



A review of media support in the post-conflict transitional period and recommendations for future actions

Strengthening Liberia's media

REPORT

The partnership for media and conflict prevention in West Africa

Contributing organisations:

ARTICLE 19

FreeVoice

Hirondelle Foundation

International Press Centre, Lagos

International Federation of Journalists

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Media Foundation for West Africa

Media Rights Agenda

Open Society Institute for West Africa

Radio Netherlands Training Centre

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

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The findings in this report are based upon missions to Liberia in June and December 2006, as well as information provided to the mission participants in early 2007.

Cover photo: Daily Talk: A free information billboard with local news for passers-by. (Photo by Pewee Flomoku)

List of Acronyms

CEDE	Centre for Democratic Empowerment
CEMESP	Centre for Media Studies and Peace Building
CJFE	Canadian Journalist for Free Expression
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
IFEX	International Freedom of Expression Exchange
IFJ	International Federation of Journalists
IMS	International Media Support
IPC	International Press Centre
INFORMOTRAC	Initiative for Mobile Training of Community Radios
JHR	Journalists for Human Rights
LBS	Liberian Broadcasting System
LIJ	Liberian Institute of Journalism
LIMESI	Liberian Media Support Initiative
LINA	Liberian News Agency
LMC	Liberia Media Centre
LMP	Liberia Media Project
MFWA	Media Foundation for West Africa
MRA	Media Rights Agenda
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OSI MNP	Open Society Institute – Media Network Program
OSIWA	Open Society Institute West Africa
PIWA	Panos Institute West Africa
PUL	Press Union of Liberia
RNTC	Radio Netherlands Training Centre
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNMIL	United Nations Mission in Liberia
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WAJA	West African Journalists Association
WAN	World Association of Newspaper

This report is being made publicly available in the interests of sharing information and enhancing coordination amongst press freedom and media development actors. All information presented in this report is based on interviews and written contributions provided to the mission members during June and December 2006, as well as information gathered in early 2007, and should be independently rechecked by any party seeking to use it as a basis for comment or action.

The mission team welcomes all feedback and suggestions from organisations or individuals about the report, which can be sent to International Media Support (IMS) or any of the participation organisations. Please see the end of the report for contact details.

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Map of Liberia.

Source: www.liberiapastandpresent.org/liberia_detailed_map.htm1.

1 Introduction

This report outlines the findings and recommendations derived from two assessment missions undertaken by the 'Partnership for Media and Conflict Prevention in West Africa' (the Partnership) to Liberia in June and December 2006, as well as the collation of additional information in early 2007. These missions brought together the expertise of a number of regional and international media development and freedom of expression actors.

This report reviews progress made during the past three years since the signing of the peace agreement and identify collaborative approaches for continuing support to the media. In this regard, the report should be seen as an extension of the original assessment drafted by the Partnership in early 2004 entitled, 'Supporting the Media in Liberia: A Review of the Media Landscape for the Post-Conflict Transition Period' (January 2004).

However, both this report and the 2004 document are not an exhaustive analysis of the numerous sectors and roles of the media in Liberia. Rather, due to the need to combine breadth and conciseness, they present overviews of a number of specific focus areas, providing recommendations for targeted activities to be further developed by specialised actors in those fields.

1.1 Structure of report

The report is divided into three parts. This structure aims to keep the document as simple as possible, so that it can be easily and selectively read by those interested in specific issues within the broader fields of media development and freedom of expression.

The first part includes a brief summary of the background and rationale for the Partnership and its collective involvement in Liberia, as well as the current political and security situation in the country. These chapters have been kept brief, as they contain general information that can also be accessed elsewhere.

The second part consists of the focus areas. Each of these sections provide a description of the area in question, aiming to give an overview of some of the main activities and actors, including facts and figures about individual media, as well as an interpretation of the situation based upon the specialised expertise of the organisations contributing to the report.

The third part outlines the recommendations for activities in each of the focus areas. These have been kept purposefully brief with the intention of focusing attention on those issues where the authors believe action should be taken.

1.2 The partnership for media and conflict in West Africa

Following discussions at the 'Assistance to Media in Tension Areas and Violent Conflict' seminar hosted by UNESCO and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) in Stockholm in May 2003, a meeting was held in Accra the following July to further analyse media and conflict issues in West Africa, with a specific focus on Liberia and the Ivory Coast.

The meeting in Accra was hosted by the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA), in collaboration with International Media Support (IMS), the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO)¹. As a result of this gathering, the 'Partnership for Media and Conflict Prevention in West Africa' was formed, incorporating those organisations contributing to this report, as well as others.

The Partnership utilizes the diverse expertise and resources available amongst national, regional and international media development and press freedom actors, thereby offering a unique approach for the provision of assistance. In this regard, holistic interventions relevant to local needs and reflecting the objectives of international organisations can be designed and implemented covering the broad spectrum of media-related concerns. This collaborative process serves to enhance the potential impact and create stronger sustainability options for activities through ensuring long-term perspectives based upon strong local ownership and the division of tasks between long and short-term actors.

In December 2003, the Partnership undertook a mission to Liberia to assess the media situation in the country. This mission was carried out in cooperation with the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) and included persons from UNESCO, Panos Institute West Africa (PIWA), Media Rights Agenda (MRA), Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA), International Media Support (IMS), International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), International Freedom of Expression Exchange (IFEX) and Article 19.

Other organisations including the World Association of Newspapers (WAN), Hirondelle Foundation, Open Society Institute – Media Network Program (OSI MNP), Open Society Institute West Africa (OSIWA), FreeVoice, IREX – Europe, International News Safety Institute (INSI), Ibis – West Africa, International Alert, International Press Centre (IPC), Radio Netherlands Training Centre (RNTC) and Journalists for Human Rights (JHR) have subsequently been involved in the Partnership. The UNDP office in Monrovia and UNMIL Media Monitoring and Development Unit have also worked closely with the Partnership.

Based on the findings of the December 2003 mission report, Partnership organisations have initiated activities in Liberia in key areas, including media policy reform, professional training (including reporting on the elections and truth and reconciliation processes), assisting associations, support to individual print and broadcast media, the development of a Liberia Media Centre and so forth.

¹ Participants at the meeting included (in alphabetical order): ARTICLE 19, Association of Journalists for Peace in Cote d'Ivoire, International Federation of Journalists, International Media Support, Media Action International, Media Foundation for West Africa, Media Rights Agenda (Nigeria), PANOS – West Africa, Press Union Liberia, Sierra Leone Association of Journalists, Union des Journalistes de Cote d'Ivoire, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

Since the first joint assessment mission in December 2003, the following activities have been initiated by organisations involved in the Partnership²:

Activities	Involved Organisations
Media policy and legislation reform	UNESCO, UNDP, Article 19, International Media Support, Ibis-West Africa, Open Society Institute
Establishment of – and support for the Liberia Media Centre	FreeVoice, UNESCO, IREX, Open Society Institute, International Media Support, International Press Centre
Support and exchange visit for the Publishers Association of Liberia	World Association of Newspapers, International Media Support
Support for the New Democrat printing press	FreeVoice
Development of computer skills for media managers and newspaper typesetters	UNESCO
Online media documentation centre created at the Centre for Media Studies and Peace Building	UNESCO
Support for the broadcast media on policy issues and developing a training framework	Panos Institute West Africa
Re-establishment and operation of Star Radio	Hirondelle Foundation
Professional standards and ethics training	UNMIL Media Monitoring and Development Unit
Leadership training, gender training and conflict reporting	International Federation of Journalists
Safety training	International News Safety Institute
Monitoring and reporting on press freedoms	Media Foundation for West Africa, International Freedom of Expression Exchange
Support to community radio sector	Radio Netherlands Training Centre
Reporting training on the truth and reconciliation process	International Centre for Transitional Justice, International Media Support

² Institutions based in-country that have implemented substantive media support programmes in Liberia include the UNMIL Media Monitoring and Development Unit and the USAID – Liberia Transition Initiative (LTI), together with partners such as Mercy Corps, Ministry of Information (MICAT), University of Liberia – Mass Communication Department and others.

A function of the Partnership is to facilitate joint approaches to potential multi- and bilateral donors. In this manner, it is foreseen that collaborative and holistic funding proposals create better options for donor agencies in terms of ensuring that funds are being properly utilised by credible actors and avoiding wasteful and potentially harmful duplication. Through the Partnership, coordination can be guaranteed prior to the commitment of funds and the added benefits of linkage between activities in similar fields can be ensured from the outset.

Short-term, small-scale funding for the development of strategic approaches will often be sourced from within the Partnership. In regards to longer-term funds, activities may be identified either in response to funding already being available or to address specific needs, with an approach to donors coming subsequently.

As the structure of the Partnership is flexible, members will pursue the development of project concepts and funding individually and collectively. In this regard, the Partnership is designed to be a forum for the mutual coordination of activities and not the collection and distribution of financial resources.

2 Partnership mission to Liberia

Building upon the collective engagement of the Partnership in Liberia since 2003, in June 2006 the organisations listed below undertook a joint mission to the country. This mission was followed-up by a second fact finding mission in December 2006 and the additional collation of information through local partners in early 2007.

- Article 19
- FreeVoice
- International Federation of Journalists
- International Media Support
- International Press Centre
- Journalists for Human Rights
- Media Foundation for West Africa
- Open Society Institute for West Africa
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
- Hironnelle Foundation³

The overall objective of this mission was to assess the media environment in Liberia, with the intention of prioritising and renewing the media support activities of the Partnership together with the local media community within the broader perspectives of post-conflict reconciliation and democratic development.

In this context, the mission sought to assess and derive lessons learnt from media support activities that have been undertaken in the country over the past three years and identify those areas requiring action.

Moreover, the mission aimed to continue dialogue with national authorities and international community on the importance of guaranteeing press freedom and supporting media development. In this regard, the Partnership organisations specifically sought to raise the issues outlined in the section below.

2.1 Target issues addressed by the mission

During the mission, the Partnership organisations sought to pursue and promote the following issues:

2.1.1 Adoption and implementation of New Media Laws

The Partnership has worked with Liberian partners (particularly the Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism, Press Union of Liberia and Liberia Media Centre) since April 2004 to initiate a media law reform process. Under this process, a National Conference on Media Law and Policy Reform in Liberia was convened in October 2004 resulting in a locally-led process to implement the outcomes, which has been supported by the Partnership.

The Partnership is interested in continuing this engagement with the Government elected in late 2005 to ensure that the proposed media laws,

³ *Hironnelle Foundation was in-country after the main team between 20 to 25 June.*

which have been drafted and agreed upon by a broad range of Liberian stakeholders are passed into law in the shortest time possible.

Three new laws are being proposed for adoption. They are:

- Act Establishing an Independent Broadcasting Regulator
- Freedom of Information Act
- National Public Broadcasting Service Act

The draft 'Act Establishing an Independent Broadcasting Regulator' seeks to redress the present state of media laws in Liberia and create an independent mechanism for media regulation while the 'Freedom of Information Act' seeks to give Liberian citizens access to public information in accordance with the well-established principle that public bodies hold information not for themselves, but as custodians of the public good and that citizens can only participate in governance if they have access to such information. The draft 'National Public Broadcasting Service Act' seeks to transform the Liberian Broadcasting System (LBS) into a public service broadcaster serving the diverse needs of various interest groups in the Liberian society, in order to ensure that all voices are heard.

The proposed laws will bring Liberian media legislation into substantial conformity with regional and international standards for the protection of media freedom and freedom of expression, thereby ensuring that the media is able to play an optimal role in the reconstruction of Liberia.

The Partnership sought commitments from the Government to ensure the speedy adoption and effective implementation of the proposed media laws. Members of the Partnership are anxious to see a stable and prosperous Liberia which respects human rights and fundamental freedoms, including media freedom and freedom of expression. By speedily adopting the draft media laws, the Government would be sending a strong signal to the international community that it is charting a new course for the country to move away from the suppression of the media, which characterized previous governments.

After they become Law, the three drafts will require the demonstration of a high level of political will for enforcement. For instance, the Act Establishing an Independent Broadcasting Regulator will require the practical establishment of an independent regulatory body that will need adequate resources to function. It will also require political will on the part of the Government to transfer to the new body various functions (e.g. the licensing of broadcast stations), which are presently being carried out by different ministries and departments.

Effective implementation of the Freedom of Information Act will require a complete overhaul of the record-keeping and management practices of the Government. It will also need public enlightenment and sensitization campaigns to educate citizens about its existence and how to use it.

In the case of the National Public Broadcasting Service Act, without a clear commitment from the Government at the highest level, the adoption of the law alone will not be sufficient to transform the LBS into a public service broadcaster. The Government needs to demonstrate its appreciation that the LBS is a national resource which should serve the interests of all Liberian citizens, regardless of their level of education, ethnicity, political affiliation, religion or other backgrounds. It must therefore ensure the existence of a legal and institutional framework that will enable the station to serve these diverse interests.

The Partnership stands ready to continue to provide technical assistance and other support to the Government in its efforts to ensure the adoption and effective implementation of these laws. In addition, the international community in Liberia should make available the resources necessary to allow these Acts to be effectively implemented.

2.1.2 The media and the Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy (iPRS)

The Partnership also requested that the Government and its development partners ensure that media support is given a prominent place in the proposed Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy (iPRS) document. Funding should be allocated to media development to enhance the ability of the media to play an effective role in this regard.

The Partnership was disappointed that despite the US\$9.5 million estimated for media development in the Results-Focused Transition Framework (RFTF) formulated in late 2003 and early 2004⁴, no allocation was ultimately made to the media sector.

Media development is a legitimate sector in its own right and should be supported within the broader framework of economic, political and social development. The media as the 'fourth estate' plays a central role in the development of transparent and accountable governance. It is therefore a critical element in any poverty reduction strategy. However, for it to play this role effectively, its capacity must be built in a variety of ways to enable it to address issues more productively and to provide an effective platform for civil society to engage the state thereby ensuring an inclusive debate on the country's reconstruction and development priorities.

