

# Media Sector Mapping

## In Sierra Leone

“You cannot solve a problem with the same thinking that  
caused the problem”  
-- Einstein

Search for Common Ground/Talking Drum Studio  
Sierra Leone

31 October 2005

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## List of Abbreviations

AA – Action Aid  
AFJ – Alliance of Female Journalists  
CBO – Community based organizations  
CCSL – Council of Churches Sierra Leone  
CSO – Civil Society organisation  
DACO – Development Assistance Coordinating Office  
DECSEC – Decentralisation Secretariat  
DFID – Department of Foreign and International development  
ENCISS – Enhancing the Interaction between Civil Society and State  
IMC – Independent Media Commission  
NMJD – Network Movement for Justice and Development  
PRS – Poverty Reduction Strategy  
SFCG – Search for Common Ground  
SLAJ – Sierra Leone Association of Journalists  
SLVA – Sierra Leone Vendors Association  
SLWIM – Sierra Leone Women in the Media  
TDS – Talking Drum Studio  
WADA – Western Area Development Association

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## **Executive Summary**

At the request of DFID, Search for Common Ground (SFCG) carried out a mapping of the media sector in Sierra Leone examining specific information channels related to two dominant policy frameworks: the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) and Decentralisation.

To better understand the effect of the policy frameworks in everyday life this study was done to gather information on a number of issues. Three key questions were asked prior to developing and executing the research plan.

- How is information made available?
- What information is the public receiving and how is it being understood?
- What quality and quantity of information is required to ensure full participation and engagement of the public?

Generally the study found that vertical information flows are well developed where horizontal information flows are not.

### ***Public Information***

Institutions of the state are ill equipped to deal with the diversifying media landscape and the information needs of the consumer in the post war environment. Since leadership comes from one (charismatic) individual, it appears that information and knowledge sharing is personality driven. In the old style of government frameworks, information represents power, and power is reduced the more information is shared. This logic of information management fundamentally and unnecessarily restricts access to information and is still a driver for many government agencies including those involved in these new governance frameworks. The dissemination of these policy frameworks is relying mainly on vertical flows of information generally channeled through one or two people.

Information available on PRS and decentralisation is dependent on what the government decides to release. There is no real consideration given to what the public wants or needs to hear. Media practitioners believe that information flow from the state to civil society is inadequate. They are not satisfied with how information is being delivered to the public and feel that to have the most impact practitioners need to be involved in the process from the policy formulation stage all the way to dissemination.

### ***Public Perspective***

From the public's perspective, consumers indicated their confusion around the number of acronyms and the technical language used in public information and their inability to digest it. They do not consider leadership at community, regional and national levels to be responsive to public opinion and are not provided information in a way that enables them to engage. Consumer surveys indicated that the audience - both rural and urban - is sophisticated, with clearly defined criteria for source credibility. Two key criteria identified in focus groups were that the message must be delivered in an interactive format allowing space for public input and the message must be delivered by a credible source with a solid track record. For example, information from officials delivered in a lecture or fixed agenda meeting is less useful or appropriate because it fails to capture the public's trust.

### ***Media Sector***

Sierra Leone's media sector has diversified at a remarkable rate over the past 10 years. A proliferation of radio stations nationwide, television service established in some provinces, and a plethora of newspapers published daily and weekly in Freetown have changed the structural conditions for information and knowledge sharing. These outlets play a major role in information sharing behaviour. Radio formats are shifting, with radio dramas, phone-in programmes and other interactive types of programming evolving in many places around the country.

Sierra Leone's 31% literacy rate is a key determinant in the manner in which information flows. Information is centralized in Freetown where almost a quarter of the population resides. The capital is home to all the newspapers, 35% of the radio stations, 10 times as many Internet cafes as in the provinces as well as the seat of the national government and the source of policy statements. Community and independent radio stations have begun to affect this dynamic, but there are still significant structural problems in how information flows in and out of the capital.

Feedback, context, and other information is carried from the people or communities to the policy makers by the radio stations and newspapers through their reporting, vox pops, talk shows with phone-ins, and other interactive formats. However, these methods assume that policymakers listen to the radio stations or read those articles. There is no direct, formalized feedback mechanism where people can voice their opinions, questions, and concerns

In terms of specific channels:

- Radio is the most important channel for receiving information by the public.
- Newspapers are not perceived as credible.
- Television is not widely available and is costly.
- The mobile phone network has transformed how information flows in the country. Mobile phone use is growing and provides an opportunity for people to provide feedback to decision and policy makers.
- Policy makers rely on radio and newspapers as their primary channels of information but use meetings as their main channel for providing information to constituents.

### ***Decentralisation and PRS***

The consumer believes public information is useful for decision making and some of the issues raised in the media are discussed in informal groups. The majority of the public is not clear about the role of Local Councils but most survey respondents want development information or some type of action plan from their Local Council.

While there is some awareness of PRS, there is little knowledge, however, about what it actually is and this is evident from the responses received in the focus groups and surveys. Focus group participants are doubtful about PRS's likelihood for success. Information dissemination and awareness raising campaigns are crucial to the implementation and, more importantly, the success of the PRS and decentralisation process.

These shortcomings notwithstanding, development issues are a key agenda item of the citizenry. Increasing awareness of PRS and decentralisation requires a well-articulated strategy linking vertical and horizontal information flows with built-in feedback mechanisms. The development of the strategy could provide an opportunity to engage a whole host of media practitioners and other key stakeholders, spurring their commitment to the processes moving forward.

## Introduction

At the request of DFID, Search for Common Ground (SFCG) has undertaken a mapping of the media sector in Sierra Leone examining specific information channels related to two dominant policy frameworks: the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) and Decentralisation.

To better understand the effect of the policy frameworks in everyday life it is important to understand a number of information-related issues. Three key questions were asked prior to developing and executing the research plan.

