not they were reporting accurately and fairly.

information laws, cooperative relationships with political figures, etc.).[14]

Certainly, this is not a new phenomenon in the country. Writing during the civil

war, Cole outlined many of the problems still present in Sierra Leone today:

excessive government control, intimidation and harassment, and one-sided

coverage generally favouring the government (1995, 60). There are, however,

signs that the situation is improving: Freedom House reports a significant decline

in the number of attacks against journalists in recent years (Freedom of the Press

2010), and the current APC president, Ernest Bai Koroma, campaigned on a

promise to abolish the Public Order Act, although no action has been taken thus

far. Nevertheless, these aforementioned political factors tie into the low level of

political development in Sierra Leone. Without suitable press laws which are used

as intended, a sufficient regulatory framework, a civil service which values (or at

least recognizes) the vital role of the media, or a political culture which respects

the physical safety of journalists, the media cannot become an effective fourth

estate.

Sierra Leone Today: Socio-Economic Challenges to the Fourth Estate

As Hamilton and Krimsky (1998, 89) write, "A truly independent press, in

the financial and editorial sense, is more difficult to create than a market

economy, because a self supporting media system requires a free-market system

as a precondition. Without the means to earn its own way through advertising and

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[14] This attitude may be intentional on behalf of the political elite (it is to their advantage to encourage a biased and unprofessional press which is thus easier to manipulate), or it may simply be a result of apathy towards the media.

profit-making ventures, a press must be linked to special interests – such as a government, a party or narrow business concern." Countries that boast "strong national economies, stable monetary systems and educated workforces tend to be nations with well-developed media systems" (Parsons 2004, 55), and in Africa, "printing technology, broadcasting facilities and information dissemination infrastructure . . . have generally tended to develop at a pace parallel to that of the continent's economic development" (Karithi 1995, 10).

Thus, the challenge MAPs face in fostering a sustainable environment for the free press is an economic problem. As LaMay (2006, 53) writes,

> For our would-be architect of free and independent media, there is the additional challenge that media, unlike most other democratic institutions, are rooted not in political or civil society, but in economic society. As an industry, democracy promotion has tended (and still tends) to see media primarily as a component of civil society promotion, which is understandable and fine until aid is exhausted or withdrawn. Then it comes time to pay the bills—for salaries, newsprint, ink, transmitters, videotape, delivery trucks, telephones, software, presses, and all the rest. Other institutions of governance also have to pay their costs, of course, but many of those hold the power of taxation.

In this passage LaMay highlights the importance of institution-building (which will be discussed at length in the following chapter) but also lays bare the economic barriers to a viable fourth estate in an underdeveloped country such as Sierra Leone.

When one considers the economic situation of Sierra Leone, it is not surprising that MAPs have experienced difficulty in fostering a free press characterized by sustainability. A country of about five million people, Sierra

Leone ranks near the bottom of the UNDP's 2010 Human Development Index (HDI),[15] at 158 out of 169 countries (Klugman 2010). The poor conditions are reflected in key social indicators – the literacy rate in the country is approximately 39 percent (Klugman 2010), the population's life expectancy is 55 years, and eight out of 100 children die before reaching their first birthday (The World Factbook 2010). Sierra Leone's GNP per capita is extremely low at approximately $803,[16] ranked by the IMF at 175 out of 182 countries (World Economic Outlook Database 2010). About 38 percent of the population lives in urban areas but the country's main economic activity remains agricultural, with commodities such as rice, coffee, palm oil and peanuts making up about half of the GDP. Another 31 percent of the economy is industry, mainly small-scale manufacturing and mining – diamond extraction alone makes up about half of the country's exports (The World Factbook 2010).

The nature of the economy in Sierra Leone does not produce an "advertising culture," which is detrimental to the potential for income in the country's mass media. Agricultural production is not on a scale which prompts producers to advertise to possible consumers, and industry is either not aimed at a domestic market (extracted diamonds are sold overseas) or is too small-scale to afford advertising. Therefore, the main advertisers in the country are the government, NGOs, and cell phone carriers (Wahl-Jorgensen and Cole 2006). The fact that the government is a major advertiser lends political officials considerable

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[15] The HDI is a composite statistic combining life expectancy at birth, access to schooling and GNI per capita. While it must be recognized that these are not the only elements of development, the HDI provides a useful snapshot and means of comparison with other nations.
[16] Purchasing power parity in 2010 international dollars.

sway over media outlets – democracy activist and former journalist Charlie

Hughes detailed the propensity of politicians to advertise only in the newspapers

that they deem "friendly," calling advertising revenue from the government

"disguised bribes." Thus it is in the best interests of media outlets to create

positive relationships with officials and politicians, in order to benefit from those

individuals' advertising budgets.[17] This is a form of political co-optation of the

media, common in many other developing countries and problematic because it

produces self-censorship in media outlets which "robs the public of necessary

information" (Parsons 2004, 62). This "soft censorship" is not limited to Sierra

Leone; it is evident in other parts of Africa, Latin America, South and East Asia

and some countries in the former Soviet bloc (Podesta 2009). Moreover, because

advertising prices in Sierra Leone are low to begin with, with a one-page

advertisement in a newspaper costing about Le300,000 (US$100) (Wahl-

Jorgensen and Cole 2006), even those newspapers which do attract advertising

struggle to make ends meet.

The socio-economic elements of Sierra Leonean society have different

implications depending on the medium. Dealing first with the newspaper

business, it is evident that a poor populace translates into low circulation for

newspapers. Newspapers cost no more than Le1,500 per issue (about US$0.50),

but this cost is out of reach for much of the public.[18] The large number of

publications operating in Sierra Leone has also historically posed a problem for

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[17] It is not unheard of for journalists in the Western world to form professional relationships with public figures and officials for the purposes of gathering information, but any financial gain on behalf of the media outlet would be seen as a breach of the journalist's objectivity.

[18] Newspapers in Argentina and Chile have avoided this obstacle by distributing their papers for free, with the intent of using increased circulation to raise advertising rates (Parsons 2004).

the economic viability of the newspaper business in the country, and this

oversaturation of the market continues to be an issue today. As of November

2005, about 15 newspapers published regularly, but the combined circulation of

all newspapers did not exceed 10,000 copies (Wahl-Jorgensen and Cole 2006).

While they do not all publish on a regular basis, 88 newspapers were registered

with the IMC in 2008 (IMC 2008).

The market for newspapers is not only limited by poverty but also by

literacy, as approximately 61 percent of the population cannot read (Klugman

2010) – meaning there are many newspapers competing for the readership of the

minority of the country (Sesay and Hughes 2005). Moreover, most newspapers

publish in English, the language of the urban elite (the majority of the population

speaks Krio, a form of pigeon English), further limiting the newspaper market

(Wahl-Jorgensen and Cole 2006). This lack of literacy is compounded by a lack

of *media literacy,* in which the public cannot distinguish "objectivity from

partisanship, opinion from analysis and investigative reporting from slander"

(Olson 2008, 20). Therefore, newspapers are not necessarily financially rewarded

(in terms of circulation and readership) for providing a product which lives up to

the ideals of the fourth estate.

In competing for this small readership, newspapers editors are willing to

listen to newspaper vendors' input on how to sell more issues.[19] Literate vendors

advocate for "hot" headlines (regardless of their veracity), while those vendors

who cannot read associate "hot news" with the *size* of the headline font. These

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[19] Newspapers do not operate their own distribution systems but instead outsource to vendors
who sell newspapers on the streets.

suggestions have crept into newspaper practices, further denigrating the quality and reliability of stories in favour of headlines that will sell papers (Wahl-Jorgensen and Cole 2006). For an example of the front pages of four newspapers based, printed and sold in Freetown, see Appendix B.