Furthermore, the Partnership is keen to ensure that the media is not solely viewed in the iPRS as a cross-cutting 'information and communication' tool. Although the media does play a crucial role in communicating on important development issues (whether these be health, education, agriculture, etc.) media development unto itself constitutes a crucial element of good governance.

The Partnership is willing and available to assist the Government and its development partners in ensuring that media development is effectively factored into the iPRS process and, in particular, to directly provide necessary input for the iPRS document.

2.1.3 A substantive and coordinated approach to media development

The Partnership urged the Government and bilateral donors to demonstrate their appreciation of the important role of the media by seriously investing in media development. There are many examples from around the world, especially from countries that have recently been through political transitions, of how media development has made a difference in fostering political reform and economic development. It is clear from these examples that there are strong linkages between economic growth and media development and that the media plays an important role in poverty reduction.

Given the devastation which the Liberian media suffered during the period of conflict, it is even more imperative that substantial investment is made both by the Liberian Government and bilateral donors in developing the

⁴ Media was included in the matrix as point 4.8. under Governance, Democratic Development and Rule of Law section.

media. While there has been some support for the media in the last couple of years, we believe that investment made over a long-term period and in a coordinated manner has the best chance of producing positive results.

Moreover, as shown elsewhere, if media development is to be undertaken in earnest it cannot be approached through a series of one-off training seminars or provisions of equipment. It requires a long-term coordinated approach that seeks to broadly develop skills and build technical capacity.

2.2 Acknowledgements

The two missions in June and December 2006 met with a wide range of Liberian media professionals, national and international civil society and NGO representatives, officials from the government, United Nation agencies and the international community. In this regard, the mission members would like to thank all those individuals and organisations that provided information about the situation in Liberia.

Specific thanks are also expressed to the Press Union of Liberia (PUL) and Liberia Media Centre (LMC) for their support in organising the mission, as well as to the offices of UNMIL, UNDP and UNESCO in Monrovia for their assistance.

The logistical aspects of the mission were supported by International Media Support (IMS), with the participating organisations covering their own expenses.

3 Situation in Liberia

For close to two and a half decades Liberia was plagued by political autocracy, economic stagnation and civil unrest. However, in August 2003 a Comprehensive Peace Agreement⁵ was signed in Accra between the Government and rebel groups, paving the way for peace and a power-sharing administration.

The sizeable regional and international presence in Liberia over the past years has presented a significant opportunity to bring stability to the country in the short-term and establish the groundwork for addressing the country's problems and needs in the long-term. In this regard, the Results Focused Transitional Framework (RFTF), which was prepared by UNDP and the World Bank in late 2003, has formed the basis for much of the international development assistance provided to the country.

In October 2005 presidential and parliamentary elections were held in Liberia. The peaceful election of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf as President marked a significant step towards the creation of a stable democracy and ushered in a new phase in the post-conflict transition.

The successful conduct of the election also opened a new vista in the quest to rebuild the country. In particular, Liberia's presence has been felt in many international fora, while the new Government has been keen to attract foreign investors with the President undertaking a number of foreign trips.

The establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission will also hopefully contribute to peace building and the recommendations of the Committee and Government's implementation of this process will be crucial.

Liberians have generally welcomed these steps, but many state that the true test of the new democracy lies more in its ability to meet the aspirations of the people, particularly in terms of job provision, infrastructural development, investment opportunities, respect of fundamental human rights and press freedom, and the promotion of good governance through openness, transparency and accountability.

3.1 Role of the media

Although the influence of the media during periods of political instability and conflict has long been recognised, it is only in more recent years that it has been specifically addressed by the international development community as a means for positively impacting on conflict resolution and long-term development, both through its function to communicate information, as well as address issues and events in an objective, reliable and accurate manner.

In this regard, a professional and vigorous media community can both prevent and resolve conflict through the automatic functions of disseminating information, furthering awareness and knowledge, promoting participatory and transparent governance and addressing perceived grievances. As noted by

5 *Comprehensive Peace Agreement was between the Government of Charles Taylor and the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) and the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL) and Political Parties (Accra, 18 August 2003)*

the participants in the UNESCO/ SIDA international roundtable on 'Assistance to Media in Tension Areas and Conflict Situations' in May 2003:

'Media underpins development and democratization and is a vital element of conflict resolution and peace building.... An independent media is the foundation of a democracy and more often than not the only guarantee for transparency and good governance in conflict management and post-conflict development efforts'⁶.

For the media in Liberia to play a central role in the post-conflict transition towards transparent and accountable governance, its capacity must be built in a variety of ways to enable it to provide an effective platform for civil society to engage the State and ensure an objective and inclusive debate on the country's reconstruction. Moreover, in the longer-term the media will be essential for the cultivation of a sustainable culture of public accountability, rule of law and democracy. In this regard, accessible independent media will be a fundamental building block for facilitating and supporting the processes of social, economic and political transition.

6 *Seminar on Assistance to Media in Tension Areas and Conflict Situations: Conclusion of Seminar Discussions and Proposed Recommendations (SIDA/ UNESCO, Vaxholm 25-27 May 2003)*

4 Focus areas

The sections below provide a 'context' and 'assessment' of the obstacles and opportunities in each of focus areas, as assessed during the missions in June and December 2006.

The context aims to provide an overview of some of the main activities and actors in a particular area. In this regard, the text includes details and figures about the media in order to orientate the reader and provide a more factual review of the landscape.

The assessment aims to provide an interpretation of the situation, based upon the specialised expertise of those organisations contributing to the report. This section also leads towards the recommendations for actions, which are outlined in the subsequent chapter.

The focus areas covered in the report include:

1. Media policy and legal reform
2. Print media
3. Broadcast media
4. Associations and media institutions
5. Professionalisation and training
6. Monitoring, advocacy and safety

4.1 Media policy and legal reform

4.1.1 Context

In terms of legislation, Liberia provides the basic framework for the exercise of freedom of expression, the media and cross-ventilation of information and ideas. However, there appears not to have been consistent conscientious action on the part of previous Governments to formulate goals, objectives and policies towards the practical implementation of the various enactments.

The various institutions established to facilitate policy formulation on media-related matters were either moribund or so tied to the Government, that they were themselves shackled down by bureaucratic restrictions. Hence, they have not been able to match action with the growing and changing pace in the world media environment. Consequently, the media in Liberia has been unable to effectively perform its core functions in a democratic society. Those who struggled during the conflict to discharge their functions did so in troublesome circumstances.

The basic legal and institutional frameworks in Liberia that provide for the regulation of the media include:

The 1986 Constitution of the Republic of Liberia

Chapter III of the Constitution generally provides for Fundamental Rights. Article 15 specifically provides for freedom of expression; which entails the right to hold opinions, right to knowledge, academic freedom to receive and to impart knowledge and information, right of access to libraries to

obtain such knowledge, freedom of speech, the right to be silent, freedom of the press, right of access to mails, telephone and telegraph; access to state information and its functionaries; access to state owned media, even to express contrary views. These rights are subject to limitations in a state of emergency declared in accordance with the Constitution and/or through Court proceedings with respect to defamation, invasion of privacy rights, false advertising and copyright infringement.

Articles 16 and 17 also made related provisions, as they respectively guarantee protection of privacy of the individual, family, home or correspondence, subject only to an order of court, as well as the right to peaceful assembly, expression of grievances to the Government, right to form and belong to associations, trade unions, political parties and other organisations and right to refuse to so associate.

Decree No. 46 of 1981

This Decree created the Ministry of Information, which is responsible for the direction and supervision of all internal and external matters relating to the information programmes of the Government. In this regard, it selects in accordance with Government policies issues to be broadcast or covered by news stories, for internal and external distribution by the Government. It also liaises with other governmental and private institutions to facilitate communication programmes. Moreover, it is responsible for countering unfavourable propaganda.

The Public Affairs Bureau is a Department of the Ministry of Information. One of its functions is to screen and accredit all local and foreign visiting journalists. The National Communications Bureau is another arm of the Ministry. Part of its functions is to regulate journalists and journalism in Liberia, with due consultation with professional journalists organisations. In furtherance of its regulatory functions, it registered journalists in Liberia on an annual basis before a journalist could practice his/her profession. Any journalist who practiced without due registration was guilty of a misdemeanour of the first degree. It also makes appropriate recommendations to the Minister for the suspension of the licence of a journalist who is adjudged to have violated the provisions of the Decree or regulations made under it. In addition, the Communications Bureau is vested with the important function of regulating the importation, exportation, publication and distribution of books, periodicals, newspapers, booklets, tracts and so forth, including the right of the Government to ban any of these and to set and enforce journalistic standards in relation to these activities.

National Assembly Act of 26 February 1958

This Act creates and establishes the Liberian Information Service. Section 10(b) makes it a misdemeanour for any commercial business, social, civic, philanthropic and religious group to refuse or unduly delay giving information requested by the Director of the Research Division of the Liberian Information Service.

National Assembly Act of 1989

This legislation established the Communications Policy and Regulatory Commission within the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications. Its functions, among others, are to formulate policies and regulations to govern the creation, establishment and operations of all electronic and print media. It also monitors, evaluates and gives licences to all media institutions and persons utilising electronic and print communications and other ancillary facilities and services. It is further vested with the power to impose punitive measures, including fines and revocation of licence for violation of its policies and regulations.

The Accra, Ghana Peace Agreement of August, 2003

This document in part governed the conduct of the affairs of government during the transition period – August 2003 to January 2006. Part Six, Article XII, provides for Human Rights issues generally. Subsection 1(b) provides for freedom of expression, association and conscience. Subsection 2(b) enjoins education of the society on human rights issues, through schools, the media et al.

Press Union of Liberia Code of Ethics and Conduct

The PUL has a Code of Ethics and Conduct. This provides internal self-regulatory mechanisms for journalists. It seeks to ensure that journalists adhere to the highest ethical standards and professional competence in performing their duties.

4.1.2 Assessment

The clause “being fully responsible for the abuse thereof” contained in Article 15 of the Constitution appears to have created a loophole for the flagrant infringement of freedom of expression and media freedom otherwise guaranteed in the Constitution. There is no definition or laid down parameters to determine what constitutes an abuse in that provision. That clause could lend itself to multiple interpretations, depending on the facts, circumstances and the purpose sought to be achieved. An act perceived as an abuse could have criminal and/or civil imputations.

The lack of specific definition of the term “abuse” in the context of the Constitution makes it extremely difficult to know exactly at what point a media publication, delivered speech or any form of the exercise of freedom of expression transcends the bounds of civil defamation to sedition or even criminal malevolence. For instance, sometime between 1999 and 2000, Dr. James D. Torh was charged by the Liberian Government with sedition based on an address he presented at the gathering of students at the William V.S. Tubman High School. In that address, he stated that governance of the country was being run from the pocket of President Taylor. He also dismissed the claim made by the government that the country was impoverished, which he felt was contradicted by the presence of flashy and expensive cars on the streets of Liberia. He further stated that Charles Taylor had failed Liberians, and therefore called on those who voted for and supported him to withdraw their support.

Another example was in August 2001, when Sam Dean, the Editor of the Monrovia Guardian, was charged with criminal malevolence, based on a report published about the Chief of Police in Liberia. In the estimation of the Government, the above acts constituted an abuse of the freedom of expression provision. Therefore, they were criminally prosecuted.

On the issue of curtailing freedom of expression during a state of emergency, it was reported that in April 2003 the Government of Liberia banned public preaching, which the Director of Public Affairs in the Ministry of Justice justified as a measure to protect public safety. International standards, especially Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, prescribe that no restriction on freedom of expression on the ground of national security/safety may be imposed unless the Government can demonstrate that the restriction is prescribed by law and is necessary in a democratic society to protect a legitimate national security interest. The burden of demonstrating the validity of the restriction rests with the Government. In this regard, excuse of national security offered by the Liberian Government during the emergency period contravened international standards.

As previously stated, Decree No. 46 of 1981 established the Ministry of Information. Sections 31.5 and 31.8 respectively created the Public Affairs Bureau and the National Communications Bureau, both under the Ministry of Information. These bodies perform functions that are very significant and fundamental to the constitutionally guaranteed freedom of expression. However, these bodies are far from independent, because they are purely Government departments headed by Government officials. The issue of independence does not arise at all in any of the enactment, as they perform their functions bureaucratically, in accordance with the dictates of the Government.

The enormous powers vested in the Ministry over journalism and the organs that propagate freedom of expression create ample room for repression. Annual registration of journalists creates possibilities for the Government to sanction journalists who are independent or critical of the Government. The criminal sanctions prescribed for failure to register are intimidating. So are the quasi-judicial powers conferred on the National Communications Bureau.

Section 10(b) of the National Assembly Act of 26 February 1958 established the Liberian Information Service. The Law makes it a misdemeanour for any commercial business, social, civic, philanthropic and religious group to refuse or unduly delay in giving information requested by the Director of the Research Division of the Liberian Information Service.

An application of this enactment to media outfits will undermine the independence of journalism profession. It endangers the ability of journalists to protect their confidential sources of information. The law should clearly define the kind of information that commercial business entities are under compulsion to disclose on request. To leave it as wide as it is means that all manner of information must be disclosed on request by the Research Division and this, as earlier stated, will work adversely against journalists in their professional operations.

The National Assembly Act of 1989 established the National Communications Policy and Regulatory Commission under the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications. The composition of this body is the absolute prerogative of the President. This creates a situation of lack of independence for this very important body in performing the functions of regulating and licensing media bodies. It gives ample room for the Government to dish out licences to loyalists and on the basis of political and personal considerations. Obviously, members are likely to demonstrate their allegiance to the President in performing their duties. In this situation, it becomes easier for the government, through the Commission, to deal with dissenting journalists and media institutions.