- How is information made available?
- What information is being received by the public and how is it being understood (including the differences between urban and rural populations)?
- What quality and quantity of information is required to ensure full participation and engagement of the public?

This report, focusing on the questions above, consists of a narrative and a matrix representing the full media sector mapping (see Annex One).

## Background

The PRS and the ongoing Decentralisation process are two crucial policy frameworks adopted by the Government of Sierra Leone (GoSL). These initiatives, intended primarily to enhance the democratisation process and to improve the socio-economic wellbeing of ordinary citizens, require full cooperation of Sierra Leoneans, individually and collectively in order to be achieved. Information and dialogue are critical to people's engagement with the new governance mechanism now available to them.

The PRS, developed by GoSL with support from DFID and other international partners, is defined by three major pillars or priorities: good governance, human development and food security. A successful first year of implementation of PRS is linked to sustainable peace and development in Sierra Leone and, importantly, to international debt relief. Under the project "Enhancing the interaction and interface between Civil Society and the State to improve poor people's lives" (ENCISS) framework, DFID continues to support the rollout of the PRS.

The Decentralisation process, designed to improve community engagement and participation in governance, establishes new governance structures at the district level. Development in the districts will be driven by these structures; therefore they are also the mechanism through which the PRS is/will be implemented. Devolving responsibilities is a major governance shift and is a present challenge as administrators, politicians and communities struggle to understand the specific roles of the various levels of government and how best to utilize these functions to meet their needs.

GoSL and its development partners have taken several measures to enhance information flow and to increase awareness and knowledge of these two policy frameworks.

## Scope and Methodology

The research was national in scope and encompassed all media channels. A number of methods were employed to understand how individuals and communities are receiving public information and what they know about PRS and Decentralization. A variety of methods were used to generate the information required to fulfill the Terms of Reference. The requirements were divided into sections, looking at how information is produced, consumed and demanded. The following activities were carried out over a six-week period:

- **Organisational Interviews** - Officers from a broad range of organizations involved in sensitization on PRS and decentralisation were surveyed using interview guidelines.
- **Policy Maker Survey** - Key policy makers were interviewed to explore the link between GoSL and the media, using a questionnaire as a guide.
- **Rural Information Survey** - The information sector outside Freetown was surveyed with guided questions exploring the kind of information that is reaching the provinces and how it is being received.
- **Rural Baseline Survey** - Consumer perceptions, attitudes and listening habits were surveyed in rural areas.
- **Television Survey** – Television audiences around the country were surveyed to find consumer perceptions and habits.
- **Key Stakeholder Interviews** - Traditional and opinion leaders were interviewed about their specific level of knowledge on the PRS.
- **Focus Groups** - Youth and women were convened in Bo, Makeni, and Mile 91 to explore a few remaining areas for clarification purposes.
- **Perception survey** - Using intercept sample methodology, a survey was conducted in Freetown and upcountry locations to identify different consumer perceptions about the information they are receiving.
- **Validation** - Information and analysis were validated with various key stakeholders using a one-on-one format.

The Terms of Reference and a list of contact people are found in Annex Two. The survey methodologies and questionnaires are found in Annex Three.

A variety of interest groups make up the consumer in this report. The consumer is a cross section of the general public - urban and rural dwellers that listen to radio, watch television, read newspapers, attend meetings and possibly even surf the Internet. Women and youth were included and their responses were analyzed to discover any particular characteristics or trends as a special interest group with key roles in society. Consumers also include opinion leaders, traditional leaders and government officials including policy makers, who were included to determine how their information needs differ from those of the general public.

## **Public Information**

### ***Primary Sources of Information***

The Development Assistance Coordinating Office (DACO) supervised by the Vice President's office, and the National Decentralisation Secretariat (DECSEC), a department of the Ministry of Local Government and Community Development, are responsible for implementation of the two governance policies. DECSEC is in the process of forming an Information and Education Unit; DACO does not have one. Neither institution has an articulated communication strategy for effectively disseminating policy information.

The Ministry of Information plays a pivotal role in communicating all government policies to the general public through the state supported media outlets. In addition to disseminating information on policy matters, the Ministry can call on a specific government Ministry or Department to clarify issues for the public. The Ministry provides information around the PRS as well as the decentralization process using the state radio network, television and print. Accustomed to working in a hierarchical manner with leadership vested in a formal position of power with heads of units, these institutions of the state are ill equipped to deal with the diversifying media landscape and the information needs of the consumer in the post war

environment. Since leadership comes from one (charismatic) individual, it appears that information and knowledge sharing is personality driven. In the old style of government frameworks, information represents power, and power is reduced the more information is shared. This logic of information management fundamentally and unnecessarily restricts access to information and is still a driver for many government agencies including those involved in these new governance frameworks. The dissemination of these policy frameworks is relying mainly on vertical flows of information generally channeled through one or two people.

This organizational culture reflects governance structures not designed to meet the new and complex challenges in Sierra Leone. Besides the rapidly diversifying media landscape, a post war environment is one with a population actively seeking information. A plethora of new policy frameworks with relevant acronyms and concepts and their attendant public education campaigns<sup>1</sup> are swamping listeners with information designed mainly on the basis of the needs of the producers rather than those of the consumer. In focus groups the consumers indicated their confusion around all the overlap in acronyms and the technical language and their inability to digest it.

The Ministry of Information organizes weekly press briefings. The material, not restricted to any particular topic, reflects contemporary issues of national concern. In regard to the PRS and Decentralisation, the Ministry brings together key stakeholders like officials of DACO for the PRS and the Ministry of Local Government, Decentralisation Commission and DECSEC to respond to questions raised by the public.

The control of information dissemination specifically related to the decentralisation process lies directly with the DECSEC Executive Director, although the Minister of Local Government also plays a key role. They interact with the media through their own social networks as well as through officially organized press briefings.