However, despite such tactics, the newspaper industry still struggles. As CJFE wrote in a final report on their activities in Sierra Leone, "the proposed goal of circulation expansion to 3,500 copies was not met. The economy of Freetown is still quite bleak, and there simply was not the economic support for the papers to allow them to make this kind of increase" (Fillmore and Payne 2004, 3). This is a significant problem in other areas of the developing world as well, where illiteracy limits the public's ability to communicate and desire to learn, thus reducing the demand for more and better media content (Parsons 2004).[20]

Radio is more popular in Sierra Leone, with a BBC World Service Trust study finding that 80 percent of men and 68 percent of women listen to the radio on a daily basis (Media Use, and Attitudes Towards Media, in Sierra Leone 2007). However, radio faces the same financial challenges as newspapers. Listeners do not pay for radio signals, so broadcast outlets must rely on other means of income. Electricity is unreliable in Freetown and largely unavailable in the provinces, meaning radio stations must rely on generators run by petrol, adding significantly to their operating costs. The lack of advertising leads these stations to rely on paid programming by politicians or NGOs. Understandably,

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[20] The print media in the developed world are also currently facing problems of readership and circulation, but this is due to the increase in online information sources. Moreover, Western media outlets generally have the funds and capacities to innovate in order to face these challenges.

those who pay for airtime wish to be on air during peak hours of listenership, meaning those periods of time are not used for news or information. Even still, the former co-ordinator for Sierra Leone's Community Radio Network, Isaac Massaquoi, says that most community stations can only afford to be on the air for about four hours per day.[21] The larger commercial stations in Freetown are marginally more successful at attracting advertising, but they primarily play music or football (soccer) news in order to attract listeners. The most successful radio enterprises in the country have been run by international organizations, such as the U.N.'s Radio Democracy or Foundation Hirondelle's Cotton Tree News (CTN). However, this radio programming is funded by international aid money and is therefore not a sustainable business model. As of January 2011, CTN expected to close its doors at the end of the month unless new donor funding was secured.

In both newspaper and radio,[22] Sierra Leone's media management is a small-scale business venture – outlets are predominantly owned by sole proprietors instead of a board of directors, as media outlets are not seen as lucrative investments. As aforementioned, this is due in part to the Public Order Act, which discourages investment in the media. These owners often have direct control over the media content (unlike a board of directors, which tends to be divorced from the editorial content), and have a vested interest in selling their

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[21] Massquoi says the station in Mile 91 defies these odds due to the hard work of a highly committed station manager who goes door-to-door in his community asking for monetary or material donations (such as petrol to run the generator, rice to feed reporters, or palm oil to sell for cash).

[22] Television will be discussed in the following chapter, but up until March 2010 the only television station was owned by the government. It is currently making the transition to public service broadcasting.

product. Many of these sole proprietors use their outlets to further certain viewpoints or politicize and bias the debate: for example, the current APC government's Minister of Information, Alhaji Kargbo, owns the newspaper *The New Citizen*. This poses a problem for journalists who want to report objectively, because, as freelance journalist Benjamin Pratt said, "You have to dance to one man's song." It is not uncommon for these sole proprietors to re-write journalists' stories when they are displeased, or simply fire them (sometimes taking it as far as publicly humiliating the journalist in the pages of their newspaper).

Sole proprietorships are made possible by the fact that start-up costs for a newspaper in Sierra Leone are fairly low. While this seems to be a positive factor on the surface (low start-up costs mean that there can be a diversity of media voices in the public sphere), the lack of regulation by the IMC means that these outlets easily violate codes of objectivity and neutrality, and further politicize the public debate. While many have argued against increased regulation of the media as it would stifle free speech, some interviewed for this project believe that the base level of journalism in Sierra Leone needs to be raised. This does not necessarily constitute stringent regulations surrounding who can run a media outlet. One suggestion was that newspapers should be monitored for the most basic breaches of professional standards, such as the use of plagiarized material (e.g. news stories which have been copied word-for-word off the Internet). This debate will be further discussed in the following chapter.

The poverty of the media in Sierra Leone (both in terms of professional ethics and finances) leads to a major problem in the economics of the media in Sierra Leone: bribery. Bribery of journalists takes many forms in the country, and

is attractive to journalists because of low (or non-existent) pay. The budget constraints of media outlets translate into poor pay for journalists – journalists are generally paid per story (not an hourly or daily wage), and up to 20 percent work without any formal pay at all. The average monthly salary of a journalist works out to about Le60,000 (about US$25) depending on the number of stories written (Wahl-Jorgensen and Cole 2006, 21-22), and this low level of income for journalists was raised by 15 (out of 18) interviewees as a major barrier to media development in the country. "When you pay such a low salary, you attract the lowest in society," said Ivan Thomas, the director general of the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC).

Instead of a salary, many media outlets only provide their reporters with a press card, which encourages a practice called "coasting." Journalists use the press card as a ticket for access to interviews and press conferences, where they receive "brown envelopes" (discussed below) and other perks, such as food. Many paid journalists also take part in this practice, and Parkinson (2005) found that coasting represents approximately 30 percent of journalists' incomes. As Wahl-Jorgensen and Cole (2006, 23) write, "Coasting is the consequence of resourceful individuals adapting to a resource-poor environment. It is fundamentally tied to the political, economic and social realities of life in Sierra Leone."

"Brown envelopes" are the most common form of bribery in Sierra Leone's media – envelopes of cash handed out at the end of press conferences in order to cover reporters' "transportation costs" (the sums of cash in the envelopes are 10 to 20 times the cost of transportation). These brown envelopes are a major draw for reporters, meaning journalists are much more eager to cover press

conferences and briefings than they are to independently investigate stories or engage in in-depth reporting. Brown envelopes are a guaranteed income for attending the event, but attached to the funds is a tacit understanding that the journalist will write about the event in favourable terms. Parsons (2004) details this phenomenon in other parts of the world as well, called "hidden advertising" in Russia. As a print and radio journalist in Sierra Leone, Abubakkar Bah says he has experienced the practice first-hand. Even when journalists are paid by their media outlet they only make between Le15,000 and 30,000 for a story (about US$5 to $10), meaning journalists are desperate to supplement their income. Thus, Bah asks, "After a meeting, when [the reporters] are given brown envelopes, how objective will that journalist be?" As Timothy Bangura, a student of mass communication at FBC put it, journalists "mortgage their credibility" in order to feed themselves. These brown envelopes are handed out by the government, U.N. agencies and NGOs alike, so while it is closely tied to the poor political ethics in the country, it is not simply a political phenomenon – supposed "civil society" organizations have also succumbed to the pressure to provide brown envelopes in order to ensure media turnout and favourable coverage.

More serious types of bribery also occur, through outright payoffs to reporters and media outlets. Journalists have been known to threaten politicians with bad press coverage (whether real or fabricated) unless they are bought off, leading to a perverse kind of "investigative journalism" – instead of digging up damaging information to hold politicians accountable to the public, journalists use their unflattering findings to extort funds out of the subject. Politicians have also been known to pay for positive coverage, or for negative coverage of their

opponents (Wahl-Jorgensen and Cole 2006). According to democracy activist Charlie Hughes, during election campaigns politicians pay news outlets to be named the leader in the polls or to fabricate other stories which may sway voters. Kelvin Lewis, editor of the *Awoko* newspaper, said that the sums of these bribes are generally much higher than those in brown envelopes at press conferences. While a brown envelope usually contains about Le30,000 (US$10), officials generally pay between Le50,000 and Le250,000 (US$16 to US$85), and Lewis said he has heard of payoffs in the millions of leones. (As a point of comparison, Lewis estimated that it costs about Le40,000 – US$13 – per day to feed and take care of an average Sierra Leonean family.) While bribery is seen as a major transgression against the ideals of the profession in the Western world, bribery in Sierra Leone is commonplace and a tolerated (if not accepted) practice, directly leading to the biasing and fabrication of news stories.