Media regulation and, invariably, the avenues through which the citizens of Liberia exercise their constitutional right to freedom of expression are predominantly under the control of the Government. In this regard, all the institutions vested with powers for policy formulation and regulation of the media are Government appendages, devoid of the requisite independence to effectively perform their roles. The result in the past was that policies were either not formulated in keeping with the changing trend of events and developments or unilateral actions were taken at the peril of media practitioners. There is therefore an urgent need for a complete overhaul of the entire media industry and related institutions.

The transitional Government through its relevant Ministries (specifically the Justice and Information Ministries) made commitments to the December 2003 assessment mission to assist with ensuring respect for the right to freedom of expression and collaborate closely with civil society, especially the PUL on the reform of media policies. It was agreed that media is a key pillar for national reconstruction.

A media law and policy reform process began in October 2004 with a three-day National Conference on Media Law and Policy Reform. The conference, attended by representatives of various stakeholder groups within the Liberian society, including government agencies, the media, civil society organizations, amongst others, recommended a range of policy and media law reforms to bring Liberian law into conformity with regional and international standards for the protection of media freedom and freedom of expression.

Since the conclusion of the conference, a process was put in place for the implementation of its recommendations, which has involved the drafting of three broad pieces of legislation to replace the existing, but inadequate legal and policy framework for media. Media professionals and representatives of civil society organizations are presently engaged in advocacy for the adoption of the draft laws (please see section 2.1.1. Adoption and Implementation of New Media Laws).

4.2 Print media

4.2.1 Context

Newspapers produce information in permanent form, which is particularly important for documenting 'history as it is made' for future reference. It should also provide in-depth coverage, as well as analysis of news, events and issues, which radio and television lack the capacity to do. They are therefore important news media, even if the high level of illiteracy in Liberia suggests that their utility is limited.

However, despite the widespread perception that the newspaper market in Liberia is saturated, newspapers remain relatively weak. Most newspapers reportedly sell less than 3,000 copies a day across the country, despite there being a population of over three million people. The print media is therefore plagued by a myriad of problems that undermines its capacity to contribute substantially to the reconstruction and democratisation process in Liberia.

A comprehensive reform of this sector is required in order to redress the situation and make newspapers an important and effective tool for rebuilding Liberia. This should involve technical and logistics support, a complete overhaul of their operational strategies, improving the skills and competencies of different categories of personnel, providing essential infrastructure support and reviewing the policy and legal framework under which they operate.

There are approximately 38 newspapers in Liberia, although only about 13 to 18 of them publish with some form of regularity.

Publication and Circulation Figures

As an example from one end of the spectrum, the *Inquirer* and the *News*, which are widely regarded as market leaders, are published five times a week. Their circulation figures have risen over the last three years. The *Inquirer*, which was circulating less than 500 copies daily at the end of 2003, now circulates between 1,000 and 2,500 copies of 8 pages daily for five days

every week, depending on a variety of circumstances. The newspaper is now circulated in four of the 15 counties in Liberia. The *News*, presently the oldest newspaper in the country, circulates an average of 1,000 copies of 8 pages per day for five days a week.

The *New Democrat*, which now has an in-house printing facility, recently joined the market leaders and circulates between 1,500 and 2,000 copies each day for four days a week.

Other newspapers also usually print 8 pages and are published either weekly or two or three times per week. However, circulation figures are not substantial and typically range from a few hundred copies a day to 1,000.

Circulation figures are affected by high cover prices of newspapers. Furthermore, newsprints are not widely available in the country and has to be imported from Sierra Leone or other destinations. Consequently, the price of a newspaper in Liberia at \$20 Liberian Dollars continues to be far above the earning capacity of the average Liberian. This, combined with high levels of illiteracy, explains why papers that were selling up to six thousand copies a day in the last three years cannot sell half that amount presently⁷.

Infrastructure and Financial Resources

Many of the newspapers lack basic infrastructure. There is no electricity supply in the country, so all the newspapers, like other enterprises and businesses in Liberia, rely completely on generators for their power needs. As generators are expensive, the majority cannot afford to own even small generators and have to rent them and buy fuel, which is also costly. Electricity supply has recently been restored in Liberia and this is likely to have a soothing effect on the situation in the coming months.

Local salaries paid to journalists and other professionals in the media industry are reportedly low, with reporters earning between USD 10 and USD 20 per month. Editors appear to be only slightly higher paid, reportedly earning between USD 20 and USD 35 per month. In addition, many of the newspapers are often unable to pay employees in a timely manner, or at all. The result is that many journalists work without pay and have to do other jobs part-time to earn money or depend on incentives from their news sources, given to encourage them to either publish or suppress stories.

Although the condition of some of the newspapers has been brought about by the conflict, during which their offices were vandalised or looted, many of them have been established during or after the conflict and have never had the capital to acquire basic facilities and infrastructure.

Printing

The cost of printing a newspaper is the highest operational expense. It reportedly costs approximately USD 165 to print 1,000 copies of every edition of an 8 page newspaper (USD 250 for a 12-page newspaper and USD 350 for a 16-page newspaper), excluding purchasing newsprint and other production costs. For example, the *Inquirer* and the *News* each reportedly spend USD 225 daily for newsprint and printing of their newspapers.

There has been one major printer servicing the newspaper industry in Liberia, this being the Sabannah Printing Press. This Press has had a near monopoly, resulting in high cost of printing and has also been unable to cope with the printing demands of the newspaper industry. The number of pages and regularity of newspapers are in part dictated by the limited capacity of Sabannah Printing Press, as it reportedly has difficulty coping when

⁷ Illiteracy rates are reportedly at 80 per cent, meaning that the reading public is relatively small.

newspapers attempt to increase their number of pages or the regularity with which they are published⁸.

In addition to this, Sabannah Printing Press was allegedly susceptible to political interference under the Taylor government, which made it possible for the authorities to exercise editorial control over the content of publications. A number of newspaper managers complained that the printers sometimes changed the headlines in their stories and articles after they were submitted for printing without reference to the editor or the publisher and, in some cases, refused to print a newspaper if prevailed upon by the Government not to print a particular critical edition⁹.

Early in December 2003 (a week prior to the assessment mission of that year), the *Analyst* newspaper started printing at another press, Dremags Printing Press. Dremags Printing Press has been in existence for some time as a commercial press, printing documents and other minor jobs. However, it began to try printing newspapers with the *Analyst*, although it reportedly has limited capacity and the costs are essentially the same as those of Sabannah Printing Press. There is limited prospect of it having a substantial impact on the printing situation in the country, unless it acquires more printing machines.

Two years ago, the US Agency for International Development (USAID) donated a Heidelberg offset 46 by 64 cm printer to the PUL, along with a generator and lithographic equipment. However, this facility has not been used mainly because of difficulty in renting or acquiring appropriate premises to install the press, as well as other operational issues.

The *New Democrat* has acquired its own printing facility with the assistance of Free Voice and this has given it a significant advantage in the newspaper market in Liberia. In addition, the *Daily Observer* newspaper also has its own printing facilities.

Distribution

A major challenge in the distribution of newspapers is the security and poor infrastructure situation in the country. Regular distribution is therefore restricted mainly to the capital city where it is done by vendors who gather at the Sabannah Printing Press on production days to collect and sell publications for a commission. Although some of the newspapers said they had some subscriptions, it does not appear that any significant quantities are sold in this manner.

As the hinterland cannot be easily accessed from the capital, only the *Analyst* and the *Daily Observer* had sales agents in most parts of the country at the time of writing. Poor road networks and the lack of suitable delivery vehicles hamper any strategic attempt to get the newspapers to the rural areas on a timely and regular basis.

Ownership

The ownership structures of the newspapers vary. All the newspapers currently in operation are privately owned. The only Government-owned newspaper, the *New Liberian*, was suspended for a while, but was re-started early in 2006 with support from the Public Information section of UNMIL. The majority of the other newspapers appears to be owned by journalists under partnership arrangements, whilst business interests also own a few.

Advertisement

The newspapers bemoan the lack of advertisement revenue. The biggest advertiser in the country is said to be UNMIL, which alone is not sufficient.

- 8 For instance, at a meeting held with members of the Partnership on 11 December 2003, Mr. Mohammed Kanneh, the managing editor of *The Heritage*, said the newspaper, which is published on Mondays and Wednesdays, had wanted to start publishing on Saturdays, but could not because Sabannah Press was unable to accommodate it.
- 9 In separate interviews, Mr. Mohammed Kanneh of *The Heritage* and Mr. Ignatius George, an editorial consultant to *The Analyst*, complained about such practices.

There is little advertisement coming from Government and some publishers are of the belief that Government has strategically sidelined and abandoned certain newspapers and do not give them adverts at all. In the few instances where there is advertisement from the Government, it could take up to two or three months before payment is made.

Furthermore, despite efforts at standardisation, there are no fixed brackets for the prices of adverts. While some newspapers may decide to take up to \$500 Liberian Dollars for a half page advert, other papers may accept \$300. Competition can often be healthy, but in circumstances where advertisers are profiteering from the very poor commercial conditions of newspapers, this can cause damage to the wider print media landscape.

4.2.2 Assessment

The newspaper environment in Liberia remains far from healthy. It faces a wide range of challenges; newspapers are poorly funded and undercapitalised; they lack basic infrastructure, including vital communication facilities; they often have inadequate management capacities; reporters and editors for the most part have little formal professional training and the difficult political, economic and social environment under which they operate means that there is very little market for media products.

Financing

The disruption of the country's electricity supply for years after the conflict meant that all the newspapers, like other enterprises and businesses in Liberia, have had to rely entirely on generators for their power needs. Many cannot afford to own generators. In fact, of those newspapers visited, only one owned a small generator of less than 2 KVA. They therefore sometimes have to resort to borrowing generators at high costs, in addition to the equally high cost of buying fuel to power them. However, with the recent restoration of electricity supply in parts of the country, particularly Monrovia, this situation is changing.

Although a number of the proprietors insist that if they were to receive funding and equipment, their economic fortunes would dramatically improve, the reality seems to be that there is little prospect for their survival on the basis on such support alone. On average, 80 per cent of the income of each of the newspapers reportedly comes from advertising, while 20 per cent comes from sales. The possibility of increasing advertising revenue without a drastic solution to the other challenges is problematic, as the advert market has seemingly reached saturation. The low circulation figures do not make them attractive for advertisers.

In an environment of low economic activity in the post-conflict period in Liberia, the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), as well as other UN agencies and relief organisations, are the main sources of advertising revenue for newspapers and other media organizations. Some newspapers have complained that in such an environment, independent reporting is hampered, as they allege that some of these agencies and organisations have been known to withhold advertising from newspapers that had written offensive or negative articles about them and to blacklist them from their other activities. One example frequently cited of this practice is that UNMIL blacklisted the *Vanguard* newspaper and stopped giving it advertising as a result of a series of articles published by the newspaper. However, as UNMIL and other relief organisations scale down their operations, there are fears in the industry that once they leave the country this source of revenue will disappear.

It seems likely that as the new democratic Government stabilises, the security situation in the country will improve and access to other parts of the country, aside of Monrovia, will be possible and with it an increased penetration by the newspapers. This could significantly improve circulation figures of many papers, if they are able to put effective distribution mechanisms in place. It could also increase advertising as economic activity develops in those areas outside of Monrovia.

Printing

One of the main challenges that the press in Liberia faces, is access to an efficient cost-effective printing press. The existing near monopoly in this area has resulted in indirect control over the editorial content of newspapers by commercial printers beholden to political authorities. However, beyond this, the limited capacity of the printing press has hindered the growth of the newspaper industry in a number of ways. Firstly, it has not allowed newspapers that want to move from being bi-weeklies to dailies to do so, because it reportedly cannot handle the additional printing. Secondly, it has limited the ability of newspapers to increase their pagination, where they are so inclined.

Moreover, a printing press is one of the most vital institutions in the print media business. The general public cannot have access to information without production of the papers that contain it. Therefore, if due to high cost of production resulting from a near monopoly situation or inability of the printer to cope with the pressure from numerous demands wherefore most publications are not printed or where the government keeps vigil at the premises of the printer to cross-check in advance papers for publication and then either prevent or confiscate dissenting publications, this has the dangerous potential of depriving the people of exercising and enjoying freedom of expression and of the media.

If a significant merger of newspapers in the country was undertaken, it could be anticipated that the surviving or emerging newspapers would have to substantially increase their print run to thousands, in order to be viable. So far, only one merger has been recorded. However, if the number of copies that the printing press can produce remains limited, then the merger would not be able to achieve this. Besides, with the expected improvement in economic activities in Liberia, even if no reduction in the existing number of newspapers is achieved, there would still be room for the individual newspapers to develop and expand, for instance, by getting more advertising in a thriving economy, more readership amongst a more financially buoyant population, increasing their print run, increasing their pagination and some of them migrating from bi-weeklies to dailies. The present situation of the printing press will constrain such growth. It could therefore be beneficial if alternative printing presses emerge in the country.

Distribution

The distribution of the newspapers to locations outside Monrovia is currently largely affected by the poor communication infrastructure. Most of the newspapers do not have transportation and would have to make use of commercial vehicles for distribution. This would be expensive and difficult for individual papers to organise, given their low level of resources and the lack of national structures to coordinate such distribution. The solution could lie in a joint or, at least, coordinated distribution arrangement that enables participating newspaper organisations to pool their resources and share costs. The possibility of improving on the subscription system should also be explored, as this will mean that newspapers can have some guaranteed sales even before they print.

Management, training and content

In addition to the technical and infrastructure problems, many newspapers also suffer from poor management and personnel training in a wide range of areas relating to the media business. Few appear to have business plans, although some of them have accountants or business managers. The management capabilities of most of the newspaper proprietors and managers should be upgraded to allow them to operate with enhanced professionalism.

Based upon the current number of pages published by each newspaper, the space available for reporting on the critical issues of peace building, reconstruction and democratisation is severely limited, with the result that they are frequently not addressed. Besides, there is sometimes a lack of diversity in the editorial content of the newspapers. For the press to be able to play an effective role in these processes, the problem will need to be addressed particularly by finding ways for the newspapers to profitably increase their pagination and the space devoted to editorial material.