The government ministries and parastatals (publicly owned government institutions) have Public Relation Officers (PROs) that provide information to media institutions (particularly government owned radio and television stations). Information on--or rather citations to--press conferences and briefings are circulated to media houses from government and its parastatals requesting coverage. Because of this mechanism, the information available on PRS and decentralisation is dependent on what the government decides to release. There is no real consideration given to what the public wants or needs to hear.

Almost all journalists interviewed said that because of their public service obligations, they usually attend press briefings with the purpose of informing the public on issues that the government wants the public to hear. They stated that while information was initially available on both processes, it has become more limited lately, which restricts their ability to produce news on the subjects.

However, the papers generally send junior reporters rather than senior editors to participate because of previous information blockages by the various Ministers. Additionally, the senior editors want to discuss directly with the Ministers involved, yet the Minister of Information or PROs control the discussion, acting as the spokesperson for all the Ministries. In protest, the senior editors have been refusing to attend<sup>2</sup>.

Most of the government PROs interviewed agreed that press briefings are called primarily to clarify media and/or public perception or respond to criticism. All Civil Society leaders interviewed hold the same view. While the PROs hold the press briefings, they are not the primary sources of information; they themselves

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<sup>1</sup> Anti Corruption Commission (ACC), MDG's – Millenium Development Goals, DDR – Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration, PETS, PRSP, ABU – agro business init, Foods Security, Gobifoh project, budget terminology, among others

<sup>2</sup> Interview with Mr. El-Tayyib Bah, former President of Sierra Leone Association of Journalists, October 24, 2005.



have been briefed on the issues by the heads of the Ministries. They cannot provide answers to every question; they frequently need to refer journalists back to the heads.

Some level of sensitisation has been outsourced recently. DFID funded and DACO contracted Action Aid (AA) to conduct sensitisation on the PRS process. AA produced standardised messages that were delivered through four subcontracted regionally-based organizations. These organisations used their own established networks to further disseminate the uniform messages. In the Western area, AA used its funds to do double page-spread advertorials<sup>3</sup> in five daily newspapers. Radio Democracy produced jingles that were aired on SLBS as well as on Radio UNAMSIL. Premier Media, a company offering media services, was committed to train drama groups in provincial communities.

Tables of the various information vectors available are attached as Annex Three.

### ***Credibility of the Source***

Communication channels and public relations offices in Ministries have deteriorated, as have media institutions like SLENA and SLBS radio and TV. The media practitioners interviewed stated that the lack of government priority on and funding to its media institutions (radio and TV) is hampering their operational effectiveness, and is also raising public suspicion about government's commitment to the process.

An ENCISS workshop<sup>4</sup> highlighted many of the issues that media practitioners are facing as they try to access information, particularly from primary sources. These difficulties reflect on the credibility of the source and SFCG's research supported this finding. Presently sources appear to be self-limiting in terms of information dissemination. Any communication strategy needs to reflect propagation of a new culture of information where knowledge and information are shared as a community.

To effectively undertake their oversight responsibilities, the media practitioners said they need adequate information from government and to be knowledgeable about the policy frameworks and their relationship to development. They insisted that they needed to be involved from the outset of policy formulation so as to be able to do adequate, objective and reliable information dissemination. This engagement did not occur in the decentralisation process; but the PRS process was more open and consultative. This sense of exclusion has affected the way the media as a whole have responded to the two policy frameworks GoSL is trying to promote.

The lack of consultation has other impacts. Even when the media receives material it does not spawn further dissemination because it has not been engaged with objective or interesting information to investigate. Instead they are provided with press releases and briefings or advertorials for direct publication. As these are merely commercial transactions, their interest is limited to the transaction's length and requirements rather than the substantive material. Effectively designed material on PRS and Decentralisation is not sufficient on any of the media channels--print, radio or TV. While they recognized their own shortcomings, the media practitioners indicated that the information flow from the state to civil society is inadequate.

The media practitioners said the public, lacking real information that they consider credible, is vulnerable to negative news. This situation feeds a cycle of cynicism and skepticism. In AA's roll out of the PRS

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<sup>3</sup> Advertorials are stories that are written by an outside source and then given to newspapers to publish on a contract basis. Newspapers are not to edit or change the stories in any way at the risk of jeopardizing the contract. This is considered by newspaper stakeholders to be a public relations ploy and 'NGO tactic'.

<sup>4</sup> In late May and early June 2005, ENCISS convened a roundtable of media practitioners to obtain their response to the PRS and Decentralisation frameworks. A report is available from the ENCISS Coordinating Office. The outcomes of the discussion relate to the relationship between the media and government and how this affects the quality of information generated.

sensitization, many of the sub-contractors used opinion and traditional leaders to disseminate the messages. However, the media practitioners indicated and focus groups confirmed that leadership at community, regional and national levels is, in the main, not considered responsive to public opinion: they do not provide information in a way that enables people to engage. They are recognized as players within the vertical flow of information and thus subject to suspicions around their credibility. As a result, while AA's sensitisation efforts may have reached the target population the information is not trusted.

Consumer surveys indicate that the audience - both rural and urban - is sophisticated, with clearly defined criteria for source credibility. Two key criteria identified in focus groups were:

- the format of the message delivery – is it interactive and does it allow space for citizen voices, including in the process of establishing the agenda? and,
- the source of the information – who is delivering the message and what is their track record?

Conversely the opinion leaders canvassed had a different opinion than the populace on credibility of source and considered information given by government as credible.

## **Usefulness and Appropriateness**

As stated, up to now information has largely been personality driven (i.e. vertical from the leadership of the organisation) rather than issue driven (i.e. horizontal from the community of organisations involved). Currently, the new information carries with it a high level of perceived uncertainty. Key stakeholders in the dissemination need to be engaged so that they trust and embrace the information, and then more effectively share it with the citizenry. Achieving this confidence, which enhances clarity and understanding, requires a strategy. This strategy should build on prior knowledge, gradually introducing new information so that incremental understanding is developed in a way that encourages the audience's confidence in its veracity.