Low pay for journalists also denigrates the educational level of those working in the field. Many of the most experienced and established journalists fled the country during the civil war (Sesay and Hughes 2005; Wahl-Jorgensen and Cole 2006), and the poor working conditions for journalists detracts from the appeal of returning to the career. Most journalists have high school diplomas, but only about 10 percent have college or university accreditation (Wahl-Jorgensen and Cole 2006). Multiple sources indicated that those who graduate from FBC's mass communication program are attracted to jobs with the government or in public relations, as the low pay for journalists is unattractive. Professional communicators tend to work outside the media, where they get "quicker promotion, more serious attention to the training needs, better personal security,

less chances of being persecuted, and better recognition and status" (Cole 1995, 64). In addition to his work with community radio, Isaac Massaquoi is a lecturer at FBC, where he said students are expected to find a job quickly after they graduate in order to justify their family's significant investment in their education. Journalism's low pay means it is seen as a "stepping stone" job (a stop-gap until a better opportunity comes along), and therefore the profession has a hard time retaining educated reporters. SLBC's Ivan Thomas even went as far as to say that most journalists in the country would not be academically qualified to attend FBC's mass communication program.

This leads to a number of problems: first, both print and broadcast journalists make simple grammatical mistakes, which Thomas termed "kindergarten mistakes." These mistakes undermine the educated public's trust of such media outlets, so Thomas requires his reporters at SLBC to take English examinations before they can report in the language – but this is not the norm at other media outlets. Second of all, as FBC mass communication lecturer Willette James said, journalists have a hard time understanding the material on which they are reporting, and therefore do not clearly present it to their audience. Rachel Forrester, a freelance communications consultant from abroad, says that she always supplies a written press release to accompany a media briefing, as journalists often get facts wrong on complex issues. She said it is not uncommon to see her press release published in a newspaper exactly as she wrote it, although it depends on the subject and the political leanings of the newspaper. MAPs have tried to address this problem through training projects in the country, but the high

turnover of journalists in the profession means that the projects' effects fade as reporters move on to other jobs.

The question of pay for journalists is also on the national agenda. In addition to the abolition of the libel provisions in the Public Order Act and the creation of access-to-information legislation, Sayoh Kamara says that SLAJ's third priority is labour rights for journalists: the implementation of a minimum wage for reporters, as well as requiring contracts and/or letters of appointment. As evidenced above, better pay for journalists could result in a decrease in "coasting" and bribery, freeing journalists to report more truthfully and independently. Increasing the pay for journalists is highlighted by Podesta (2009) as a key initiative in reducing soft censorship and other forms of financial coercion.

The poor financial standing of media outlets is not only a problem for journalists' pay. It also translates into a lack of material resources as basic as pens and paper. This issue constrains the fourth estate in an obvious way: even the best-trained, most honourable journalist cannot produce a story without paper upon which to write it. Equipment is in need throughout the country – even the government's communication systems are lacking.[23] Neighbouring governments such as Guinea and Cote d'Ivoire provide financial and technical assistance to independent media outlets within their borders, but this is not the case in Sierra Leone (Baryoh 2008).[24] According to Parkinson (2005), only one out of 10 journalists have access to tape recorders and notepads (a statistic which may have

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[23] Forrester said it is not uncommon for government officials to write documents by hand, due to a lack of access to computers.

[24] Baryoh's 2008 survey indicated that 78.8 percent of journalists, teachers, students and other members of the public felt that the government provided "low" or "very low" support to the media sector in Sierra Leone.

improved since then, but still provides a snapshot of the dire situation in the country). While MAPs have gone a distance in addressing this problem through provision of computers, recorders, and other office materials, more expensive resources like cars or printing presses are in short supply.[25] Even those outlets which have received donations of computers or cameras have a hard time maintaining them, as spare parts are unavailable or too expensive. In 2005, the newspaper the *African Champion* had five computers, but only one was functional (Wahl-Jorgensen and Cole 2006).

Aside from making journalists' jobs more difficult, this lack of resources narrows the impact of media in the country. Sierra Leone is a small country, but most of its journalists are located in Freetown due to a "skewed concentration of most media facilities and coverage around the major urban centres," much like the rest of Africa (Karithi 1995, 10). Reporters do not have the means to travel to the provinces in order to cover stories, nor is there any incentive to do so. Newspapers do not have distribution networks to disseminate their papers in the provinces and radio stations do not have the funds to set up transmitters around the country. The result is media content very focused on the Western Area (the region in which Freetown in located), which divorces those in the other provinces from the mass media. Where the population is physically removed from the seat

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[25] Without enough printers in the country, papers have to balance the quality of their reporting with the chances of actually publishing their paper. If a newspaper waits too long to go to the printer in the evening, they run the risk of "drowning" – arriving too late to be printed for the following morning. For this reason, media managers often decide to print before stories are complete. CJFE tried to rectify this problem in 2002, bringing a printing press to the country in the hopes of starting a printing co-operative. Kelvin Lewis, one of the editors who took part, says the project fell apart due to mismanagement after it was turned over to local leadership. This project will be discussed in the following section.

of government and lacks access to the media, interpersonal relationships with local elites play a much larger role in shaping public opinion (Parsons 2004), undermining the fourth estate.

MAPs in Sierra Leone: Ten Years On

The previous section outlines the challenges faced by the fourth estate in Sierra Leone. This is *not* to indicate that MAPs have failed, nor should it be taken to mean that some undefined prerequisites for the fourth estate must be met before MAPs should be implemented. Rather, MAPs have made a considerable difference in some areas of media development in Sierra Leone, but have not succeeded in their goals of fostering a fourth estate due to the constraints of the political and socio-economic climate of the country. The following section will assess the triumphs and shortcomings of MAPs in Sierra Leone, in the hopes of offering guidance for future media development programs operating in similar environments.

Widely-used press freedom indices do not present identical results in the progress of Sierra Leone's media, but they all highlight a similar trend. The *Press Freedom Index*,[26] compiled annually by Reporters Without Borders, shows variations from year to year, but overall there has been negligible change in Sierra Leonean press freedom between 2002 and 2010. Freedom House's *Index of Press*

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[26] The *Press Freedom Index* is a quantitative study which measures indicators of violations of press freedom, using a survey with 43 criteria that assess the level of press freedom within a country. It does not take into account questions of "quality" of journalism.

Freedom[27] shows a marginal improvement in the same time period – out of a total possible score of 100 (with 100 being the "least free"), Sierra Leone's score improved from a 62 in 2002 to a 55 in 2010, leading Freedom House to classify Sierra Leone as "partly free." Finally, the *Media Sustainability Index*,[28] compiled by the International Research & Exchanges Board (IREX), finds that Sierra Leone's overall media environment has remained unchanged since 2006. According to IREX, Sierra Leone's media is categorized as "near sustainable." While not identical, these three indices all paint a similar picture – no great improvements have been made over the last 10 years in Sierra Leone, but no significant declines have occurred either. MAPs may not have spurred the country towards a revolution in the activities of the media, but no one knows what may have happened if MAPs had not been present – the situation could have been much worse today.

While all interview participants were in favour of MAPs, few of the positive changes they identified were without caveats. Training and material assistance were most commonly raised as impacting the media environment, in addition to the aid put towards increasing the number of media outlets, diversifying ownership, and limited improvements in the political/regulatory environment. These elements of progress in the media sector will be discussed in

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[27] The *Index of Press Freedom* ranks countries on indicators in three categories: the legal, political and economic environments for journalists. It does not take into account questions of "quality" of journalism.
[28] The *Media Sustainability Index* measures the media's ability to play its role as the fourth estate, using qualitative panel discussions and quantitative questionnaires to measure the media environment in five areas: legal and social norms, professional standards of quality, objectivity, editorial independence, and presence of supporting institutions. No data for Sub-Saharan Africa exists prior to 2006, as 2006 was the first year for which data was gathered in the region.

the following pages, along with suggestions for improvements in the design and execution of MAPs. Media programming aimed at peace-building will also be discussed, as it has perhaps seen the most marked success in the country.