Given the small and poorly developed reading and advertising market, there appears to be no rational explanation for the high number of newspapers in the country. Although a number of the proprietors visited thought a merger of some of the newspapers was desirable, many said it would be extremely difficult to implement, because most were reluctant to lose the prestige of being newspaper owners. Three newspapers – the *Standard*, the *Vanguard* and the *Independent*, have recently merged to become the *Monitor*. However, the promoters say that this has not yet had the significant positive effect sought.

4.3 Broadcast media

4.3.1 Context

Television

A few television channels have appeared in Liberia, although there is still no functioning national television station. The TV channel of the Liberian Broadcasting System (LBS) has not been operational for over a decade. Power TV, Clar TV and Real TV operate from Monrovia, whilst DC TV, which was also broadcasting in the capital, has been closed for a year.

International television channels are easily accessible by satellite, but access is dependent on subscription, which is expensive and therefore only regularly viewed by the more wealthy segment of the population, as well as those that have access to such channels through their workplace or other communal source. Financial and technical realities mean that there does not appear to be any perspectives for establishing a national TV broadcaster in the short term.

Radio

Contrary to the television landscape, radio in Liberia has flourished and increased in plurality and diversity. Many stations have sprung up during the past years and there are reportedly over 50 registered radio stations in the country. The majority of these play music and carry advertisement, as well as public and private announcements.

The number of stations in Monrovia is close to fifteen, with most operating through FM only. Most are privately owned and reports from the election

campaign during the latter half of 2005 indicate that half of them openly or covertly supported individual candidates or political parties. In this regard, a number appear to have close ties with political groups and with the passing of the elections the future survival of many has been called into question.

At present, there are about 47 community stations outside of Monrovia, out of which less than 35 are active. These stations have mostly been supported by Mercy Corps with USAID funding. Signal strength limits the majority of these stations to approximately five miles and although many of the stations were designed to be self-sufficient (including solar electrical power, digital equipment and computers for editing and broadcasting) sustained external support for their operations is uncertain.

At the time of writing only three stations – Radio Veritas, ELWA and Star Radio – operate both on FM and Short Wave, whilst only one station has a national FM network – UNMIL Radio – and only one operates a website with updated audio files for the Liberian Diaspora – Star Radio¹⁰.

Many stations cooperate with international actors and broadcast programmes such as those produced by Talking Drums Studios, UN agencies and others.

Content and professionalism

Most programmes on the stations are from western sources and appeal to youth, although there are increasing efforts to have local programmes. Some stations only air music and show films, and do not run news. Programmes are produced both in-house and by independent producers.

Professional standards in the broadcast media are generally low and there are calls for more training on what constitutes news, headlining of reports, interview techniques, news presentation and news production.

Revenue and frequencies

For most of the stations advertisement is responsible for 70 percent of revenue, while the rest comes from other sources, particularly donor support. Frequency allocation is done by the Liberia Telecom Authority (LTA). Both the TV and the Radio pay licensing fees as stipulated by the regulating authority.

4.3.2 Assessment

i. Television

Clar TV

Clar TV is part of Royal Communications Inc., which is owned by George Weah and also includes Kings FM and City FM. Royal Communications has been running since 2004 and employs a total of 34 people.

Clar TV has no studio and only the resources to run minimal local programming due to lack of resources, funding and training. As an example, the station only has 2 cameras. The stations broadcasts for 18 hours per day and is a VOA affiliate, but also runs programmes from the BBC, CNN and other international channels.

Power TV

Power TV is part of the Infinity Corporation, which also includes Power FM and is owned and run by persons formerly associated with the Liberia Communication Network, created during the Taylor era. The Corporation was founded by 4 journalists and it is funded through advertising, which accounts for 70 percent to its revenue. Power FM/TV does not receive donor

¹⁰ The website for Star Radio is: www.starradio.org.lr

support. The group currently has 15 journalists. The Corporation should have reportedly moved to bigger facilities by the end of 2006.

Power TV has started running its own programming with programmes from international channels accounting for 30 percent. The station now has a TV studio, though it continues to lack regular electricity supply. It solely relies on its private generator as a source of power. The station has 4 working cameras and covers all of Monrovia.

ii. Private and commercial radio stations

Star Radio

Frequency: FM 104, SW & Website

Established: 1997 to 2000; 2000 to 2003 (closed by Taylor); restarted in 2005

Description: *Independent* news and information radio station for Liberia & the sub-Region; donor funded; programmes on current affairs and news; broadcasts in 18 Liberian languages, French, English and Liberian English; daily news on the internet and the website covering audio programs, advertisements & announcements.

Original started by Foundation Hironnelle in 1997, but closed down by the Taylor government in 2000, Star Radio was reopened in May 2005 with the support of the European Commission, United Kingdom, Switzerland, Norway and the Netherlands.

Star has modern equipment and engages in news and current affairs and development programming, with the aim to reach the entire country. To ensure sustainability, Star radio has recently reduced its broadcasts hours from 17 to 14 hours daily, but continues to broadcast in 16 Liberian languages and covers the whole country, as well as most of the sub-region with 1 hour daily of Short Wave broadcasts.

As with UNMIL Radio, due to attractive salaries, a number of Liberian journalists have taken employment with Star Radio from other stations. The station currently has a staff of 70, but due to sustainability concerns, particularly with reduced donor funding it has started implementing the planned gradual reduction of staff by 20%. Last September it laid off staff who by then were actually being paid reduced salaries.

The radio station also operates a website on which the Liberian Diaspora has access to updated information and to downloadable audio files, thereby providing the opportunity for Liberians abroad to access information from within the country.

Radio Veritas

Frequency: FM 97.8 & SW

Established: 1997

Description: Owned by the Catholic Church; current affairs and entertainment; broadcasts in English and some local Liberian languages.

Supported by the Catholic Church, Radio Veritas is one of the oldest stations in Liberia and operated during the conflict, whilst developing a respected professional track record. The director, Mr. Rennie Ledgerhood, has steered the radio for the last 10 years through all the difficulties and has maintained a reputation of a fair and informative station.

Radio Veritas provides news and information. The station's FM broadcast

reportedly covers most of the country, although its Short Wave coverage is limited. It maintains the former Star radio shortwave system and has expanded to a 200 km range transmitter for FM. It has also received new equipment. Its programming is 75 percent general and 25 percent religion, mostly catholic. It relies on in-house production mostly and makes use of few programmes from independent sources.

The majority of private stations are owned by individuals or companies and are mainly funded through announcements and advertising. In this regard, it seems that much of the commercial and private radio sector depends heavily on outside donors to complement revenue generation. Equipment is often basic, although those supported by external donors have better facilities, including digital equipment. These stations only broadcast within greater Monrovia. The table below provides basic information about the majority of these stations.

Name	Frequency	Established	Description
ELWA	FM 94.5 & SW	Since 1954; 1990 to 1992 closed due to rocket damage	Programmes mainly focuses on Christian religion; broadcasts in English; operated by a group of Liberians trained by the Christian group ELWA (Eternal Love Winning Africa of the Sudan Interior Mission)
DC 101 (Ducor Broadcasting Corp.)	FM 101.1 & TV	Since 1995	Privately owned by a Liberian politician; programming includes current affairs, advertisement and entertainment; broadcasts in English
LCBN	FM 102.2	Since 2002	Programmes focus on Christian religion and are in English; operated by a Church group
King's FM (Royal Commu- nications Inc.)	FM 88.5	Since 2004	Owned by George Weah; broadcasts 18 hours a day with a 500w FM transmitter; it has one studio and relays UNMIL news and programmes, current affairs, music and advertisement; programmes are in English
City (Royal Commu- nications Inc.)	FM 90.2	Since 2004	Owned by George Weah; broadcasts 18 hours a day on a 200w FM transmitter; music/entertainment and advertisement; all programmes are in English.
Crystal	FM 95.5	Since 2004	Owned by a group of Liberian journalists with reported links to pro-Charles Taylor political entities; programming includes current affairs, advertisement and entertainment; covers most of Monrovia city
Power (Infinity Corp.)	FM 93.3	Since 2005	Owned by a group of Liberian journalists with reported links to Liberia Communication Network created during the Charles Taylor era; programming includes current affairs and music; programmes are in English; development oriented – has programming on sanitation, health, social issues and so forth, as well as programmes from Talking Drum Studio (Search for Common Ground); broadcasts cover all of Monrovia.
Love	FM 105	Since 2005	Privately owned by a member of the civil society and a Liberian politician; programming includes current affairs and music; programmes are in English.
Truth	FM 96.1 & TV	Since 2005	Privately owned by a Liberian politician; programmes include current affairs and entertainment; programmes are in English; the director, Ambrose Nmah, is a Liberian schooled in Ghana and gained

iii. Radio stations that operate as public service broadcasters

ELBC

Frequency: FM 99.9

Established: 1960

Description: State owned; current affairs & entertainment; broadcasts in English, French and some local Liberian languages.

Liberia Broadcasting System (LBS) was established in the 1940s and comprised the FM radio station ELBC, the Short Wave radio and a TV station. The state-owned LBS was not spared during the conflict and being situated in Paynesville on the outskirts of Monrovia, it changed hand several times between the warring factions.

Following the end of the conflict in 2003, LBS was in a serious state of disrepair. Only one of its two buildings was functional, the other being gutted during the years of conflict. There were serious obstacles in performing the most basic of tasks, such as writing a newscast. The newsroom had only two typewriters and it was observed that much of the newscast was handwritten. Moreover, there was only one functioning studio, the equipment in which was old and in disrepair. For a period, LBS was left to struggle along with meagre resources and, because of the conflict, there was no significant external assistance for years.

The new LBS Director, Mr. Charles Snetter (former founder of Radio Monrovia and one of the first Liberians to open an FM station in the country) appears keen to empower the national radio, attract international funds and enlarge the activities throughout the country.

Strengthened by support from USAID, LBS has acquired new digital players/recorders, 5 field digital recorders, metric system for live broadcast and 4 on air broadcast computers, all of which were inaugurated in May 2006.

Further to the support, talk show studios have been redesigned. They could now accommodate a minimum of 5 persons and a maximum of 8 persons on-air, while also making it possible to have live guests on a daily basis on the morning show. The newsroom has been transferred downstairs with new tables and chairs, air conditioner and other decorations and 2 computers for editing. The website has been launched and received 8,000 hits in the first two weeks.

As a consequence of these developments, the output of reporters and programmes has been strengthened considerably. The programme, Liberian Panorama, is highly rated and since September 2006 has been featuring the President on the last Tuesday of every month. Live broadcasts are done outside Monrovia and the signal is received all along the country's border with Sierra Leone.

Additionally, the Government of China has offered to provide LBS with an FM system that has the capacity to cover 75% of the country or more. It has also agreed to redesign and equip a master control studio and two others for production, one of which will strictly be for language programmes. A 10 KW transmitter is to be provided and 6 relay stations, each with 1 KW FM transmitters are to be constructed and installed in places like Bomi Hills, Gbanga, Upper Maryland and Bikana. The Memorandum of Understanding for the above support has been signed, while an assessment has been done by a Chinese technical team with take off scheduled for between January and July 2007.

Encouraged by these developments, the LBS management is negotiating with several entities for the establishment of a TV channel that will broadcast nationwide.

Despite these successes, LBS still faces a number of challenges. For example, the management is mandated to provide 40% of the income even though the economic environment is tough. The management also believes that professionals should be well compensated, but admits that salaries are currently below desirable standards. Yet it needs staff who are well trained and has tried to convince the government to provide additional support.

However, in order to enhance professional standards, the management has sent some personnel abroad for training, especially for the proposed TV to be located in the station's other unused building.

Although Mr. Snetter stated that a public service broadcaster would be costly, considering the size of the country and could be a significant strain on the public budget, he said he was not opposed to the idea in principle. The reinvigoration of LBS should therefore be undertaken over a staggered period, coupled with public education on the need for such a broadcaster.

UNMIL Radio

Frequency: FM 91.5

Established: 2003

Description: Owned by the United Nations; broadcast focuses on public information of United Nations activities and peacekeeping/security; broadcasts in English & some local Liberian languages.

Established in accordance with the UN mandate for Liberia, the station is well-equipped and presently reaches most of the country. The station is led by the Chief of Radio, Joseph Roberts-Mensha, an experienced radio practitioner from Ghana.

UNMIL has a 1 KVA FM transmitter in Monrovia and several FM transmitters across the country in key locations. The station broadcasts 24 hours a day in English and Liberian English, although not in local languages. The programmes mainly focus on the operations and programmes of the international community and Government, thus following a public information model rather than a journalism model. Due to attractive salaries, a number of Liberian journalists have taken employment with UNMIL Radio from other stations.

At the time of writing the decision on the future use of the radio stations and its equipment at the end of the mission's mandate is yet to be taken, but there are indications that the facilities may be turned over to the Government.

iv. Community radio

There are currently 57 community radio stations registered in Liberia, out of which 37 are reportedly active¹¹. This marks a considerable expansion in community radio in the country due to the support provided for the establishment and operation of such stations by donors. Nevertheless, it continues to be a problem for these stations to access the resources and professional development opportunities they need.

Community radio stations in Liberia face the challenge of acquiring resources for capacity building, including personnel recruitment and training.

11 Please see Annex 3: UNMIL list of community radio stations in Liberia (Source: 'Needs Assessment Community Radio Liberia' (9 February – 7 March 2007), INFORMOTRAC, Radio Netherlands Training Centre)

Community-driven support is often lacking, while business support is only extended to those close to the capital, and this is also limited. Power supply remains a major obstacle and it has not been possible for the stations to acquire digital equipments. While some of the stations have developed different kinds of programmes to attract revenue (for example Radio Bomi has organized beauty and leadership contests for which fees were charged), long term sustainability and ownership need to be addressed.

Mercy Corp ran an extensive community radio programme during 2004 and 2005 with funding from USAID. However, it is currently scaling down its operation due to reduced donor support. Of the stations established, it is reported that some have flourished whilst other have faced difficulties in sustaining regular operations.