Sensitisation has focused on a broad, uniform message, applied through advertorials, press briefings, and news releases, which have not been differentiated for the various target groups or different media channels. As a result, information around decentralisation and PRS is largely indigestible. The songs and jingles carrying short messages have shown to be extremely popular; however, they are designed to popularize the two policies rather than to build a sense of ownership and therefore have limited impact.

The research also indicated a disconnect between the information produced and what the consumer wants to know. This is particularly true for print media, but also applies to radio. Generally the information produced has been sterilised—provided as government-approved briefing notes for news updates and short articles. People are less interested in straight news reports of workshops and events that focus on personalities and institutions, looking instead for discussion and analysis of developments and implementation. Media outlets are however limited by their resources; they have little incentive to do additional programming beyond the news briefings, as they are not being compensated for airtime or space in their papers. As well they have little ownership over the process to generate their own reporting.

At the ENCISS roundtable cited above, media practitioners said formats where the public can interact are the most effective for sensitisation. This statement is supported by the results of the rural survey and focus group discussions, which indicate that a sophisticated audience weighs the appropriateness and usefulness of information. The information officials deliver in a lecture or fixed agenda meeting is less useful or appropriate because it fails to capture the public's trust.<sup>5</sup>

The rural survey found that respondents prioritise development issues (28%) and the plan of action of the local council (28%) as the key issues on which they want information. Accordingly, development issues

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<sup>5</sup> 72% of respondents in the rural survey preferred to receive information by radio; 12% through meetings.

(31%) are also the primary topic being brought to policy makers by their constituents. Together these findings should indicate a real interest in the PRS and its implications. Yet the PRS has not been linked to development in people's minds, signifying a critical gap and disconnect in the understanding of its purpose.

Decision makers share information using public meetings (69%) and visits (14%). It is interesting to note that policy makers rarely use the media channels identified by citizens as the most effective.

- Radio – Although these two frameworks are government priorities, the state media infrastructure has not been mobilised for delivery of PRS and decentralization messages. Even if a government media strategy is developed, the community and independent radio stations are outside this framework. Their formats, which are more locally-centered and appropriate for the audience, could be leveraged to foster horizontal information flows. These currently do not involve a feedback mechanism into government, but could become a resource for policymakers to tune in and listen to discussion among their constituents.
- Newspaper – The government is not engaging print journalists adequately and are using advertorials rather than delivering information to them in a way that enables them to objectively research and report on a subject.
- Television – This channel is not perceived as effective because of limited access (less than one third of homes in transmission areas have televisions).
- Meetings – Most meetings have a controlled agenda that limits people's interaction, and therefore confidence and engagement; jeopardizing reception of the message that officials want to deliver.

## **Clarity**

New information carries a high level of perceived doubt and confusion around the details. Several media practitioners interviewed indicated that when they required clarification on specifics around information provided, the government contact, usually the Press Officer, could not provide that clarity, further complicating and frustrating dissemination efforts. It also clearly demonstrates the vertical alignment of information production and provision.

Further complicating people's understanding of the PRS and decentralisation is the plethora of new concepts and acronyms being constantly introduced to communities. Since the end of the war, people have been introduced to the PETS, MDGs, CWCs, TRC, SC, DECSEC, DACO, food security, and a number of other new policies, benchmarks, and governance tools, but sensitization has not been systematic or incremental. Jingles are aired and topics are introduced but people do not have a strong grasp of how the different concepts interrelate or apply to their lives.

Horizontal information flows are more inclusive and collaborative than vertical flows, and they help to improve the clarity of the message. Networking and information sharing increases understandability of the message. The horizontal flows have not been developed adequately, however, for a variety of reasons stated elsewhere in this report; only the vertical flows are well developed.

Interactive forums provide the most useful means for information consumers to receive and clarify information. By having their questions answered, exploring the substantive content and linking it to their experience, new information is incorporated into their existing knowledge.

## **Decision-making and Feedback Mechanisms**

There is a pattern of decision-making associated with information flows that is related to disclosure or acquisition of shared information. Structural conditions, defined as the physical, social and economic arrangements that influence individual and organizational use of networks and systems of information exchange, also play a key role in information sharing behaviour. The old style hierarchical management of

information lacks a feedback mechanism: therefore information produced is disconnected from the needs of the audience.

The decision to broadcast or publish information is made by a News Director at a radio or television station; for newspapers, the Editor or the Publisher makes the decision. In most cases these are individuals who are not bound by statutory rules of a company (only four newspapers are owned by companies) or by institutional ownership obligations (i.e. community radio boards). The Independent Media Commission (IMC) regulations bind individuals only – in the case of newspapers, only the editors are held responsible and this means that in most cases individuals are making the decisions without any clear or articulated guidelines. Vulnerable to financial constraints, many editorial decisions are made not on the basis of independent substantive information but may be affected by incoming revenues. It is obligatory for the government-controlled radio and television stations to broadcast government briefings. For the independent media (both print and broadcast), government press releases are edited and most often used as news.

Information is also disseminated through council meetings. Although council meetings are held publicly, these are primarily intended as an opportunity for citizens to see how they are represented and not as information sharing sessions. However most people do not understand this and are frustrated by the lack of opportunity to contribute in a meaningful way<sup>6</sup>; they merely observe the process. Technically the ward committees are supposed to be generating discussion and feedback for the councilors to raise in the meetings and this is where consumers can also input. It is likely that many ward committees do not understand their own important role in information dissemination and feedback. However many of the ward committees are non-functional in this role as they were selected by partisan candidates rather than popularly elected, and therefore do not have the people's confidence to serve as a conduit for citizen response and feedback. According to SFCG interlocutors the result of the ward committee selection process is that many of the ward committees have expectations of returned favours as a result of their support for their local councilors to win the election rather than as service to their communities' development.