While media stakeholders' suggestions for improving MAPs were diverse and sometimes contradictory, they all followed a similar vein. The previous chapter details the realities of journalism in the country 10 years after large-scale MAPs got underway in Sierra Leone. In tracing the reasons for minimal progress on these fronts, several interviewees came to the same conclusion: while MAPs have been effective in pinpointing problems with the media system in Sierra Leone, they have not targeted the root causes of the unprofessional, biased and politicized reporting. The analogy of an illness can be employed here: if the fourth estate in Sierra Leone is sick, international assistance has treated the symptoms without addressing the source of the infection. For example, MAPs have provided training sessions to educate journalists on the ethics of journalism, without taking action on the reasons *why* journalists take bribes – such as the lack of pay. David Jabati (editor of *The Exclusive* newspaper) says the international community simply has not delved deep enough: "They just look at the surface, but underneath that there are a lot of constraints that are facing us. . . . If they have patience to really come to help, to assist, there are a lot of ways they are able to help." These underlying constraints include the political and socio-economic factors discussed in the previous chapter.

Overall, the suggestions for the reconfiguration of MAPs in Sierra Leone – which will be explored below – link back to a central theme in the aid effectiveness literature: *institution-building*. While international assistance has

been useful in short-term stabilization of the political, social and economic realms, the longer-term impacts are limited. As de Zeeuw (2005) finds, post-conflict democracy programs in eight regionally-diverse countries (including Sierra Leone)[29] have lacked longevity, providing aid which is not significant in the broader democratic process. As Howard (2003, 21) writes, "Rather than as an afterthought, sustainability needs to be included from the point of conceptualization of an aid program through to delivery." Under this umbrella of institution-building falls *aid coordination* and *use of local knowledge.* Coordination is necessary to draw together individual MAPs as well as democracy-supporting organizations, as many of the challenges outlined above stem from issues outside of the MAPs' purviews (such as economic stimulus or governance reform). Local knowledge is equally necessary to ensure that MAP activities are cognisant of the realities on the ground in Sierra Leone – too often, MAPs approach programming with a one-size-fits-all mentality.

Training and Technical Assistance

The main MAP activities which touched the lives of media stakeholders in Sierra Leone were training projects, a type of media programming popular worldwide. As de Zeeuw writes (2005, 496-497), "The training of journalists has received by far the most international attention. In order to professionalize the media sector, the international community has funded and organized many

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[29] The study looked at democratization programs aimed at improving elections, human rights and the media in Cambodia, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Uganda, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, El Salvador and Guatemala.

workshops, training courses and exchange programmes. These normally focus on the learning of basic journalism skills, such as newsgathering and reporting, in order to prevent factual and contextual errors, biased reporting and improper sourcing." Such training can also include business training for media managers, in areas such as marketing and financial management.

The majority of participants in this study had received some form of training from international media assistance, and many of those had taken part in multiple training sessions. A major training initiative was undertaken by the Thomson Foundation (funded by DFID) from March 2001 to May 2003, covering core media skills in news sourcing and writing, editing, libel legislation, radio and television production and public relations (Sesay and Hughes 2005, 102). Many smaller training initiatives were/are run by other media organizations on an on-going basis, and agencies working in entirely unrelated subject matter have been known to provide ad-hoc training for journalists on their area of focus (for example, UNICEF has trained journalists on issues specific to child rights in domestic and international law).

Sesay and Hughes (2005) note that training has prompted an improvement in the professionalism of some journalists, but that, as a whole, the profession has a long way to go. Many participants also highlighted an improvement in professional standards since the end of the war, indicating that training has played a role in raising the level of reporting over the past 10 years. Bernadette Cole (high commissioner of the IMC) credited training programs for increased professionalism and pluralism in the media, highlighting the diversity of current coverage: where journalists used to focus on politics and sports, the broader social

interests of the population are now evident on the airwaves and in the pages of newspapers.

Despite general agreement that training has had a positive effect on the media environment in Sierra Leone, participants highlighted several problems with the way training programs are conducted. Kelvin Lewis (editor of *Awoko* newspaper) was most critical of these programs, pointing out that training programs are not optimized to make the maximum impact on participants. First of all, the sessions are simply not long enough to make a lasting impact on newsroom practices. They can be as short as a day or take place during multiple days spread over a few weeks; participants indicated that this term of training was inadequate to reform the practices of reporters who may have spent years reaping the financial benefits of bribes and brown envelopes.

Second, the quality of reporters who attend training sessions is often left wanting, as they are not necessarily the most committed to the ideals of the fourth estate. If an editor or media manager is allowed to choose the reporters s/he will send to a training session, s/he will often choose the least productive members of the newsroom, as productive reporters cannot be spared. Third, training sessions often offer food and brown envelopes to reporters to ensure attendance, prompting some reporters to attend for the material benefits, without bothering to actually listen to the presentations, participate in the activities or even stay for the entire duration of the training. Issac Massaquoi said many journalists ask if a training session "has blood" before they agree to attend – meaning they want to know if there will be food and/or money available to participants.

Fourth, even if a reporter takes the training seriously and tries to implement the things s/he has learned upon returning to the newsroom, it is the editors and managers who determine the final style and content of the media outlet – any changes that the newly-trained journalist tries to implement may simply be edited out. Womay Kamara, a JHR fellow and former television journalist, said that training journalists does not create an enabling environment in which they have the resources to carry out their training. They need financing and a committed outlet for which to produce stories which demonstrate the skills they have garnered.

Finally, Bernadette Cole raised the 'stepping-stone' nature of journalism in Sierra Leone – reporters continually enter and leave the profession; it is seen as a way to make a quick buck, and not a career choice. This high turnover means that new, untrained journalists are constantly entering the field as the trained reporters leave the profession. While the training they receive from MAPs may be applicable to future job prospects,[30] it no longer directly improves the media environment.

Aside from the day- or week-long training activities, training for journalists in Sierra Leone has also been improved by international assistance to the Mass Communication Department at FBC. This strategy is encouraged by scholars in the media assistance field, who highlight the "transient and unsustainable" nature of ad-hoc training sessions (deZeeuw 2005, 497). Communications programs at FBC are more extensive and long-term than training

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[30] Charlie Hughes says the trainings he received as a reporter/editor are now directly applicable to his work as a democracy consultant.

programs run by NGOs, offering the benefit of more coordinated classes and in-depth education. However, the mass communication students and lecturers interviewed indicated that journalism training at the university level does not necessarily lead students to work in the media after graduation. As aforementioned, the low pay in journalism leads graduates to instead seek work with the government or in public relations.

Participants offered suggestions for concrete changes that MAPs should implement to improve their results by building institutions which produce a professional and unbiased media system. As de Zeeuw (2005, 497) writes, "Training programmes focus mainly on correcting the behaviour of journalists, without addressing the root causes of the behaviour." In terms of training, participants suggested projects that go beyond simple news reporting or writing. The general sentiment among participants was that unethical and unprofessional conduct by reporters was not simply caused by a lack of training on their part; the root cause was traced to patronage networks and unprofessional editors and media managers who dictate the content of the news. The majority of interviewees indicated that training programs should be implemented to educate media managers/owners on the business side of running a newspaper or radio station, in order to tighten business practices and move the industry towards a more stable footing where journalists could expect more regular pay.[31] In terms of economics, a better-paid staff is less likely to fall prey to patronage. On the editorial side, changes implemented at the top of the newsroom will trickle down. Because the

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[31] Such training programs aimed at media managers have operated in Sierra Leone in the past but the majority of training has been focused on reporting and news-writing.

turnover of reporters is so high, trying to influence the ethics of journalists at the bottom of the food chain does little to change the institutional ethos of the media's elites, because those at the top are in charge of monitoring the ongoing ethical and professional standards of their news outlet. In influencing those who anchor the outlet, the seeds of institutional change can be sown.

However, participants did not indicate that training for new or inexperienced reporters should be eliminated altogether. They recognized the efficacy of offering basic skills to journalists who have not had the opportunity to attend university, but advocated for more specific training on certain "beats" (umbrellas of general knowledge into which specific stories often fall, such as justice or economics). The low literacy rate suggests that Sierra Leoneans are not a well-educated population, meaning reporters must be clear and simple in the way they explain complex issues. However, reporters often do not understand the topics upon which they report (leading to plagiarism of press releases and online news, or a susceptibility to influence from elites), making it doubly difficult for them to produce a balanced and concise report which is accessible to their audience. It was also suggested that training be located outside Freetown (with transportation provided), in order to attract participants who are committed to attending the entire project for its content and are not simply looking for a free lunch.