USAID entered into an initial 3-month contract with Star Radio to maintain the community radio system in 2006 and 2007. The pilot phase started in November 2006 and ended in January 2007. It involved the supply of equipment and programmes exchange with Radio Bomi, 98.9 FM in Bomi county; Radio Ggehzoohn 106.3 FM in Grand Bassa County and Radio Gbarnga 96.5 FM in Bong County. The project also involved training in the basics of broadcast journalism, news gathering, interview techniques, monitoring and programmes development.

The Radio Nederland Training Centre (RNTC) in collaboration with the Liberian Media Center (LMC) held a 'Future Search Conference on the Community Radio' in Liberia in early 2007. Under this collaboration, a needs assessment mission was undertaken to approximately 40 community radio stations. As a result, RNTC has produced a comprehensive report on the situation of community radio in Liberia, entitled 'Needs Assessment Community Radio - Liberia: 9 February - 7 March 2007' (Mario Nozza and Brigitte, Radio Netherlands Training Centre).

The Initiative for Mobile Training of Community Radios (INFORMOTRAC) has also been launched by RNTC, under which 12 stations will be offered all relevant equipment (BLF and HF) and mobile training on location.

The Liberia Media Project, which is a partnership of International Alert and three Liberian organizations, namely the Centre for Justice and Peace Studies, Justice and Peace Commission and Press Union of Liberia, has installed four community radios in Toe Town, Grand Gedeh; Fish Town and Webbo, River Gee; Sass Town, Grand Kru and is in the process of establishing another four community radio stations (two in Gbarpolu, one in Bong and one in Vahun, Lofa). The LMP provides the equipment, whilst the local community builds the structures. LMP also produces programs on peace, governance and HIV/AIDS to be aired by community and local radio stations. The community radio stations are meant to provide a voice for the common people in the dialogue for Liberia¹².

The Liberia Community Radio Broadcasting Association (LIRCORBA) is seeking to develop a policy framework and document for community radios. LIRCORBA has also suggested that since most stations were taken to the communities to be run as NGOs, they should benefit from the funds given to the communities for development. Local communities have budgets from the Government and it is argued that community radios have a role to play in terms of development communication.

12 The LMP has convened meetings of various stakeholders (youth, women, community leaders, CSO, interim government representatives, ex-combatants, etc.) to discuss, analyze and deliberate on the peace process. The LMP also arranges cultural festivals, including traditional music, dance and food to celebrate peace, as well as conducts training for women and youth from the counties on the usage of media for promoting and advocating peace and human rights, including providing each participant with a battery operated radio set. The LMP has also provided training for traditional media people (town criers, traditional communicators, story tellers) from each county and provides such persons with battery operated public address system.

LIRCORBA has also proposed a national meeting of community radio stakeholders to examine and proffer solutions to the myriad of problems besetting the sector, including funding and professional standards.

The Association of Liberian Community Radios (ALICOR) currently runs a network of technicians that makes rounds of member community radio stations to troubleshoot, diagnose and correct system faults at these stations. This network is currently run on funding provided by the member organisations and it is at times facilitated by the UNMIL Public Affairs Section in the form of the provision of transport (usually helicopter) services for missions to difficult-to-access parts of the country.

ALICOR is currently in possession of 15 solar panels that have been turned over to the organization by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) for distribution to radio stations across the country. According to the organization, the installation of the panels will help the community radios to solve a significant part of their electric power requirements. Finally, ALICOR is in the process of initiating a training of trainers to help prepare the organization's leadership to provide training for community radios across the country.

The Liberia Community Radio Network (LICORNET), with funding from Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA), has been involved with promoting community radio in Liberia. LICORNET has also worked with LTI to train and supply community radios with equipments through an "in-kind grant". They also worked with their core supporter OSIWA to identify the needs of community radios and train staff locally and through the international conferences they attended.

v. Regional media

The influence and presence of regional media in Liberia is currently limited, as there is only one of such – the West African Democracy Radio (WADR) supported by the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA).

The Liberian office of the WADR has three reporters stationed in Monrovia, but managers of community radio stations up country contribute stories to WADR Monrovia office.

The local office produces programs on human rights, gender issues, health, youth and democracy. Ordinary citizens are the main sources of WADR stories. WADR has an MoU with 9 community radio stations under which they relay its programs from Dakar. The stations are in turn given small grants from OSIWA, WADR's, sole donor.

WADR broadcast in English and French on short-wave on the frequency 17875 Kilowatts and on the FM on 94.9 in Dakar. The coverage extends to the entire West Africa and parts of Europe.

4.4 Associations and media institutions

4.4.1 Context

Since the end of the conflict in 2003, there have been significant developments in the media landscape in terms of the formation and strengthening of associations and networks. However, networking as an advocacy strategy has not yet yielded the desired results for the Liberian media. A cursory

glance at the unions and associations reveals that not all is well. Given the current situation faced by the media houses, there arises the need for more collaboration and solidarity in order for the media to be able to get the best out of the already saturated media landscape in Liberia. Hence there is a need for the associations to build strong alliances among themselves, as well as to strengthen their relations with the international NGOs and other associations that they collaborate with.

4.4.2 Assessment

i. Media practitioners

Press Union of Liberia

At the end of 2006 the Press Union of Liberia (PUL) had a total of about 450 registered members. These are divided into the full members (those who have practised for 5 years and above); associate members (those who have practised for 5 years) and affiliates (non-Liberians). Despite the two changes in leadership since late 2003 – firstly with the election of Elizabeth Hoff in December 2004 to replace Terrence Sesay and then the appointment of George Barpeen as President after Ms. Hoff moved to the Ministry of Information as a Deputy Minister – the PUL has continued for the past three years to be a real force for promoting and defending press freedom in the country.

Over the past few years, the PUL in collaboration with NGOs, international organisations and UN agencies in Liberia and abroad has been able to conduct various training programmes to support the professional development of the wider media community. Taking into consideration the sensitisation needs in preparation for the 2005 elections and the explosive emergence of community radio stations in rural Liberia, the PUL has often been at the forefront in designing training programmes aimed at equipping Liberian journalists with the required knowledge and skills to create awareness on civic rights, thus contributing their quota in building and supporting Liberia's democratic gains.

In relation to the issue of ethics, the PUL has continued to remain vigilant in monitoring its members. Most recently, one of the members was suspended in relation to the deliberate violation of the Code of Ethics. The PUL also condemned the *Independent* newspaper for violating public sensitivity over the publication of the sex-photos of a Minister in Government who has since resigned. Such developments have led the PUL to reconstitute its Ethics and Governance Committee. Nevertheless, the concerns for the PUL continue to remain significant, particularly as one of the major challenges for the Union is how to build own headquarters.

The PUL has reiterated its priority to have 3 regional offices in addition to the headquarters in Monrovia to be located in Zwedru for the South East, Gbarnga for Central and Tubman Barg for the West. This way, it hopes to decentralize and enhance its ability to run programs that benefit members outside the capital. It is seeking support for the purpose of recruiting staff and acquiring equipment and facilities. In the immediate period, it plans to open at least one of the regional offices and hopes that media establishments will make use of the facilities for token fees.

The PUL is seeking to improve its financial capacity. Its current major source of revenue is an annual grant from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) through which it funds administration and running expenses, conducts two training programs annually and organizes a monthly intellectual forum

at which stakeholders discuss national issues. Another main source of revenue includes the minimal fees it charges members for the issuance of ID cards.

The PUL is keen to organise skills training for journalists in specialised areas, including judiciary reporting, political reporting and health (HIV/AIDS, malaria) reporting. Its priority also include skills training for photo journalists, who has so far only benefited from one training program and management training for media managers.

The PUL is also concerned about the state of female journalism and has facilitated the training of 25 women in the Mass Communication Department of the University of Liberia.

*Female Journalists Association of Liberia and
Liberian Women Media Action Committee*

The female media community is small and reportedly often divided by disagreement. Moreover, discrimination against female media practitioners as lacking in commitment to the profession, undoubtedly makes it harder for them than their male counterparts. The media industry in Liberia is clearly male-dominated.

The Female Journalists Association of Liberia (FEJAL) was established in December 1999 as an affiliate of the PUL. It has about 33 active members out of an estimated total of 50. The leadership has a lean resource base, as members do not pay dues, while it has complained about lack of interest by members, some of whom reportedly consider journalism a temporary abode before moving on. FEJAL is encouraging media managements to go through journalism/mass communication institutions for recruitment, while also working to pick talents from the high schools.

FEJAL has extended its activity beyond the capital to the rural areas and in November 2006 held a workshop in Gbanga for 25 of its members. FEJAL has also been networking with other organisations including the African Women Development Fund for its programmes and activities. Its attempt to produce a regular newsletter has not been successful, although it does organise talk shows that address issues relating to 21st century women. To strengthen its capacity to undertake its activities, FEJAL needs equipment support for its office including vehicle for its rural programmes.

The Liberian Women Media Action Committee (LIWOMAC) works under difficult circumstances in Liberia. It was started by a group of media women to highlight the concerns of women and children in response to the various abuses suffered by women during the insurgency of 2003. LIWOMAC deals with rights and justice issues and has since its inception organized many activities. As examples, last year it launched an anti-sexual violence sensitization campaign through the support of the Global Fund for Women. LIWOMAC also organizes training on human rights for community women and engages in relief activities. LIWOMAC has a Board of Advisors but its day to day management is the responsibility of the Executive Director/National Coordinator.

Although LIWOMAC has received funding from a number of bodies and institutions including UNFPA, UNDP, UNIFEM and UNICEF, it requires support in order to build its capacity to implement its expanding programmes. After initially operating within the premises of the PUL, LIWOMAC has now moved to its own rented office. The office however needs computer and Internet facilities, air conditioner and other secretariat equipment.

ii. Editors and publishers

Publishers Association of Liberia

The Publishers Association of Liberia has been strengthening its organisation over the past years in order to be able to address the serious problems confronting the publishing industry, particularly as it is evident that the current situation cannot be remedied by any one single newspaper.

The Association has about 25 members comprising 15 active newspapers and 10 non-active ones. Through the assistance of the World Association of Newspaper (WAN), the Publishers Association has been able to acquire an office space, which at the time of writing was yet to be officially occupied by the group. WAN is also supporting the Newspaper in Education (NIE) project, which aims to use newspapers as an additional source of information in Liberian schools and is run in conjunction with the Ministry of Education. Moreover, in cooperation with International Media Support, WAN supported the Publishers Association to undertake a capacity building mission to Ghana and Uganda to meet with and discuss methods for improving the print media sector with their counterparts in these two countries.

The Association lamented that there was a printing machine given to the PUL, which has never been utilised because there was initially no place to house it. However, the printing press has been lying idle for the past five years and has most likely deteriorated in condition.

The Association also bemoaned the lack of training opportunities for its members and considers the following areas of support as critical to the growth and development of newspaper publishing in the country:

- Human Resource Development: short-term and refresher training for editors and reporters;
- Financial Assistance: core funds to upgrade staffs' news gathering and news processing capacities; funds to help media houses jointly or individually establish printing presses; funds to expand coverage and distribution;
- Resource Centre: a journalist centre well-equipped with reference materials and books on current trends and debates in media works, in line with changing times.

Editors Association

Like the Publishers Association, the Editors Association faces critical challenges. Formed in August 2004, the Editors Association is meant to bring together all gatekeepers to network and has a significant membership, which comprises the managing editors and sub-editors of newspapers and radio stations. It presently runs its official affairs from the office of the Forum newspaper.

The Association was set up to improve on the standard of newspapers and content of radio stations by objectively being able to criticise their own work and to come out with strategies that will help overcome the difficulties that they are confronted with. Though previously effective, it appears that the committees set up to monitor the work of newspapers and radio stations have faced obstacles in undertaking their work and their decisions have not been fully respected.

Prior to the 2005 elections, the Association collaborated with the Mass Communication Department of the University of Liberia on a three-month training programme on election reporting. There were also similar collaborations with the PUL and USAID in computer training.

The Association is reintroducing the internal review of the activities of media institutions vis-à-vis the issues of content and ethics. Due to observed lapses in news presentation and writing, it is involved in a campaign for in-house training and the use of professionals. The Editors Association shares many of the same concerns as the Publishers Association. In their view, there seems to be some form of 'segregationist policy' in relation to advertisements. Concerning the issue of adverts, there has been an outcry from the Association that Government is using its influence to block adverts from companies to certain critical newspapers. This has apparently starved some newspapers and radio stations from essential financial resources that could have gone a long way in stabilising their newspapers and radio stations. It is difficult though to cite specific examples, while Government has denied having any 'segregationist policy'.

iii. Broadcast media

Broadcasters Association

Discussions are at the formative stages for the formation of a Broadcasters Association that could address various issues of common interest to broadcasters, be they community, regional or national. It is expected that the association would take off in 2007 with a projected membership of 300, including institutions and individuals.

A Broadcasters Association will be best suited to address issues relating to programming, assessment of professional standards, advertisement and revenue, frequency allocation and payment of licensing fees. An association would be a strong voice in the advocacy for the institution of public broadcaster.

The broadcast media sector in Liberia urgently needs an audience survey to determine the level of competition and to profile programming nationwide.

ALICOR

The Association of Liberian Community Radios (ALICOR) was established in 2005 and has a membership base of some 38 institutions. The organization's statutes allow for the recruitment of institutions into its ranks that are in the process of being established. The organization at present only opens its doors to institutional membership. ALICOR is currently housed in MercyCorp offices in Monrovia. MercyCorp provided the organization the room in its offices to give it a measure of visibility and stability.

LIRCORBA

The Liberia Community Radio Broadcasting Association (LIRCORBA) was formed in 2002 to integrate community broadcasters by serving as an umbrella organization.