Feedback, context, and other information is carried from the people or communities to the policy makers by the radio stations and newspapers through their reporting, vox pops, talk shows with phone-ins, and other interactive formats targeting listeners and policy makers. However, these methods assume that policymakers listen to the radio stations or read those articles. There is no direct, formalized feedback mechanism where people can voice their opinions, questions, and concerns.

## Channels

Sierra Leone's media sector has diversified at a remarkable rate over the past 10 years. A proliferation of radio stations nationwide, television service established in some provinces, and a plethora of newspapers published daily and weekly in Freetown have changed the structural conditions for information and knowledge sharing. These outlets play a major role in information sharing behaviour. Radio formats are shifting, with radio dramas, phone-in programmes and other interactive types of programming evolving in many places around the country.

Competition between stations for creative and engaging programming is also driving new innovations and formats, improving the media landscape. Additionally, technology—the introduction of the computer, desktop publishing, Internet and other innovative ways of communicating—is more available to the population, delivering information from around the country, the West African region and the world. Social

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<sup>6</sup> People who have attended council meetings said that the meetings are reports on council activities. If they wanted to make contributions, they had to do so through their councilors by either whispering in their ears or writing on a piece of paper.

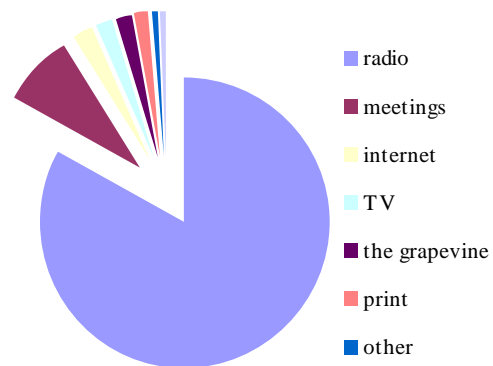
marketing and promotional campaigns, awareness raising and sensitisation are campaign styles utilising a variety of formats and channels to promote a series of ideas, messages and sound bites from policy developments to HIV/AIDS. The face of the media in Sierra Leone is quickly evolving.

The development and proliferation of various media is inherently linked to the level of literacy of the population and its experience of the war. Social, economic and political development of a nation is far more difficult with an illiterate population. Sierra Leone's 31%<sup>7</sup> literacy rate is a key determinant in the manner in which information flows. Information is centralized in Freetown. While home to about 20%<sup>8</sup> of the population, the capital is home to all the newspapers, 35% of the radio stations, 10 times as many Internet cafes as in the provinces plus it is the seat of the national government and the source of policy statements. Community and independent radio stations have begun to affect this dynamic, but there are still significant structural problems in how information flows in and out of the capital.

A variety of vectors carry policy information outward from policy makers to the nation and can bring information back in to government. Each channel is described below in terms of what is delivered followed by the results of the consumer study that illustrates what is watched, listened to and read. A matrix of existing newspaper, radio, and television outlets with details of ownership, coverage, and other specifics is attached as Annex One.

A rural information survey in eight locations asked respondents using an intercept methodology what were their preferred sources of information. Chart 1 confirms the huge popularity of radio as the main channel of communication in Sierra Leone.

**Chart 1: Preferred Information Sources**



## Radio

The radio sector has expanded dramatically over the past few years. In 1991, two radio stations existed. The breakthrough came in 1996 when three independent stations set up in Freetown. Community radio emerging from amateur radio stations began in 2001 in Tombo and Mile 91. The full listing of radio stations and coverage can be found in the media matrix annexed.

Province/Area	Total Number of Radio Stations
Southern	5
Northern	4
Eastern	6
Western	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>23</b>

Supported by DFID, GoSL expanded its SLBS network for better national coverage. With the only shortwave facility, Radio UNAMSIL is the only FM station covering most of the country, although this coverage is reducing as troops draw down towards closure of the mission at the end of 2005. With 13 of the 17 districts<sup>9</sup> hosting radio stations, most of the districts are covered at least partially by the stations' collective broadcast range. Annex Five is a map plotting the locations by district and details of coverage are

<sup>7</sup> Literacy levels differ greatly by location. 4 out of 5 males in Freetown can read and write, while in Kailahun only 1 in 10 males can. For females the statistics are worse: in Freetown 2 in 5 are literate while in Kailahun only 1 in 13 are -- PRS household survey, 2004.

<sup>8</sup> Provisional 2004 census results, <http://www.statistics-sierra-leone.org/ASD%202004/CHAPTER%20%202.htm>

<sup>9</sup> Pujehun, Bonthe, Port Loko district do not yet have stations. Kambia District community radio is just coming on air.

in the matrix in Annex One. Radio is by far the most widespread and popular media channel with almost national coverage.

Radio stations operate on average about 11 hours per day<sup>10</sup> relying on generators for their power source. This is always problematic and affects broadcast time<sup>11</sup>. With mobile phone systems now available, radio formats have diversified. Now 19 radio stations can conduct call-in programmes, initiating more interactive formats such as roundtables, panel discussions and feedback sessions using the mobile phones, which would have been unheard of two years ago. Radios are also developing creative formats, like *Mr. Spider* of Radio Gbafth in Mile 91<sup>12</sup>. Additionally all of the radio stations except two broadcast SFCG's Talking Drum Studio (TDS) produced radio programmes.<sup>13</sup>

## Ownership of Stations

SLBS is owned and operated by the GoSL. SLBS makes national transmission to the regions through its links, focusing on national news, people and events, and periodic special programming related to government or sporting events. As stated above, SLBS has not been mobilised to develop programming to support the two policy frameworks, but its stations will play programmes that are prepared and supported through AA or other NGOs or institutions involved in the process.