In order to increase the institutionalization of the fourth estate, many participants also suggested placing trainers in newsrooms, instead of centralizing training sessions for reporters to attend. This suggestion is supported by de Zeeuw (2005), who – in his research on Sierra Leone and seven other post-conflict

nations – found that journalists consider on-the-job training a better training tool than classroom workshops. This extended and direct contact would allow the trainer to develop relationships with reporters, editors and media managers, deepening the trainer's understanding of the local media context and increasing their influence over participants. It would perhaps decrease the number of reporters who are trained, but would provide continuity of instruction and affect the newsroom at all levels of operation, from cub reporters to editors and managers. This approach was suggested with the condition that trainers be present for extended periods of time – three months instead of two weeks or less – adding to the institution-building nature of such a project. It is difficult to promote long-term change when the promoter is only present for a short period of time. Such an approach would require greater coordination between MAPs, to concentrate assets and avoid working at cross-purposes (one MAP installing a trainer in a newsroom, while the reporters are attracted away by another MAP offering training off-site that includes a free lunch).

In the radio industry, this suggestion would aid community radio outlets in developing strategies of becoming economically viable, the main challenge they currently face. While MAPs played a large role in spreading community radio to the provinces, the assistance programs did not sufficiently equip the stations to be economically-independent when the international donor funding ran out. Training and technical assistance (such as financial restructuring) which focused on individual newsrooms of each community radio station could offer personalized strategies for becoming more economically viable.

In the newspaper industry, where the market is oversaturated with publications,[32] this approach suggests that fewer news outlets would reap the benefits of MAPs. While some participants took issue with the idea of hand-selecting which media outlets would receive training, many others enthusiastically promoted the idea. By choosing only outlets which have demonstrated commitment to the fourth estate, proponents argued that the professionalism of those outlets would be markedly raised – and along with that professionalism would come greater economic revenue. Other outlets would either be forced to raise their operations to a competitive level, or go out of business.[33] This strategy operates on two interconnected assumptions: first, that the public is more likely to choose media which is unbiased; and second, that advertisers will choose where to spend their advertising budgets based on the size of the audience. While these assumptions may be true to some degree, it is worth noting that the public's media literacy is low, and government players have the freedom to advertise where they wish – and may continue to place their advertising dollars with sympathetic news outlets, as opposed to the most professional or widely-consumed. However, in conjunction with programming to change the activities of the political elite, this strategy may prove successful and certainly offers more potential for long-term change than ad-hoc training sessions.

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[32] Cole stated that the newspaper industry has more than 80 registered publications, whereas in her view a country of Sierra Leone's size only needs five to six newspapers. This view was shared by other participants as well.

[33] The prospect of media outlet bankruptcies did not deter supporters of this idea, as they argued that there are too many newspapers in Sierra Leone and it would be beneficial if some went out of business or merged their operations.

Material Assistance

The second major MAP activity highlighted by participants was the provision of material assistance to media outlets. Without equipment, even the best journalist cannot do his/her job. DFID, OSIWA and CIDA have provided materials such as paper, pens, cameras, recorders and computers to media outlets over the years, but participants noted the lack of larger logistical needs like printing presses and vehicles. DFID played a key financial and technical role in the establishment of the IMC, and UNDP has more recently provided radio monitoring equipment[34] to the commission – however, as of June 2010 the IMC lacked the infrastructure and trained staff to operate the equipment.

One of the most oft-mentioned technical assistance projects raised by participants was a 2002 initiative by CJFE to provide a printing press to a cooperative of five newspapers in Freetown. Kelvin Lewis was one of the newspaper editors who took part, and he says that the project was initially a success but problems arose as the months went on. He said CJFE helped his newspaper, *Awoko*, move to a "new level" at the beginning of the project, as the printing press was supplemented by a donation of office furniture, a generator, mobile phones, cameras, recorders and training.

However, as the project wore on, he says he became frustrated with CJFE's lack of understanding of the media system in Sierra Leone. He says that CJFE began to impose restrictions on the content of *Awoko*, the first being that no more than 30 percent of the newspaper could be advertisements. Lewis says that

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[34] Such equipment is used to monitor the content of radio stations throughout the country to ensure they are in compliance with Sierra Leonean law and the IMC code of ethics.

CJFE did not understand that if he turned away advertisers he had no way to pay his staff or save money for longer-term upgrades to his newspaper. Second, he said CJFE took issue with the content of the stories in *Awoko*, indicating that they could no longer print one-sided stories. Lewis says this again demonstrates a lack of understanding of how the media works in Sierra Leone – officials tend to dodge questions until a damning story is published, at which point they are willing to comment in order to offer their side of the story, which is published in a second story the following day. Lewis says this process – which he calls a "running story" – was not looked upon favourably by CJFE even though it is commonly accepted practice in Sierra Leone. He says CJFE insisted that this type of story was unprofessional, and threatened not to print issues which contained such stories. Lewis eventually left the cooperative and saved enough money to buy a private printing press for *Awoko*.

The final report produced by CJFE does not explicitly confirm or deny Lewis's assessment of the project, but does offer information which seems to support Lewis's claims: "At first the newspapers worked hard to take advantage of new opportunities to increase their circulation, but later, they began to focus more on generating revenue from advertising and did not pursue circulation development as much as CJFE would have expected" (Fillmore and Payne 2004, 4). The report also indicates that it required newspapers to adhere to a code of ethics established by CJFE, about which the participating newspapers complained. It is unclear exactly what transpired after CJFE's MAP concluded, but multiple sources indicate that the printing press is no longer operational due to mismanagement and disrepair.

While this is a single case study, it does offer insight into the importance of local knowledge in implementing MAPs. As Howard (2003, 24) writes, "Economic conditions may thwart conventional media assistance, and must inform carefully tailored programs and expectations." It seems the shortcomings of the project are due in part to a disconnection between the goals of the organization carrying out the MAP and the realities faced by the program participants. While the programmers said that the newspapers should reduce their reliance on advertising and adhere to a code of ethics developed by the donor organization, Lewis felt it was not in his long-term economic interests to do so. Perhaps if such differences had been discussed and resolved at the outset of the program with the participation of the local recipients, some of these issues could have been avoided or at least foreseen.

Many programs which provide material assistance in Sierra Leone and other parts of the developing world tend to focus on improving outputs, instead of organizational capacity-building (deZeeuw 2005). In providing material assistance, some participants made the suggestion that the international community should seek to build the capacities of a few news outlets which are demonstrably committed to the fourth estate, combining such a strategy with the targeted training programs which were explained in the previous section. Simply providing aid which is consumed in the short-term (paper, pens) or cannot be used indefinitely without repairs (computers, printing presses) does little to build the capacities of news outlets to remain self-sustaining once donors' budgets have dried up, unless attention is also paid to how outlets can finance their own material costs in the future.

News Outlet Proliferation

MAPs have also prompted an increase in the number of media outlets operational in Sierra Leone. As noted in the previous chapter, media outlets have historically tended to be based in Freetown and its environs, divorcing outlying communities from information and political discourse. While still problematic, this issue has improved over the last 10 years. The quality of journalism is nowhere near the standards to which the Western media is held, but the quantity and availability of media voices has improved with the implementation of MAPs, primarily in radio projects (there are still no newspapers published outside of Freetown). Quantity of media voices does not guarantee quality or diversity but it is a step in the direction of pluralism.

The establishment of new radio stations represent the greatest success for MAPs. Prior to the end of the war, no community radio existed – and only four radio stations existed in the country. By 2008, 56 radio stations were registered with the IMC, although that does not necessarily mean that all broadcast regularly (IMC 2008). Radio stations now exist in the second-largest city, Bo, and a community radio network exists across the country. These "up-country" outlets face considerable economic challenges, but as a result of funding from OSIWA, "many communities outside Freetown can now not only hear but be heard. They are reached in their local languages and they too can air their views in these languages. This represents a departure from Freetown's overwhelming domination of the media and the resulting 'media blackout' for more than three-quarters of the country's population" (Sesay and Hughes 2005, 104).