LICORNET

The Liberia Community Radio Network (LICORNET) was started in October 2003 when it held its first consultative meeting of community radio stations. The Network seeks to stress the vital nature of community radio for the dissemination of essential information, as Liberia progresses along the path of recovery. The organization maintains a functional office, staffed with four journalists and volunteers.

iv. Media institutions

A positive development in the post-conflict and political transition period in Liberia is the emergence of stable professional media support institutions

with the mandate to facilitate capacity building programmes for journalists and training in specialized areas of reporting. The media support institutions have also contributed to processes expected to lead to the reform of media laws and constitutional guarantee of press freedom in addition to broad professional and ethical issues.

Liberian Media Centre (LMC)

The Liberian Media Centre (LMC) started as a project of the Press Union of Liberia (PUL) and the Partnership for Media and Conflict Prevention in West Africa, following a national conference on the state of the media in Liberia. It has since been registered as an independent non-governmental resource centre in accordance with Liberian law.

It commenced operations in August 2005 with the mandate to provide journalists and media organisations in Liberia with improved access to basic IT (computer and internet), secretariat resources and training workshops, as well as provide periodic assessments of media coverage of significant national and international events, facilitate capacity building programs for journalists and render professional services to media and civil society groups.

The LMC supports advocacy for the reform of Liberian media laws and policies in the pre- and post-election transitional period within the broader context of the right to freedom of expression, freedom of opinion, freedom of the press, access to information, media independence and pluralism in Liberia and the West African sub-region.

The LMC is entering into a four-year contract with RNTC for the management and implementation of the INFORMOTRAC (Initiative for Mobile Training of Community Radio) project in Liberia. Under this agreement, LMC will be provided an office complex, three rooms, a conference room, internet mall and a training room fully equipped with digital audio-visual devices and acoustic isolation studio accessories. Additionally, the centre will be provided a vehicle and running cost for four years. LMC intends to use this period to launch a headquarters project.

The LMC is also involved with the vetting of 10 key regulations to govern the forestry sector, as well as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) process, with respect to media coverage of the commission's work.

Among its programmes for the 2006/2007 period is a UNESCO sponsored internship program for mass communication seniors and photojournalism training program for practitioners and mass communication students.

The LMC currently has a small management structure headed by the Executive Director who is assisted by programme officers and consultants.

Center for Media Studies & Peace Building (CEMESP)

The Center for Media Studies and Peace Building (CEMESP) operates as a non-governmental independent resource centre for the media and civil society.

It has been involved with advocacy for media freedom and development, as well as the initiation of peace building programs in Liberia, especially within the media setting. CEMESP is a leading actor in the media law and policy reform process being supported by the Partnership for Media and Conflict Prevention in West Africa.

Among its most recent activities is the evaluation of the public affairs component of the Arms for Development Program of the United Nations

Development Programme (UNDP); CEMESP has established an online media development and documentary website (www.liberianmedia.org) with support from UNESCO and a free expression alert program with support from the International Freedom of Expression Exchange (IFEX).

CEMESP is engaged with the West African Civil Society Forum (WACSOF), while it is conducting a content analysis research of selected radio stations in Liberia, in partnership with the Institute of Applied Media Studies of the Zurich University of Applied Sciences.

Over the coming years, CEMESP intends to work towards the establishment of a community multi-media center. It will seek to enlarge its network with Liberian media, including rural- and community-based organisations and increase civic participation in its development and peace education programs.

4.5 Professionalisation and training

4.5.1 Context

Journalistic standards in the Liberian media require as much immediate attention as the infrastructural, organisational and technical needs of the industry. Overall, journalists are lacking adequate skills and training opportunities in areas such as reporting, writing, editing, program development and broadcast production. Additional improvements are required at higher levels of media management and ownership, including business management, fundraising, budgeting and strategic planning.

While standards vary between newspapers and radio stations, the majority of media face serious professional challenges. This affects all aspects of the profession, including management, editing, layout, design, photography, production and presentation.

The lack of professional standards has resulted in the publication of material with potential libel content, such as speculative and opinionated news writing. Aside from the ethical issues surrounding the publication of such information, this type of content provides ammunition for Government offices, civil society organisations and other individuals to attack and discredit the media. Arguably, however, the most important reason to improve journalistic standards is to allow the public access to reliable articles and stories, based on proven facts and ethical research.

The state of the media's professional standards is directly related to the country's political history, particularly over the past three decades. In practice, Liberia has never had a state monopoly on media as in many neighbouring countries. However, the reign of dictatorial and authoritarian regimes curtailed press freedom, constraining the potential for the development and advancement of standards.

Political repression, including violent attacks, forced journalists and media professionals into exile for decades. This trend only worsened during the years of outright conflict. The result has been that professional traditions have had almost no space in which to develop. Many of the country's experienced broadcasters and journalists fled during the conflict, changed professions or joined a Government agency or service.

4.5.2 Assessment

i. Training and training institutions

Formal training opportunities and institutions for Liberian media practitioners are slowly rebuilding after being all but destroyed during the conflict. According to estimates provided to the mission team in 2004, around 30% of journalists have received formal training from journalism institutions, while 70% have learnt on the job.

Department of Mass Communication – University of Liberia

The Department of Mass Communication at the University of Liberia is gradually putting together the broken pieces left behind as a result of the Liberian conflict. The Department was set up in 1983 through a bilateral agreement between the Liberian government and UNESCO. Under this agreement, UNESCO provided technical assistance, while the Government through the University of Liberia provided the space and faculty. However, in 1990 the UNESCO assistance to the Department ended.

Today, the Department has managed to resuscitate itself, though not to its pre-war capacity. It has succeeded by and large to attract more students and acquired some state-of-the-art equipment for the enhancement of students' academic work. Significantly, for the first time in several years, the enrolment of female students has increased to 20 percent.

The Department, prior to the 2005 elections, indirectly secured a small, but appreciable grant from the United States Aid for International Development (USAID) through the Office of Transition Initiative/Liberia Transition Initiative (OTI/LTI) to train local working journalists for the elections.

Through the grant, the Department's annex situated on the Main Campus of the University was refurbished and equipped with two computers and a generator. Unfortunately, at the close of the 2006 academic year, the Department was burgled and computers procured through the project were stolen, thus creating a serious setback to academic and research works. Recently, the generator room was also broken into and essential components stolen.

The Department, which grants Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree in Mass Communication, offers courses from sophomore, junior and senior levels. By academic requirements, students are requested to do general courses to qualify to sit for their majors and minors. The Department offers courses in both broadcast and print journalism and students are at liberty to specialize in either.

Print Journalism (Major): The courses offered include Introduction to Mass Communication, News Writing and Reporting, Broadcast News Writing and Reporting, News Writing and Editing, Feature and Editorial Writing, Magazine Writing and Editing and Photojournalism. Others include Principles of Public Relations, Media Law and Ethics, International Communication, Mass Media Research/Thesis, Development Communication and Internship.

Broadcast Journalism (Major): The courses are Introduction to Mass Communication, News Writing and Reporting, Broadcast News Writing and Reporting, Feature and Editorial Writing, Television Direction and Production, Broadcast Script Writing, Radio/TV Management, Principles of Public Relations, Media Law and Ethics, International Communication, Mass Media Research/Thesis, Development Communication and Internship.

The current enrolment strength of the department stands at four hundred with female students accounting for 20 percent. There are four professors, two instructors, three teaching assistants and five support staff. Occasionally, the Department hires part-time lecturers to increase its faculty.

Liberian Institute of Journalism (LIJ)

The Liberian Institute of Journalism is a private training institution founded in 1999 and managed by Vinicius Hodges. Mr. Hodges was elected into the House of Representatives in October 2005, where he is presently serving. The LIJ was dormant at the time of writing, though there are plans to reactivate the Institute in 2007. The LIJ received core funding from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and grants from other donor groups.

United Methodist University (UMU)

United Methodist University (UMU) recently introduced a mass communication programme of which journalism is a component. There are currently 21 students enrolled in the programme, which is a significant increase from the 6 students enrolled the previous year. The program offers 5 courses and the Faculty is hoping to introduce 2 or 3 additional courses in 2007.

African Methodist Episcopal University (AMEU)

The Department of Mass Communication of African Methodist Episcopal University (AMEU) was established in 2001. There are about 120 students, doing major or minor courses in Mass Communication at the University. The first set of students is expected to graduate in 2007.

The Department has a staff strength of 5 persons and offer courses such as an introduction to mass communication, news writing and reporting, broadcast reporting and writing, magazine editing, public relations and advertising, communication management, media law and ethics, news editing, editorial and feature writing, photojournalism, telecast production and direction, international communication, development communication, mass media research and thesis and internships.

The Department states that it needs a studio and laboratory facilities for effective acquisition of practical knowledge. It also needs text books and fellowship opportunities for the students to learn abroad.

University of Massachusetts and Cuttington University

In December of 2006 the University of Massachusetts, in coordination with LIMESI (Liberian Media Support Initiative – founded by a group of Liberian journalists in the United States), launched a series of initiatives to support the development of the media sector in Liberia¹³. The first was to conduct a media survey in Monrovia and Bong County to assess the media habits and attitudes of both Monrovia residents, as well as the residents of Bong county. The survey was designed at the University of Massachusetts, but conducted by students in the Mass Communication Department at the University of Liberia. The results were announced at a public meeting and press conference at the University of Liberia in March 2007.

The second initiative was to select a group of Liberian journalists and media experts to come to the United States on an exchange program in late 2007.

The third initiative was to think about ways of supporting media higher education in Liberia. To that end, it was decided to work together with the administration of Cuttington University to support the University's plan to establish a Department of Mass Communications that would have a strong focus on meeting the media needs of the rural population, who are severely

13 The financial supporter of these activities was primarily the US State Department, in coordination with the US Embassy in Monrovia, as well as the University of Massachusetts which has several other independent initiatives underway in non-media areas.

underserved by the media in Liberia. Cuttington University was selected for this initiative because of its location in the rural area, which is Suakoko, Bong County and, secondly, to encourage the University to include a rural communication component in the development of its curriculum, prior to the official launching of the mass communication discipline at the University¹⁴.

Other Initiatives

In addition to the large-scale professional training courses provided by the UNMIL Media Monitoring and Development Unit during 2004, UNMIL has also organized one-day refresher courses in radio production and news gathering and a training of trainers program for 18 persons. In the second phase of the training of trainers (ToT), those originally trained would be put in charge of programmes, in order to observe the quality of their skills.

IRIN Radio has provided training workshops and practical assistance in broadcast programme production. These activities have included co-production work with state broadcaster, ELBC, commercial Monrovia station, DC-101 and Peace FM (formerly Stone FM) and the identification of several radio stations for training over six months. IRIN Radio has also produced a rough guide on reporting techniques, which was compiled based on lessons learned in both Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire and has been made available in both English and French.

The Liberia Media Project (LMP), which is a partnership of International Alert, Centre for Justice and Peace Studies, Justice and Peace Commission and Press Union of Liberia, has conducted training for women and youth from the counties on the usage of media for promoting and advocating peace and human rights, including providing each participant with a battery operated radio set. The LMP has also provided training for traditional media people (town criers, traditional communicators, story tellers) from each county and provides such persons with battery operated public address system.

UNDP, together with the Ministry of Information (MICAT), organised a two-day seminar on promotion of good governance polices for Public Affairs Officers and media practitioners.

The Centre for Media Studies on Peace Building (CEMESP) has conducted six week intensive journalism skills training for 25 beginner journalists with support from the National Endowment for Democracy, with the expectation that another course will be undertaken in 2007.

Other workshops have included those for community radio station managers on cholera, diarrhoea and the avian flu, supported by UNICEF; for journalists on investigative journalism supported by UNHCR; for photojournalists organised by FreeVoice; for community radio stations on sustainability supported by UNMIL; and for community radio journalists on ethics and human rights organised by IFJ and the PUL. The Carter Center has also undertaken training activities for journalists.

ii. Professionalisation opportunities

Liberian journalists have strongly expressed a desire for training opportunities and the enthusiasm amongst local media practitioners for training is fertile ground upon which to build. International concerns and pledges of commitment provide important support and potential resources to support training projects. In this regard, though the higher-education programmes are in dire need of assistance, their presence is critically important for sustained medium and long-term training activities and programmes. It is therefore

¹⁴ For further information on this please contact Michael Keating at: michael.keating@umb.edu

crucial to place the development of educational institutions in any strategic plan for training. In this regard, support to such high-education institutions may include:

1. Promoting secondment or attachment of external experts to the institutions and scholarships for Liberian trainers on courses outside to return to the institutions.
2. Infrastructure and facility assistance to equip training institutions and make them more efficient. This would include the development of media labs where students could practice using cameras, voice recorders, the Internet and so forth.
3. Developing an internship program that would provide students with practical, hands-on experience at local media outlets.
4. A half-year to one-year journalism diploma for school leavers and pre-career media practitioners.
5. Current curricula should be reviewed and updated and linkages pursued with other African training and education institutions.

Obstacles to training

The fundamental problem for training is that of human resources. At the moment, the country lacks the qualified and experienced personnel needed to initiate, manage and promote training programmes that meet the urgent challenges and long-term needs. Of the prevailing media, few have staff capable of providing substantive on-the-job training. In several critical areas, such as management, it is difficult to find qualified trainers within the country. In terms of radio, expertise for training may be found at some of the stations. However, even then, they are too few in number and lacking the necessary resources and support to conduct training with anyone outside of their place of work.

Most media personnel in Liberia ended their formal education at the high school level. While many have learned on the job, training has been limited to the knowledge, expertise and opinions of their colleagues. Additionally, there is an overall lack of computer literacy including the ability to use the Internet as a practical research tool. This has been hindered by the overall lack of access to the Internet, although the computer centre established for journalists at the Liberian Media Centre (LMC) is slowly beginning to address this issue.

The training institutions in particular need modern equipment and facilities that can help produce well-rounded journalism or mass communication graduates. This should include studios, laboratories, well-stocked libraries and resource centres, cameras, recorders, laptops and so forth.