Non-government stations are licensed as community, commercial, or religious radio stations. Whether a license is community or commercial is determined solely by the size of the transmitter. Stations with less than 100 watt transmitting power are automatically categorized as community stations, regardless of their actual governance or revenue generating frameworks. However governance structures reflect on editorial decisions: stations run by an individual will have different priorities and policies than stations run by community-selected Boards. Similarly, government ownership must necessarily affect the content of what the SLBS stations broadcast – see text box. With a diversity of institutional frameworks, community and independent radio stations can have more independent editorial; however, this is not well developed in any of the institutions. The media matrix in Annex One provides a breakdown of the type of license and ownership of the various radio stations.

**Mr. Spider**  
When SLBS Kono began a programme called *Schkipendeh* similar to *Mr. Spider*, it met with stiff resistance from the local authorities and was stopped. The youths in Kono demonstrated to bring it back on the air.

For the most part, in the provinces, local stations' strong community ties ensure programming is relevant to the needs of the community audience. This is less well defined in Freetown based stations particularly as the audiences are more diverse. The radios located in the provinces have the experience of being able to quickly identify conflicts and developments arising and engage the necessary actors to address them whereas in the larger cities such developments can be lost in all that is going on. Community and independent radio also have the advantage of using a diversity of formats that support the credibility of sources and enhanced understanding on the part of the audience. These formats improve horizontal information flows. In a typical week, a typical community radio station indicates that 44% of airtime is entertainment, 24% is community news, TDS programmes are 7.25% and public notice and jingles 7%.

<sup>10</sup> Averaged over a sample of six stations representing both community- and state-owned.

<sup>11</sup> TDS monitoring has found on average about 70% of agreed airtime is provided by radio stations.

<sup>12</sup> Mr. Spider, a radio programming format characterized by animal identities, captures information about things that are not going well in a society. Individuals in the community inform the programme but are afraid to directly identify themselves with the information because of the possible social consequences that will be brought to bear. These programmes are extremely popular and are called Mr. Eagle, Mr. Owl, and Mr. Spider. They are contemporary social commentary and a way of raising sensitive issues in a community without confrontation or individual responsibility. Apparently these programmes have their roots in experiences in colleges or universities.

<sup>13</sup> These two stations ask for commercial airtime prices while TDS negotiates a partnership MOU with other considerations.

Operating costs are still a major challenge to most radio stations, and present a stumbling block in the government’s attempts to disseminate information on its policies. Most stations are commercial in nature and are dependent on revenues received for advertisements and public notices; these provide the bulk of their operating revenue. They also receive airtime support for the broadcast of specific programmes. Stations vary in how closely revenue aligns with budgeted expenditures; in some places stations are forced off the air because they cannot afford to buy fuel for the generator or community members make private donations to help keep them running. At the same time, stations have to be careful about what donations they accept because many contributions come with political strings attached that would compromise the integrity of the station if accepted. Some radios have the institutional support of an NGO alleviating the hardships and constraints of commercial transactions for the immediate future.

In light of their financial constraints, many of the stations are frustrated by expectations for programming from the national government and local councils without compensation for airtime. SLBS-Makeni and Radio Gbafth have stopped airing some programmes distributed by DACO because of the lack of airtime support.

### Produced Material

For the PRS sensitisation, drama groups around the country were trained in outdoor community theatre. Jingles were produced by Radio Democracy 98.1 FM and given to the state radios where available and community or independent radio where state radio does not exist. As mentioned above, after six months SLBS Makeni stopped airing the jingles because they had not received payment; Mile 91 stopped after a year. Through its subcontractors, AA implemented regional-level rural dialogues with community stakeholders and a panel of Ministers and officials.

For decentralisation information, Radio UNAMSIL has a forum once per week for one hour. Many of the radio stations rebroadcast this transmission in various parts of the country.

SFCG’s TDS produces regular weekly programmes on issues related to decentralisation and the PRS that are distributed through Memoranda of Understanding to 21 of the 23 registered stations. Regional programmes produced in Bo and Makeni focus on specific aspects of the decentralisation process, including roles and responsibilities of councilors and ward committee members, and addressing problems that arise as the new structures are implemented. Its programming on the PRS particularly looks at livelihoods and income generation for youth. SFCG/TDS produces an average of 115 minutes of programming per week directly relevant to the two policy frameworks.

### Radio Listening

A baseline survey was conducted with residents of four eastern rural districts (Kailahun, Kenema, Koinadugu and Kono) in June 2005. The following information collected during the survey is relevant to this report<sup>14</sup>.

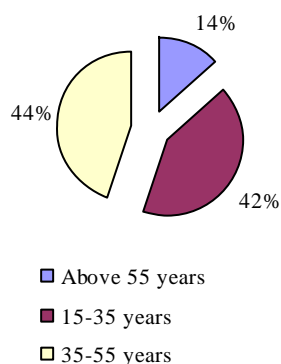
#### Demographics

Four hundred individuals were interviewed in this rural area using an intercept type of sampling methodology. See Annex three for details of the methodology utilised. Of those surveyed, two thirds were male (67%) and one third female (33%). The most common occupations are shown in Table Two.