There has been a backslide in the content of the community radio network since the project was turned over to local management, as the stations became responsible for raising their own funding instead of relying on external aid (the challenges of which were outlined in the previous chapter). Isaac Massaquoi was one of the coordinators of the project, and readily admits that the MAP failed in developing sustainable mechanisms for raising funds once the aid money dried up. It is for this reason that these community radio stations have encountered the economic challenges outlined in the previous chapter – the international project team which midwifed their birth did not give enough thought to the survival of the project past its infancy. This is another instance in which a focus on long-term institution-building would have benefitted the fourth estate, as these radio stations – which are many Sierra Leoneans' only direct link to information coming from outside their community – can only broadcast for an average of four hours per day. The very fact that the network endures is a step in the direction of the fourth estate, but more support is needed to build the capabilities and long-term sustainability of outlets.

Newspapers have also proliferated in the post-war period, from less than 10 at the end of the war to 88 registered with the IMC in 2008. This increase is not directly related to MAPs; the establishment of new publications has been solely due to private entrepreneurship (Sesay and Hughes 2005, 104), although material and technical assistance has helped these newspapers to sustain themselves. However, the oversaturation of the newspaper market is seen as a hindrance to the economic viability of the newspaper business. It is for this reason that many participants advocated that MAPs focus on a few newspapers in their

training and material assistance efforts, instead of offering broad-scale support to anyone who is interested – resources concentrated on a few outlets has the potential to produce more lasting change than resources spread among dozens of newspapers. A criticism of this approach was raised by participants who felt it was unfair to "pick favourites" within the media system, but proponents of the idea emphasized that newspapers should be picked on their merits – such as a demonstrated commitment to the fourth estate (although no suggestions were offered as to how one might determine said commitment).

Television remains the one area in which plurality is lagging – the only television station is the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation. While its progress over recent years is promising (and is detailed in the pages that follow), it is the only television broadcaster which has succeeded in remaining active, partly due to extensive government support. Five other television stations were registered with the IMC in 2008, but none were broadcasting as of June 2010. Womay Kamara, a former reporter for ABC television (a local station, not the American network), says ABC had to stop broadcasting because of the lack of advertisements and the poor electricity supply in Sierra Leone. Producing advertisements for television is much more costly than those for radio or print as it requires more expensive equipment, meaning the already lacking advertising rates are even lower for television. And, even for those who can afford televisions (another barrier to the size of the television audience in Sierra Leone), electricity is unreliable in the

capital and unavailable in most other parts of the country.[35] Freetown, Bo, Kenema and Makeni are the only urban areas which have reliable access to the electrical grid – all other citizens rely on generators, or do without. This poses a problem for the audience size of television broadcasts (upon which advertising prices are based), as well as increases the costs of television production, based on the cost of running a generator. The role of MAPs in encouraging television will be explored in the following discussion of SLBC.

Media assistance organizations have been criticized for failing to incorporate the "new" media into MAPs, by ignoring Internet-based technologies such as Twitter, blogs, and social networking (Kalathil 2008). However, this criticism does not hold water in Sierra Leone's case. Online journalism techniques – both methods of gathering information and publishing stories on the Internet – are not yet viable in Sierra Leone due to several factors: electricity shortages, access to computers and literacy rates. While a few news outlets make efforts to publish their stories online (in addition to print versions), personal computers and Internet access are even less available than television to the general public. The infrastructure of the country simply cannot support Internet access for the majority of Sierra Leoneans, and even those who can afford access attest to its glacial speed and unreliability. While new media may be the way forward for news outlets in the developed world, the infrastructure and economic realities of the media environment in Sierra Leone are simply prohibitive at this point.

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[35] This is not a barrier for radio, as radios are much less expensive and many listeners use battery-powered receivers – they do not rely on national electricity supply or generators.

Regulatory and Legal Environment

Although large challenges remain in the regulatory framework for the media in Sierra Leone, improvements have been made with the help of international assistance. The IMC was created with assistance from DFID, and despite its problems, participants generally agreed that it has potential to be a positive force for the creation of a fourth estate in Sierra Leone. However, the founding of the IMC is the only major regulatory change to take place in the media sphere since the end of the war. As detailed in the preceding pages, the criminal libel provisions of the Public Order Act remain on the books and an access-to-information framework is still lacking. The IMC developed a code of practice which has done its part to raise awareness about the rights and responsibilities of journalists in the country, but the commission has come under criticism for failing to enforce the code of practice when complaints are brought against media outlets.

While the aforementioned media development indices suggest that no wide-spread improvements have occurred since the end of the civil war, Sesay and Hughes (2005) indicate that conditions are markedly better than those before the Lomé Peace Agreement in 1999. However, they attribute any increased press freedom to the resilience of media practitioners to "uphold the country's democratic aspirations," rather than direct interference by the international community (2005, 105). Nonetheless, it should be noted that MAPs have provided journalists with tools and training with which they have been able to maintain that resilience.

Aside from the workings of newsrooms, the main suggestion was an emphasis on reforming the legal environment for the media in Sierra Leone. Participants called on the international community to put pressure on the government to repeal or amend the Public Order Act, as well as work with government officials to improve the working conditions for journalists in the country through access-to-information legislation. In order to reduce soft censorship – which occurs when governments discriminate where to place their advertising dollars – CIMA advocates that governments be required to develop transparent mechanisms for placing advertising, which requires that governments buy advertising in outlets which can reach the intended audience regardless of the outlet's news content (Podesta 2009). International media assistance organizations could play a role in pressuring the government to take these legislative actions, especially if they seek the cooperation of other democracy-supporting organizations which focus on good governance and political reform.[36]

The above suggestions are aimed at improving the transparency of the government and reducing persecution of journalists on political grounds, which would make it easier for the media to institutionalize. However, the press also has a responsibility to act ethically, and one such method of ensuring professional behaviour is to regulate the press. The question of the appropriate level of media regulation in Sierra Leone drew disparate responses from participants. While interviewees tended to agree that the IMC needed increased powers to enforce existing legislation and the code of conduct, some also advocated for additional

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[36] It would not be the first time such a tactic was used: during the U.N. peacekeeping mission, the U.N. provided advice to the government on media regulation (Price, Noll, and DeLuce 2002, 17).

regulations to be placed on the media. Participants saw a role for empowering the IMC to promote professional ideals according to the code of conduct, and actively punish those outlets which violated the code. Some felt that the IMC should not wait for complaints to be made by members of the public, but instead monitor newspapers and airwaves and go after those news outlets deemed to be acting unethically. The IMC was given radio monitoring equipment by UNDP in order to fulfill this role, however at the time of the interview with Bernadette Cole (IMC high commissioner) it remained in dusty boxes in the corner of her office – with no one trained to set up and/or operate it.

Some participants argued that the media should be further regulated by the IMC through the creation of legislation which governs who can become a journalist, using criteria such as level of education or conflict of interest. Another suggestion was for the IMC to withhold broadcast or printing licenses until potential media owners demonstrate that they have the capacity to pay their reporters a living wage, to reduce the attractiveness of bribery and brown envelopes. Sayoh Kamara indicated that such suggestions had been made in the past by media stakeholders in Sierra Leone, but were shot down by international donors which saw such rules as a muzzle on free speech. Those participants who were supportive of such legislation felt the international community should play a role in pressuring the IMC to adopt such initiatives and help in drafting the regulations. Creating changes to the regulatory environment have a lasting impact on the media culture in the country, as laws and statutes stay in place long after an organization has left the country – provided the new regulations have incorporated

local knowledge so they are seen as relevant and legitimate within the country.

Otherwise, enforcement becomes a problem.