The courses currently being offered are suitable at least for the post-conflict challenge of training more hands at different levels of journalism. Given the small size of the country, however, the relatively small number of students studying journalism/mass communication, as well as the critical question of financial sustainability, it might be necessary in the longer term for institutions to harmonize and streamline their courses, so that expertise could be promoted and specialization encouraged.

The economy of the media is another major obstacle to the progress of

the industry and the profession. Over the years, international NGOs and donor agencies have borne the costs of training activities, including meals, transportation and sometimes a stipend for trainees. As in other places in West Africa, such training is often looked upon as a source of supplementary income to the low wages of media personnel¹⁵. If journalists are largely attending training because they are receiving financial compensation, this undercuts the goal of training contributing to the long-term sustainability of the country's media. It is vital to encourage training based on individual desire to build capacity, with journalists, managers and media owners hopefully realizing the long-term benefits to be gained thereof.

The challenge of the above-noted situation is that it is difficult to encourage anyone to consider long-term goals when they have little in the short-term. How can someone be asked to plan for large-scale development in five years time when they have no immediate way of supporting themselves or their families? This issue should be addressed or at a minimum acknowledged in any training activities.

An additional challenge is that some journalists are in the business for want of employment, political objectives or lack of qualifications and opportunities in other professions. Among this group there may be low motivation for professional improvement. Mechanisms must be used to engage these individuals in the profession. Motivation will also be a challenge for those already engaged in the profession if they think that increased training and capacity does not eventually lead to increased wages, increased responsibility and/or increase opportunities.

The heightened interest in the Liberian media by organisations and agencies from around the world also poses potential challenges. With each international entity potentially pursuing its own agenda of training, avoidable and unnecessary competition could limit the full potential benefits of training. In this regard, cooperation and flexibility of focus will be important, while keeping in mind that each organisation has its own pre-determined mission and mandate.

The Liberian media has shown courage and fortitude through the years of violent repression. Improvements in professional standards will strengthen their self-confidence and social responsibility, as well as build public trust, solidarity and patronage. However, while the opportunity and enthusiasm for training exists, success will depend on the calibre of human resources present and the commitment of media practitioners to uphold professional standards.

iii. Objectives of Training

There is a need for training in all aspects of media organisation, operation and production. Any training strategy, however, must recognise the need to set a scale of priorities that tackles immediate needs, while proposing long-term benefits. Therefore, training programmes need to address:

1. Upgrading the overall standards of the media, including journalism ethics;
2. Particular and specific requirements of each medium;
3. Developing or producing a critical mass of local trainers for medium and long-term purposes;
4. Training for particular public or state institutions, such as the regulatory

¹⁵ In discussions with various journalists it was learned that the average wage for a full-time Liberian journalist is approximately \$20US per month.

agencies, the Ministry of Information and others;

5. Training for public service media, such as the LBS and community radio stations;
6. Strengthening the organisational, business and management capacity of the media toward economic viability, sustainability and growth.

The development of a training programme in the medium and long-term must be carefully coordinated. It should provide a holistic approach to training that includes all elements and levels of media from journalism students to experienced journalists, professors, policy makers and other engaged and involved in the media. All training activities should be carefully coordinated to avoid duplication. In this light, a database of training programmes already conducted should be created and maintained to provide information about training that has taken place, the focus of the training, the participants and the organisers.

4.5.3 Media as a cross-cutting area

Training and media content is often considered as a cross-cutting theme and is seen in numerous different development sectors, from agriculture to gender or health. In this regard, any internationally funded training should focus on developing professional and technical skills that allow local media to objectively and reliably report on topics they choose and not solely on those identified by international actors.

4.6 Monitoring, advocacy and safety

4.6.1 Context

The establishment of a truly transparent and participatory democratic system in Liberia requires an independent, free and pluralistic media. Since the end of the conflict, the media environment in Liberia has significantly improved providing a pluralistic terrain for freedom of expression.

During 2005, attacks on the media and media practitioners shifted from state-sponsored institutions, as was the case during the conflict period, to party activists particularly during the elections, owing to intolerance of diverse political views and opinions.

During the election period, a number of media practitioners were threatened, mainly by supporters of the Congress for Democratic Change (CDC). The frequency of attacks on journalists by CDC supporters provoked a sanction action from the PUL against the party. The CDC later called for dialogue with the PUL and pledged to ensure the security of journalists covering the election activities would be guaranteed. As a result of this, the sanction was lifted.

Equally, there were excesses committed by the media practitioners with a number of cases of poor professionalism. Several media were cited by the PUL and adjudged to be in contradiction to ethical standards following complaints filed by aggrieved parties.

For a list of recent alerts on press freedom violations in Liberia during the first months of 2006 as compiled by the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA), please refer to Annex 4.

4.6.2 Assessment

i. Media and the authorities

The one-year ban placed on the privately owned *Independent* newspaper in February 2007 following the publication of sex photographs involving a serving Minister, marked a turning point in the relationship between the media and the Government. While independent media groups have condemned the newspaper on ethical grounds, they nonetheless feel that the real reason behind the closure was to send warning signals to the media, especially sections of it that are critical of government policies. The Editor, Sam Dean, has since claimed that he received death threats following the publication and the ban and as a consequence gone into hiding.

On assuming power in January 2006, the Unity Party of Mrs. Ellen-Johnson Sirleaf had made a policy commitment to promote a vibrant media environment and defend the growth of a free press in the country, as enshrined in Article 15 of the Liberian Constitution¹⁶.

Signals from some high-profile officials in the new Government however have indicated that free expression must still be properly overseen and ensured during the transitional post-conflict period. In this regard, some officials of the Unity Party have openly expressed their displeasure over critical views expressed in the media against the Government.

On 17 May 2006 the Liberian Broadcasting System (LBS) ordered its journalists to seek clearance prior to broadcasting "corruption allegations" against government officials and other top personalities. A memorandum signed by the Assistant Director General for News and Public Affairs (ADG) warned editorial staff to channel all such stories through his office for further clearing.

The statement further cautioned that "any reporter or newscaster's failure to adhere to this reminder will leave the office of the ADG with no alternative, but to institute stern administrative measure(s) against violator(s)".

The memorandum copied to the station's Director General and the Deputy Director General for Broadcasting noted that LBS news bulletins are not courtrooms for prosecuting Government officials and other personalities in society, "hence, all controversial stories of corruption allegations levelled against such persons will, hereafter, not be allowed to form part of our news, unless such stories pass through the clearance house and must also meet my expressed approval", the memorandum stated.

On 23 August 2006, President Sirleaf reportedly criticised the media saying that Liberian journalists have replaced 'sensitization' with 'sensationalism' and that the media in Liberia preferred outright lies and half-truths to accuracy and truth. These comments were contained in her commencement address at the United Methodist University and came shortly after local media reports criticized her government's decision to grant the exclusive right to import rice to a single company.

Whilst the situation in the country has undoubtedly improved, the isolated cases of intimidation and attacks by the authorities remain a major concern. These include:

¹⁶ This Article of the Constitution states that "Every person shall have the right to freedom of expression, being fully responsible for the abuse thereof. This right shall not be curtailed, restricted or enjoined by government save during an emergency declared in accordance with this Constitution-public office holders in the country are not democratically matured to accommodate the views of critics of the status quo."

1. On 20 February 2007, the Criminal Investigation Division (CID) of the Liberian Police declared Sam Dean, the publisher of the privately-owned Monrovia-based newspaper *Independent*, wanted for publishing pornographic materials. The paper had in its 19 February edition published photographs of Willis Knuckles, Minister of Presidential Affairs, and two women.
2. On 27 February 2007 the government of Liberia revoked the operational license of the *Independent* newspaper in Monrovia for one year. The decision was announced at a press conference in Monrovia by acting Information Minister Laurence Bropleh. Minister Bropleh said the decision was in response to the *Independent's* publication of a photograph showing former Presidential Affairs Minister Willis Knuckles in a sex scene with two ladies.
3. On 16 January 2007 reporter Othello Guzean of the government-controlled radio network, Liberia Broadcasting System (LBS) was suspended indefinitely by the network's director general, Charles Snetter Jr. According to a 16 January 2007 letter from Snetter to the reporter, Guzean was suspended for allegedly violating the editorial policy of the station. However, Guzean indicated to CEMESP that he was suspended because he conducted and aired an interview of Montserrado County District Seven opposition parliamentarian Thomas Fallah.
4. On 13 June 2006 the Special Security Service (SSS) agents harassed and briefly detained four local journalists at the Executive Mansion in Monrovia. The journalists were trying to report on the alleged dismissal of several senior SSS personnel.
5. On 24 May 2006 reporter George D. Watkins of Radio Veritas was assaulted by Special Security Service agents while reporting on the SSS's alleged enlistment of a former rebel commander.
6. On 20 April 2006 two journalists from the private dailies, the *Inquirer*, and the *Informer* were assaulted by police while covering clashes between police and street vendors in Monrovia.
7. In January 2004 four journalists and a former business manager from the private weekly *Telegraph* were accused of "criminal malevolence," a charge sometimes used by members of Taylor's government to harass aggressive journalists. The charges were brought over an article alleging that National Security Minister Losay Kendor had embezzled public funds. The case was referred to the Criminal Court.
8. In July 2004 the Liberia Petroleum Refining Company (LPRC) pressed criminal malevolence charges against Editor Crispin Tulay and Associate Editor Cheechiay Jablasone of the private Monrovia-based weekly *Vanguard*. The charge stemmed from an article accusing the LPRC of using an illegal oil deal with the West Oil Company to finance "Taylor's terror machine," according to local sources. The case was transferred to the Criminal Court.

While there is no evidence that some of these incidents were directed by the Government as part of a coordinate effort to intimidate or suppress the media, the authorities have a responsibility to ensure that the security forces respect press freedom and freedom of expression. However, the inclusion of persons in the Government who have been in the vanguard of human rights advocacy during previous years, indicates that press freedom and freedom of

expression will be defended. The relationship between the Government and the media is an area of concern. As is to be expected, the media often acts as a medium for critical views against the Government. However, this is a key component of any democratic system and the targeting and uncooperative treatment of critical media outlets demonstrates an indirect intolerance of press freedom. Nevertheless, despite such concerns, the media in Liberia does operate in good press freedom environment. Moreover, the positive interaction between the national media community and representatives organisations, such as the PUL, with the Government demonstrates a positive commitment to ensure that this trend continues.

ii. Non-Monrovia based media

Another area of concern is the press freedom and freedom of expression environment outside of Monrovia. With the emergence of local media and, in particular, community radio around the country, the ability of these outlets to pursue independent and professional reporting is crucial for a balanced and stable situation in the areas where they operate.

Reports at the current time indicate that there is little undue interference with the community radio stations, although the absence of a well established national press freedom monitoring network makes it difficult to gather a full and comprehensive picture of the conditions faced in the rural areas of the country.

The role of the media is very important in ensuring growth and development of economic, social and political systems through freedom of expression and dissemination of information. The issue that confronts the Liberian media today is not who is in or out of power, but the possible abuse of the fundamental rights of media practitioners who are seeking to do their jobs and thereby strengthen the development of the country. Free and independent media is a guardian of human rights and watchdog against abuses by authorities. It also provides citizens with the information they require to exercise their democratic rights. In this regard, the protection of freedom of expression and press freedom are crucial.

5 Recommendations

5.1 Media policy reform

Building on the media policy reform process of the past two years, the recommendations for media policy reform are aimed at creating a sustainable media environment primarily through passing the draft legislation and ensuring the proper usage and implementation of these laws.

1. Expertise should be made available to the Ministry of Information for developing a 'National Communications Policy' that caters for the different administrative problems the media face, including licensing, legal reforms, public service media and so forth;
2. The 'Act Establishing an *Independent* Broadcasting Regulator', 'Freedom of Information Act' and 'National Public Broadcasting Service Act' should be passed into law;
3. Once passed, these laws should be effectively implemented, including the creation of and adequate financing for independent bodies and training of public officials;
4. Support to be provided for the self-enforcement of a code of ethics as outlined by the media community, as well as the creation of voluntary media accountability systems;
5. Public awareness should be developed surrounding the new media legislation and voluntary media accountability systems, with a particularly focus on the Freedom of Information Act, as well as capacitating the media community and civil society to monitor the implementation of the new laws;
6. Authorities should consider the provision of a regular grant from the state to the media, either directly in terms of finances or indirectly through tax relief, in accordance with the spirit of the UNESCO 'Florence Treaty' – the Agreement on the Importation of Educational, Scientific and Cultural Materials;
7. The Ministry of Information should either close, privatise or turn into public service media the Liberian News Agency (LINA) and the New Liberia newspaper.

5.2 Print media

The mission found the print media to be hindered by a number of the same constraints as in 2003. The recommendations for print media are therefore aimed at capacitating them within their existing environment, by addressing these constraints and reducing overheads through cooperation and consolidation, as well as developing technical capacity.

1. Assistance to be provided with the purchase of newsprint, possibly including bulk purchases, negotiating subsidised rates, creating a 'replenishing' fund and lobbying government for import duty waivers;
2. Printing facilities should be developed, possibly through purchasing a printing press and establishing it as a non-profit entity under a media association or institution;
3. Access for media outlets to low-cost capital should be facilitated through soft loans and long-term financial advice;
4. Options should be explored for a joint advertising structure run by the newspapers, including actively pursuing timely and full payment by all parties for advertisements;
5. Options should be explored for a joint distribution system for newspapers to enable them to reach all of the country;
6. The merger of newspapers to be promoted and supported with the aim of rationalising the media landscape and creating professional economically viable entities;
7. A comprehensive media landscape and audience research survey should be conducted to assist in refining and targeting the recommendations outlined above.

5.3 Broadcast media

The broadcast media (and particularly radio) has seen substantive investment and advancement during the past two years, although much of this progress remains donor-dependent. The recommendations therefore aim at strengthening the broadcast media environment for the longer-term.