Farmer/Gardener	40%
Schoolteacher	20%
Housewife	17%
Market Vendor	13%
Miner	6%
Driver	3%

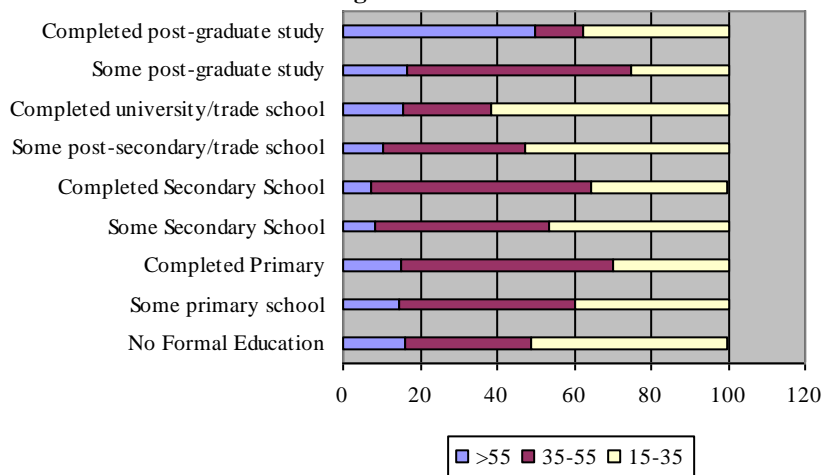
<sup>14</sup> The full report is available upon request.

**Chart 1: Age of Sample**



Their age and education distribution is illustrated in the two graphs above.

**Chart 2: Age and Education Characteristics**



Radio is the preferred channel of communication for almost three quarters (72%) of these rural respondents. Word of mouth was mentioned by almost one fifth of respondents (19%), meetings by 12% and newspapers were mentioned by only 3% of respondents as a channel of communication that they use.

The survey results show that: 70% of those surveyed are radio listeners; those who are more educated listened more recently; younger people (15-35) listen more than those over 35; and more males than females listen to the radio.

Ninety percent (90%) of respondents who are radio listeners have a radio in the house where they live, although only 70% own the radio themselves. People listen at home, most often in the early morning, in the evening and at night. Young males are more likely to own the radio and determine what is listened to, assuming that the owner of the radio controls the selection.

People listen to the radio for news and information (60%) especially about ‘my community’ (38%) and ‘world news’ (25%). They also listen to be entertained (20%). The remainder 14% said they listen because it gives reliable information. The radio programme they listen to most frequently is TDS’s *Atunda Ayenda* followed by local language programming and community news.

It appears from the research that rural communities derive most of their information from the radio, even in those areas where radio is relatively new. Additionally responses indicate they appreciate local language programming. Proportionately fewer women own radios, and many listen to the radio of male relatives or husbands. They also have lower recent listening rates. These findings reflect their levels of access to public information and how they use information to inform their decision-making.

A broader radio listening survey was conducted in 2004, which provided some information on the differences in listening habits between urban and rural listeners. Freetown radio listenership was spread out among more stations, while most rural residents listened to predominantly one common station (by location). Although the various programming sources were not compared, TDS programmes are more popular with rural residents than with urban.



## Print

All the newspapers are published in Freetown and are not distributed widely except in the capital. A total of 42 newspapers are produced, with some daily or weekly and others irregularly. The full listing of papers with circulation figures can be found in the media matrix (see Annex One).

Frequency of Publication	No. of Newspapers
Daily/Five times weekly	9
Three/Four times weekly	6
Twice/Once weekly	13
Irregular	4
Not currently publishing	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>42</b>

The Sierra Leone Vendors Association (SLVA), comprised of 170 members, represents the vendors who sell newspapers in the country. It is a commercial operation that liaises with each newspaper's agent and delivers newspapers to the Post Office where the vendor buys them. Some of the agents double as vendors. Newspapers sell at Le 1000 (\$0.40 USD) each.

The selection of newspapers that is sold is determined by readers' demand. It is also determined by production consistency and frequency. The vendors want to earn a profit so they invest their monies in newspapers that are popular and have wide readership. Newspaper people indicate that the proliferation of newspapers, which was made possible by the repeal of the 1983 Newspaper Act, has decreased sales of newspapers overall. According to the survey of print media, people buy newspapers mostly for the current issues discussed, but also for sports, to know their stars (horoscope) and for records purposes.

Readers know what they want. Newspapers generally gained popularity through their reportage on the war. A handful of papers gained great credibility through their war reporting, and were considered to have very incisive and critical analysis of the situation. Readers also look for the position and analysis a paper takes on issues, how critical (or not) the papers are of government, and how they craft headlines. Research indicates that people know which position a newspaper takes on political issues and choose those that have a balance between those supporting government and those not. While readership is difficult to ascertain, individuals seeking to establish a Publishers' Association conducted a random survey of the population and found that on average eight people read one newspaper<sup>15</sup>.

Vendors' selection outside Freetown is based on popularity of the newspapers. The most popular newspapers account for 80% of those sent upcountry. In the provinces, newspapers are sold singly (sales driven by compelling headlines) rather than in packets as in Freetown and before prices doubled in cost Le 800 in the provinces.

In total, vendors distribute only 440 newspapers to the provinces on a daily basis as follows: Kenema - 100, Mile 91 - 90, Kono - 150 and Makeni - 100. Other areas receive newspapers through individuals who buy them to read and then give them to friends and family members. Bo used to have sales but distribution has stopped because of revenue and other financial reporting inconsistencies by the agent.

Given the limited circulation and small readership of newspapers, financial viability is difficult. Most papers earn only 25% of their revenue from sales. They try to earn the rest from advertisements, but the market is very limited and competitive among the various papers. Advertisement space is usually only purchased by telecom companies, government agencies, and a few large businesses, all based in Freetown. To make ends meet, journalists frequently demand fees for attending press briefings, require payment for publishing certain information, prioritize advertisements over news articles, and take small incentives for publishing distorted facts or strict public relations information. Other times the papers accept financial backing from individuals with vested political interests. All of these factors have serious implications for

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<sup>15</sup> Interview with Mr. El-Tayyib Bah, former President of Sierra Leone Association of Journalists, September 14, 2005.

the professional observance of standards and ethics in the industry and damage the credibility of the print sector.