Aid coordination also comes into play when changing the practices of the

press, particularly in terms of brown envelopes. International organizations – even

U.N. agencies – are some of the worst offenders when it comes to offering brown

envelopes. By coordinating their activities with organizations working in other

areas of development, MAPs could encourage international organizations to

attract journalists to press conferences without resorting to payouts, or at least

limiting payouts to the actual cost of transportation to and from the event. Rather

than convincing journalists to stop taking bribes, it may be more effective to

improve aid coordination and convince international organizations to stop giving

them out.

SLBC: A Success Story in the Making?

Despite the shortcomings of MAPs in Sierra Leone, the media sector is not

without hope. Sierra Leone may be a poor country, but the country's media is not

stagnating – and the example of the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Service (SLBS)

offers hope in both the political and economic realms of media development. By

an act of parliament, SLBS became SLBC in March 2010 when the government

handed the television and radio service over to non-partisan civilian control with

the express purpose of transitioning the organization to a public service

broadcaster in the tradition of the BBC. Once a mouthpiece for the government,

SLBC is now an independent media outlet providing a mix of local and

international news and entertainment. Ivan Thomas formerly worked for the

SLBS as a journalist, and was named the director-general of SLBC in March

2010. He says it was his mission to professionalize the service, and with grants

from international organizations[37] he has upgraded the content of their broadcasts,

as well as their technology and working environment. Programs are produced to a

higher professional standard, a significantly larger portion of the broadcasts are

local content (as opposed to programming produced in other parts of Africa or

overseas), and SLBC's broadcasts are "almost country-wide." These

improvements have been noted by the general public as well, as communications

consultant Rachel Forrester said she notices improvements each time she turns on

the TV, both in terms of content and production value. Thomas says the economic

benefits of his changes are clear. Financial records show that in April 2009, SLBS

took in Le10.5 million in television advertising and Le1.9 million in radio

advertising. Over the same period in 2010 (after Thomas's changes had been

implemented), SLBC made Le61.5 million and Le13million, respectively – more

than a 600 percent increase.

The example of SLBC is encouraging, as it demonstrates a political trend

towards greater freedom of the press – a trend which MAPs are encouraging

through funding to SLBC. It is also instructive for future MAPs, indicating the

potential for an economic benefit (in terms of advertising revenue) for media

outlets which successfully professionalize their content. Thomas indicated that

SLBC's improvements in professionalism have resulted in a better relationship

with the public. He says that SLBS was insignificant to society before it became

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[37] DFID and UNDP.

SLBC, whereas the organization is now recognized as a vital conduit of information – press conferences are now delayed if SLBC is late in arriving. Thomas says that the newfound significance and relevance of SLBC to political figures and the general public is related to improvements in quality and professionalism. This is a vote in favour of focusing assistance on a few promising news outlets, in the hopes of raising their standards to the point where they garner the respect of the government and the public.

Media for Peacebuilding

MAPs aimed at promoting peace-building through media have perhaps been the most successful, or at least have garnered the most positive attention from scholars in the field. Kumar (2006b) provides a case study of a major media peace-building project in Sierra Leone, run by SFCG. Called Talking Drum Studio (TDS), the project produces entertainment and news radio programs for a general audience. TDS is not a radio station but an information service – it creates programming which is played on community and commercial stations throughout the country. The studio's emphasis on conflict resolution makes it unique amongst MAPs, which otherwise seek to create a traditional fourth estate in which news reporting feeds on conflict and even "rewards discordant behaviour with airtime and newspaper space, while efforts to build consensus and solve problems are penalized – by being either ignored or discounted" (Marks 2003, 15). Instead TDS creates programming which minimizes conflict and emphasizes methods of reconciliation.

TDS works closely with the Sierra Leonean government and international organizations, employing a multiethnic staff of approximately 60 men and women. It draws its funding from USAID, the Dutch Foreign Ministry, DFID, the European Commission, the Swiss Agency for International Development, the Swedish International Development Coordination Agency, UNHCR and CIDA (Kumar 2006b, 145). Operating on the assumption that citizens are tired of political bickering and the "bleak picture presented by news and events," TDS tries to make its information more accessible to the average listener, using formats such as storytelling, dramas, soap operas, and public discussions (Kumar 2006b, 145).

Kumar (2006b) pinpoints three ways in which TDS has contributed to Sierra Leonean society. First, it provides information and ideas to a national audience, giving voice to ordinary citizens. Studies have indicated that peace-building programs of this sort attract substantial audiences, although shifts in attitudes are more difficult to assess (deZeeuw 2005). Second, it has helped to reduce tensions, particularly in the demobilization of ex-combatants. TDS was credited by DFID for providing information about the National Committee for Disarmament and Demobilization, as well as giving voice to ex-combatants both from the government and rebel factions. Third, the project has strengthened the radio sector through technical and financial assistance to partner stations, and by developing and relying on local talent to produce programs (Kumar 2006b, 149-152).

While TDS demonstrates a good use of local knowledge in providing programming which is relevant and useful to listeners, it still falls prey to the

challenge that most MAPs in Sierra Leone have faced – the creation of a project that is sustainable after donor funding has left the country. SFCG has been unable to establish local sources of income that can be sustained after the project funding is ended, but has stated that it is aware of this typical institution-building shortcoming and is exploring ways to address the problem (Kumar 2006b).

The Road Forward

The preceding assessment of MAPs in Sierra Leone indicates a need to improve donor coordination and use of local knowledge, with the end goal of engaging MAPs in institution-building.

Overall, the main directive that participants had for international organizations was a need to commit to longer periods of time in-country, focusing on tasks that are sustainable after donor funding has dried up. This emphasis on long-term strategies and commitments is also raised in the literature by multiple authors. In his recommendations for media assistance, Kumar writes that the international community "should adjust course by giving equal, if not greater, priority to institution building. Although it should not ignore current needs, the primary goal of media assistance should be to build local capacities" (2006b, 160). De Zeeuw (2005, 498) makes a similar point, stating "most media organization support has been focused on producing output (programs, reports and press statements), not on organizational capacity-building. As a result of these factors, most media NGOs (and some media outlets) have become almost totally dependent on foreign assistance and will certainly perish once this funding stops." Therefore, the "fulfillment of organizational and financial sustainability of local

media organizations needs to be part of any donor exit strategy" in order to fully incorporate the news outlet into political and economic life once the assistance ends (Howard 2003, 26).

If initiatives such as political reform and institution-building are so badly needed, why have projects such as training and material assistance endured as the overwhelming bulk of media assistance programming? Training and material assistance have no doubt impacted the lives of many media stakeholders working in the field, but perhaps their effects have not been felt as extensively as MAP practitioners would have donors believe. Projects of this type endure for a key reason – their "success" is easily measured. Measuring concepts like "media freedom" or "institutional strength" is much more difficult than providing donors with statistics on "number of journalists trained" or "number of computers donated." Essentially, as de Zeeuw (2005, 499) puts it, in this and other forms of democracy assistance there exists a "skewed interest in products over process." Training and material assistance are also short-term projects, making them more attractive to NGOs that are dealing with yearly budget cycles – results can be produced within a much shorter period of time than longer-term undertakings with more abstract goals, such as institution-building.

Other suggestions in the media assistance literature also apply to the Sierra Leonean case, such as the creation of coordination mechanisms not just within the media assistance circles, but incorporating broader democracy-promotion programming (Price, Noll, and DeLuce 2002). Such a mechanism would be useful in Sierra Leone to synchronize activities aimed at building the capacities of a few choice outlets through technical and material assistance, or to pressure the

government to reform its regulatory structure. As "independent media cannot spring to life in anti-democratic societies," MAPs require a "sustained partnership with other democracy developers to create an 'enabling environment' of legal and marketplace reform" (Hume 2004, 14). Economics, politics, social issues, and the media are all interconnected, and coordinating the democracy-promotion activities within these fields could only help to move towards their common goal of democratization.