1. A forum should be convened among all stakeholders to discuss the definition of a national broadcasting policy framework;
2. Support to be provided for the development of a broadcast media association(s), specifically including outlets outside of Monrovia and community radio stations;
3. Support should be available for existing broadcast media to address infrastructure problems and work towards financial sustainability in the post-donor environment;
4. Targeted assistance should be provided to rural broadcast media to address hate speech and encourage conflict resolution, as well as sustain communication on development issues;
5. After the passing and implementation of the 'National Public Broadcasting Service Act', the Liberia Broadcasting System (LBS) should receive broad assistance to develop technical and professional capacities;
6. An advisory committee of local, regional and international actors should be established to monitor the progress of the development of public service broadcasting.

5.4 Associations and media institutes

The landscape of associations and media institutes has expanded over the past years. The recommendations are therefore aimed at supporting and strengthening the roles and structures of the main stakeholders and avoiding duplication.

1. The democratic processes and governance structures of key media associations should be strengthened;
2. Access should be provided to institutional resources (including ICT infrastructure) for media associations and assistance provided for developing financial self-sustainability options;
3. Gender awareness and mainstreaming should be promoted amongst media associations and institutions;
4. Press Union of Liberia (PUL) should be strengthened as the key entry point on all issues relating to professionalism and rights, with a specific focus on its competencies as a trade union (including collective bargaining) and establishing a national network (including three regional offices);
5. Support should be given to the Publishers Association to strengthen the media houses in terms of accessing equipment, loans, minimising costs through cooperative activities and so forth;
6. Support should be given to the various media associations to help promote professionalism and enforce codes of conduct;
7. Media support should be channelled through media institutes (such as the Liberia Media Centre and others) to ensure the targeted development of hubs of national professional excellence and service providers to the wider media community.

5.5 Professionalisation and training

Whilst many media practitioners have received training over the past two years, this has mainly been of a one-time short-term nature. The high turn-over in media staff means training remains in demand, including in specialised areas. The recommendations therefore focus on addressing the 'skills deficit' in the country through existing training institutions and based on 'best practices' models.

1. Training on basic professional skills and ethics should be provided for new entrants in the media, as well as specialised training for mid-career and senior media practitioners;
2. A half-year or one-year journalism diploma should be established for school leavers and pre-career media practitioners;
3. A programme providing mid-career, refresher, up-grading training projects should be available at post-secondary institutions. Other international stakeholders will of course continue to provide their own training services;
4. Opportunities and facilities for students should be improved with better access to equipment and resources for practical training, including internships at media outlets;

5. Mass communication and journalism course curricula should be reviewed and updated and linkages pursued with other African training and education institutions;
6. Media proprietors and managers should be assisted to develop their skills in business planning and management, entailing financial management, marketing strategy and so forth;
7. Regular forums for editors/managers should be held to reflect on policy issues, new technologies or professional challenges;
8. Training workshops should be run for community-based stations to develop awareness on community radio, as referred to by the African Charter on Broadcasting.
9. Training activities should be carefully coordinated to avoid duplication and a roundtable of national and international organisations should be held to produce a comprehensive multi-year training strategy document;
10. A database of training programmes already conducted should be created and maintained to provide information about training that has taken place, the focus of the training, the participants and the organisers;
11. Training courses should ideally be long-term and undertaken on a repeated basis, thereby re-engaging participants, as well as undertaken in-house, incorporating all staff from chief-editor to junior journalists as and when appropriate;
12. Networking and linkages between media houses and training institutions should be encouraged, including direct input from the media community on the type of training activities to be prioritised.

5.6 Monitoring, advocacy and safety

Since the end of the conflict in 2003, the press freedom environment has been relatively unrestricted with few reported violations. The recommendations are therefore aimed at ensuring vigilance is maintained and the wider media environment is strengthened to prevent any regression to the pre-2003 situation.

1. Press freedom monitoring and alert networks should be strengthened across the country and specifically in areas outside of Monrovia;
2. Knowledge of press freedoms should be strengthened amongst media practitioners across the country and specifically outside of Monrovia, including on how to report violations;
3. Local authorities, judiciary and police should receive training on press freedoms issues;
4. Legal aid mechanisms (potentially based on the model used by the Media Institute of Southern Africa) and pro-bono work should be promoted and supported in cooperation with relevant institutions, including the National Bar Association;
5. A central database on press freedom violations should be established and maintained.

5.7 General

Other recommendations identified during the course of the mission included:

1. Increased coordination should be promoted and facilitated amongst national and international actors supporting media outlets and training activities both in and outside Monrovia;
2. All actors involved in media development should actively use information sharing forums, specifically including the UNMIL Media Development Clearinghouse meetings and newsletter;
3. Linkages and cooperative activities should be developed between the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the media community;
4. The media should open its doors and widen access to the citizenry, so that their voices can be heard above those of political debate. There is a tendency for biased reporting as the media may sometimes be manipulated in favour of a particular group or party.

5.8 Recommendations made by the University of Massachusetts Assessment Team

In December 2006 the University of Massachusetts, in coordination with LIMESI (Liberian Media Support Initiative – founded by a group of Liberian journalists in the United States), undertook an assessment of the media environment in Monrovia and Bong County. As a result of this assessment, the University of Massachusetts team saw three critical areas requiring immediate attention, these being:

1. Firstly, the need to review existing media laws and policies to determine their relevance or enact new legislations through the Liberian legislature within the context of the emerging democracy in Liberia;
2. Secondly, to provide business and management consulting to the general media community in order to figure out ways of cutting costs and raising revenues;
3. Thirdly, to tackle the media needs of the rural population.

For further information on this please contact Michael Keating at: michael.keating@umb.edu

5.9 Media sustainability index for Liberia

In 2007 IREX will be conducting a Media Sustainability Index (MSI) for Liberia, as well as the surrounding countries in West Africa. Funding permitting, this will be done on an annual basis thereafter. The MSI (see www.irex.org/msi) measures the strength of a country's media sector by assessing its multiple, inter-related components against a comprehensive list of 38 indicators. Produced by a panel of media professionals about the country in which they work and live, the MSI provides a statistical assessment amplified by a descriptive narrative.

The standardized methodology and resulting data make the MSI results comparable over time and across regions. In Liberia, this will allow for the monitoring of progress toward a stronger media sector and provide a potent tool for advocacy, assistance and policymaking.

6 Concluding remarks

These final remarks do not seek to repeat the findings and recommendations outlined in this report, but rather sum up the objectives and benefits of the Partnership approach and overall activity objectives.

Support to the media and freedom of expression community in Liberia is imperative in the post-conflict transition period. The success of such support will almost certainly have significant repercussions on the long-term development of peace, stability and democracy in the country.

The Partnership approach being jointly pursued by the authors of this document offers an innovative method for the provision of media development and freedom of expression assistance. In this regard, the benefits of coordination, collaboration and mutual linkage between projects within the same fields could be substantial.

Those organisations involved in the Partnership bring together a variety of expertise in their specialised areas. In addition, all have experience of working in situations where poor coordination and funding competition have resulted in the execution of ill-conceived overlapping activities, thereby squandering opportunities.

Although it is clear that not all the activities outlined in the document can be undertaken simultaneously, it is nevertheless hoped that many can be implemented within a reasonable timeframe. This will significantly enhance their mutual impact and set an important precedent for future coordination of assistance in this and other fields.

Annexes

Annex 1: Mission participants

Name	Organisation
Fatou Jagne	ARTICLE 19
Babah Tarawally	FreeVoice
Darcy Christen	Hirondelle Foundation
Pa Louis Thomasi	International Federation of Journalists
Thomas Hughes	International Media Support
Nikki Whaites	Journalists for Human Rights
Lanre Arogundade	International Press Centre
Beatrice Amoah	Media Foundation for West Africa
Lawase Akpolou	Open Society Institute for West Africa
Edet Ojo	UNESCO

Annex 2: Contact details

For further information about this report please contact any of the authoring institutions. International Media Support (IMS) will also be pleased to answer any comments or questions or refer inquiries to those members of the Partnership best able to answer them.

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Annex 3: UNMIL list of community radio stations in Liberia

County	City	Name station	Updated info on status
Bong County	Gbarnga	1. Radio Gbarnga	On Air
		2. Radio Heritage	Closed/unknown
		3. Super Bongese	On Air
		4. SKT	Unknown
	Salala	5. Salala BS	On Air
		6. IDP FM1	IDP camp gone
		7. IDP FM2	IDP camp gone
		8. Voice of Reconciliation	On Air
Bomi County	Tubmanburg	9. Radio Bomi	On Air
	Suehn	10. Voice of Suehn	No information
Gbarpolu	Bopolu	11. Radio Gbarpolu	Not operational yet
Grand Bassa	Buchanan	12. Voice of Gbarpolu	Gone
		13. Radio Gbehzohn	On Air
		14. Magic FM	On Air
Grand Cape Mount	RobertSPORT	15. PIO	Unknown
	Bo Waterside	16. Radio Piso	On Air
	Sinje	17. Bo Comm Radio	Unknown
		18. Radio Sinje	Planned
Grand Gedeh	Zwedru	19. Smile FM	On Air
	Toe Town	20. Peace Radio FM	On Air
		21. Radio Wildfire	Unknown
Grand Kru	Barclayville	22. Voice of Grand Kru	Unknown
	Sasstown	23. ?	Unknown
Lofa	Voinjama	24. Radio Kintoma	On Air
	Bakedu	25. Bakedu Radio	Unknown
	Zorzor	26. Life Zorzor	On Air
	Salayea	27. ?	Unknown
	Kolahun	28. Radio Harleygee	On Air
	Vahun	29. ?	Unknown
	Foya	30. Tamba Taykor	On Air
	Kakata	31. Y-Echo	On Air
Margibi	Harbel	32. Radio Kakata	On Air
		33. Stone FM	On Air
		34. Peace FM	On Air
		35. Sky	On Air
		36. Y-Echo	On Air
		37. Radio Harper	On Air
Maryland	Harper	38. Voice of Pleebo	On Air
		39. Voice of RM	On Air
Montserrado	Bensonville	40. University of Liberia	?
Nimba	Sanniquellie	41. Radio Nimba	On Air
		42. Radio Sanweih	On Air
		43. Y-FM	?
	Ganta	44. Kergheamahn	On Air
		45. Y-FM	On Air
	Yakepa	46. Radio Shalom	On Air
	47. Voice of Hope	On Air	
	Saclepea	48. Radio Saclepea	On Air
	49. Radio Ylamba	On Air	
	Flumpa	50. Radio Flumpa	On Air
Karnplay	51. Radio Karn	On Air	
Bahn	52. R Beaganlay	On Air	
Tappita	53. Voice of Tappita	On Air	
River Cess	Cestos City	54. Rivercess BS	On Air
River Gee	Fish Town	55. ?	
Sinoe	Juarzon	56. ?	
	Greenville	57. Voice of Sinoe	On Air

Source:
'Needs Assessment
Community Radio
Liberia' (9 February
– 7 March 2007),
INFORMOTRAC,
Radio Netherlands
Training Centre

Annex 4: List of alerts carried by MFWA on Liberia in early 2006

Liberia ALERT: Police declares Publisher wanted

The Criminal Investigation Division (CID) of the Liberian Police on February 20, 2007 declared wanted Sam Dean, publisher of the "*Independent*", a privately-owned Monrovia-based newspaper for publishing pornographic materials. The "*Independent*" in its February 19 edition published photographs of Willis Knuckles, Minister of Presidential Affairs and two women in an orgy. Dean is wanted because the publication violates Section 18.1 of the Penal Code of Liberia which prohibits the dissemination of obscene materials without minimizing the risk of exposure to children under sixteen.

Liberia ALERT: Government revokes newspaper's licence

Liberia's government on February 27, 2007 revoked the licence of "*The Independent*", a privately-owned newspaper, for continuously publishing a photograph of Willis Knuckles, Minister of State for Presidential Affairs, allegedly having sex with two women at the same time after President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf had earlier announced in a national broadcast the resignation of Knuckles. The Acting Minister of Information, Dr. Laurence Bropleh, who announced the revocation of the paper's licence at a press conference, said the newspaper would be out of circulation for a year.

Liberia UPDATE: Newspaper sues government

The management of the suspended privately-owned newspaper, "*The Independent*", on March 1, 2007 filed a writ at Liberia's Supreme Court challenging the Government's decision to revoke its licence. The newspaper's lawyers are claiming the government's action was illegal, arguing that it was not based on any court's decision. At the time the Acting Minister of Information, Dr. Laurence Bropleh, was announcing the revocation of the newspaper's licence, a team of policemen led by the Inspector General of Police, Munah Sieh, had barricaded the offices of the newspaper and locked it up.

Liberia UPDATE: Publisher in hiding

Sam Dean, publisher of "*The Independent*", a Monrovia-based privately-owned newspaper, currently facing a ban on March 15, 2007 alleged that his life is in danger due to continuous threats on his life by agents of the state security. He has therefore been in hiding. He said he needs assistance to leave the country to escape the threats. The publisher had in a statement on March 9 catalogued a number of threats, harassment and intimidation on him and his staff members by state security agents.

Liberia ALERT: Journalist attacked

Julu Johnson, Sports Editor of the "*News*", an independent Monrovia-based newspaper was on March 31, 2007 violently attacked by Napoleon Japloe, Assistant Secretary of the Liberia Football Association (LFA). Japloe, who accused Johnson of writing negative stories about him, slapped him several times in the face, before pushing him to the ground. The incident occurred at the headquarters of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) in Monrovia.

Liberia UPDATE: Football official suspended for flogging journalist

The Liberian Football Association (LFA) on April 9, 2007 suspended its secretary general, Napoleon Japloe for one month for flogging Julu Johnson, sports editor of the independent Monrovia-based the "*News*" newspaper. The LFA took the decision following calls by members of the Sports Writers Association of Liberia (SWAL) for punitive action to be taken against the football official.

An official of SWAL, Numennie Williams who witnessed the attack on March 31, 2007 condemned it and vowed to ensure that the matter was investigated and the LFA official dealt with. Japloe attacked Johnson for allegedly writing an "erroneous" article against him. The incident occurred at the headquarters of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) in Monrovia.



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