Another method of promoting institution-building in the media is to enable organizations that support the media, such as associations for journalists, photographers, publishers/owners, advertisers, human rights defenders, or lawyers. Such organizations provide networks in order to create a more cohesive civil society where common interests are recognized and pursued (Olson 2008). The strength of these connections leads to a more integrated and supported media, institutionalizing the free press within society and protecting it from state or elite interference.

First and foremost, the international community could build upon the capacities of SLAJ, as the association is a continuous force in advocating for journalists' rights and responsibilities. Unlike international organizations which come and go at the whim of their funding, SLAJ is a local initiative committed to a long-term advocacy role in the country. David Jabati (editor of *The Exclusive* newspaper) also advocated for the creation of an association to represent journalists who have been physically assaulted because of their line of work. This ties in to a suggestion – found in numerous places in the literature – to promote associations which support journalists' legal rights (and condemn those journalists

who are in contravention of the law or codes of practice). Some even include financing for the media as a portion of the media-support infrastructure, advocating for micro-finance institutions which can provide low-interest loans to media outlets (Kaplan 2008). Such support for the media requires donor coordination across fields, as it crosses into areas such as law, human rights and finance. By harmonizing activities with international organizations working in other (related) fields, the networks of civil society grow stronger and increasingly interconnected.

The importance of monitoring and evaluation is also raised in the literature, suggesting a break from the conventional reporting of output (short-term results of a singular project) instead of outcome (long-term impacts). The improvement of MAPs relies on more than recording the number of journalists trained or responses on recipient satisfaction surveys. Instead, cross-methodological data collection is needed to assess the changes in standards of journalism as a result of programming. While such undertakings are expensive and time-consuming – explaining why they are generally not included in MAPs – they are necessary to provide clear lessons which can be used in the future (Howard 2003; Price, Noll, and DeLuce 2002; Hume 2004). As a widely-accepted methodology for measuring outcomes does not exist (mainly because social and cultural changes are difficult to measure) matters are further complicated (Kaplan 2008). However, proper assessment of projects – as well as the overall media environment – in line with the goals of institution-building is necessary, and resources need to be put towards developing methods of assessing projects.

Conclusion

The challenges facing the fourth estate in Sierra Leone are numerous. Still recovering from a brutal and devastating civil war, the media are struggling to rebuild and push the boundaries drawn by political and socio-economic factors. A shortage of political will – characterized by repressive libel laws, a lack of access-to-information legislation, poor attitudes and even politically-motivated violence against journalists – has erected barriers to the free and depoliticized flow of information in Sierra Leone. The socio-economic characteristics of the country also raise challenges: low advertising rates and a poor populace have resulted in an impoverished press characterized by bribery and soft censorship. MAPs have been active in Sierra Leone for 10 years, but their activities have done little to address these underlying causes of a corrupt press unable to fulfill the role of the fourth estate.

However, the situation is far from hopeless. If MAPs realign towards a goal of long-term institution-building, they have the potential to dramatically increase the speed at which the media sector in Sierra Leone improves and how long those changes are sustained. MAPs stand to foster significant changes in the media environment in Sierra Leone if they employ institution-building through greater use of local knowledge, attention to long-term sustainability, improved aid coordination, the creation of media-supporting institutions, and better monitoring and evaluation. Greater commitment is specifically needed in the regulatory and political realms, in order to promote a political environment in which the media is recognized as an essential component of a democracy and valued for this

contribution to the development of Sierra Leone. A move towards institution-building is not an easily-implemented suggestion – it requires substantial financial and human commitment to undertake long-term programming of this nature. The question remains whether the political will (and financial backing) in the developed world exists to drive these changes forward, as it is clear that such changes would be welcomed by media stakeholders in the country.

International media assistance has positively impacted the lives of almost every journalist in Sierra Leone, whether through material assistance, training or job creation. The intent of this thesis is not to discourage MAPs – just the opposite. The aim is to encourage the designers of MAPs to think critically about their objectives, in the hopes of promoting a longer-term institution-building view which takes into account the unique attributes of the media environment in Sierra Leone. In the preceding pages it has been demonstrated that MAPs have left many challenges to the fourth estate unaddressed, but it was the staunch belief of participants that MAPs are useful – and stand to be more so, if they tailor their approach to Sierra Leone's media landscape. Rather than looking at the symptoms of the ailing fourth estate – bribery, improperly-sourced stories, plagiarism – MAPs must address the source of the infection.

Appendix A: Interview Participants

Name – *Date of interview*. Position.
An asterisk (*) denotes that the name was changed at the request of the interviewee

Bah, Abubakarr – *June 2, 2010*. Mass media student at Fourah Bay College, and a reporter with *Cotton Tree News*, a radio news service which provides content to 15 community radio stations around the country.

Bangura, Timothy* – *June 2, 2010.* Second-year Mass Communication student at Fourah Bay College.

Caulker, Sylvester – *June 2, 2010*. Community radio coordinator at *Cotton Tree News*.

Cole, Bernadette – *June 3, 2010*. High commissioner of the Independent Media Commission.

Forrester, Rachel* – *June 9, 2010.* Freelance communications consultant based in Freetown (originally from abroad).

Hughes, Charlie – *June 1, 2010.* Democracy activist and author, and former freelance journalist and editor for *The Democrat* newspaper.

Jabati, David – *May 31, 2010.* Editor of *The Exclusive*, a daily newspaper based in Freetown.

James, Willette – *June 2, 2010.* Lecturer in mass media at Fourah Bay College.

Kamara, Sayoh – *June 16, 2010.* Public Affairs Officer for the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists since 2009.

Kamara, Womay – *May 31, 2010.* Former reporter for ABC television, and media fellow with Journalists for Human Rights.

Konteh, Amadu* – *June 2, 2010.* First-year Library and Mass Communication student at Fourah Bay College.

Lewis, Kelvin – *June 10, 2010.* Editor of *Awoko*, a daily newspaper based in Freetown.

Massaquoi, Isaac – *June 11, 2010.* Lecturer in mass media at Fourah Bay College, and former project co-ordinator for the Community Radio Network.

Mohmoh, Steven – *June 4, 2010.* Vice-president of the Sierra Leone Photo Union.

Ngombu, Agnes Baindu – *June 2, 2010.* First-year Mass Communication student at Fourah Bay College.

Parkinson, Dan – *June 11, 2010.* Media Officer with the Ministry of Information and Communication.

Pratt, Benjamin – *June 3, 2010.* Freelance radio reporter based in Freetown.

Thomas, Ivan – *June 4, 2010.* Director General of the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation.

Appendix B: Newspaper Headlines

These four daily newspapers – all of which were printed in Freetown on Thursday, June 3, 2010 – demonstrate the extent to which scandalous headlines are used to catch the reader's eye. The newspapers' lead stories are vastly different, drawing into question the veracity of their claims. If such stories were legitimate, it seems logical that there would be at least a degree of overlap among the newspapers. *Photo credits: R. Quipp.*
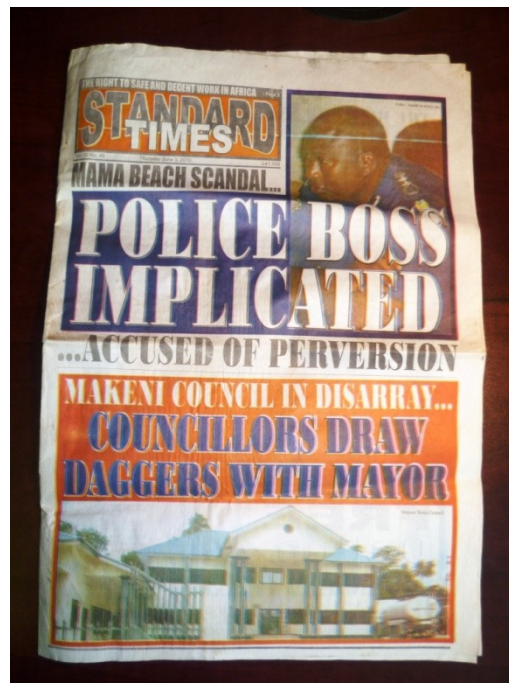
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