## Ownership of newspapers

As with radio, ownership of newspapers is governed by the IMC. For registration, the entity must be registered as a business and pay taxes on the business. Copies of these documents, plus an application fee, are sent to the IMC, which then approves or rejects the publishing license. The cost of starting a newspaper is relatively low, likely contributing to the proliferation of papers. With less than US\$1000 one can start up a newspaper and print the first edition. One thousand (1,000) copies of one edition, assuming 12 pages printed back to front, costs approximately \$250 to print excluding salaries and overheads.

For the most part, individuals own Sierra Leone’s newspapers. These people are generally the journalists who staff them, usually the Managing Editor or Editor-in-Chief. In some cases this ownership is genuine, in others the journalist owner is just a front for a third party interest. However, these financiers are not on record anywhere, including with the IMC. Connections between the financiers and the papers are hard to prove, but they are acknowledged within the media sector and account for some papers with strong partisan leanings.

Companies own four of the newspapers, namely *Salone Times*, *The Post*, *Awoko*, and *Democrat*. Two others are owned and run by Sierra Leone’s main political parties, *We Yone* (SLPP) and *Unity* (APC).

## Newspaper reading habits

According to the findings of a print survey conducted in eight locations<sup>16</sup>, almost three quarters (71%) of the people polled read newspapers at some point. However of that number over 56% do not read newspapers regularly. Almost one fifth read a paper ‘yesterday’ with equal numbers reading a paper within the last 7 days (22%) and within the last 4 weeks (22%). Of those who said they read newspapers, more than half (57%) said they do not read them regularly. The reasons for this were: cost (10%), lack of access (11%), lack of interest (6%) and language issues (3%). Half of the sample that replied indicated they had a preferred newspaper to read and data suggests that *Concord Times*, *Standard Times*, *Awoko* and *New Vision* are the most popular publications. People preferred these newspapers because the stories and editorial content are considered credible.

When asked if they had seen articles about PRS in the newspaper, only half of the sample answered the question. Of those that responded, two thirds (67%) said they had seen articles about PRS in the newspapers and 69% said the frequency was rare or never.

Even though readership levels appear to be high the regularity of readership is low. Based on the results of other surveys, the information printed in newspapers is generally not seen as credible and certainly does not rate anywhere near as high as radio in terms of preferred sources of information. Further analysis into why people read the paper would likely reveal some interesting results.

## Television

### Stations

**Table Four: ABC TV Programming**

#### Local Programmes

- Night Line
- Eye on Sierra Leone - UNDP and special court activities
- Comfort zone (entertainment) weekends
- Exposed - corruption issues (pending)
- Local news

#### International Programmes

CNN, BBC AND DEUTSCHE WELLE

Relay Series Movies

Relay important international programmes

<sup>16</sup> The survey was conducted in Freetown, Lungi, Bo, Bombali, Sembehun, Kambia, Mombasa, and Magburaka

Two television stations are located in the Western Area and provide service to limited parts the country. The SLBS Television station, which has broadcast irregularly over the years, began televising again in 1996, covering Freetown, parts of Port Loko District and Bo Town. ABC TV, a private station owned by local businessman was established in 2005, and covers the Western Area and parts of Port Loko and Kambia Districts. Power limits consumer access: the stations are dependent on generators for regular supply and consumers for reception.

ABC TV airs 9 hours per weekday and 24 hours on the weekend, and their programmes are divided into two categories, of which 30% are local and 70% are international programmes (see Table Four). SLBS broadcasts for 7 hours on weekdays and 13 hours during weekends. On the whole, local programmes constitute 80% of SLBS's airtime.

## **Television Survey**

A survey was conducted to understand television viewing habits in the Western Area, Port Loko District and Southern Province (Bo). Included in this sample are those who watch SLBS and/or ABC Television in the home. About 14% of the people living in Bo have TV and watch it sometimes while in central Freetown the rate was 22%. In the more well-to-do areas of western Freetown, TV viewing was up to 30%. These statistics do not include satellite television, on which many people watch football games in facilities where they pay an entrance fee.

### **Demographics**

The sample was derived from Freetown (56%), Port Loko (15%) and Bo (28%). Respondents were asked to classify themselves as urban or rural dwellers, and of this group 83% considered themselves urban and 17% considered themselves rural. Business vendors were the largest group of respondents, with NGO workers second. The TV viewing audience is, for the most part, educated at the secondary school level and above (81%) with slightly more males (55%) than females (45%) represented.

### **Viewing Habits and Preferences**

Most people watch television in their own homes between 5:00 pm and midnight. The major reason people gave for watching TV is entertainment (24%) followed by world news (18%) and education (16%). If the news categories (world, community, governance news) were grouped together, news of all types is a more important motivator for television watching than entertainment.

Almost three quarters (70%) of respondents have seen information related to the PRS on television. Almost half (45%) of those who have seen programming have seen it "rarely" and 41% have seen it once or twice a week. One quarter (25%) say they have heard jingles and/or songs related to PRS while others say they saw PRS discussions on the TV. Respondents indicated that government officials (30%), journalists (17%), and NGO officials (10%) present the PRS information on television. Many (45%) of those who watch believe the information they receive is credible, although a large percentage (44%) is undecided on this point. Respondents indicated that radio is still their primary source of information, even if they watch television.

## **Internet**

Internet services in Sierra Leone are delivered through landline (Sierratel), Very Small Aperture Terminal (VSAT) or HF Radio. Landline or dial up connection is available only in large towns with the services of Sierratel. International institutions that can afford the high costs associated with the purchase of the equipment, installation and user fees install VSATs.

The largest number of Internet users is in Freetown, where just fewer than 30 Internet cafés are operating, most of which are dial-up. Internet connections are available in Bo via a dial up system using Sierratel, with two cafés open. Bo also hosts four private VSAT installations. Since the end of the armed conflict there has been no landline telephone connection in any part of the Northern province except Lungi airport area and Port Loko (one in Kambia). There is no evidence of an Internet café in these areas although there was a possibility one might start at the Lungi airport. In the Eastern province there are Internet connections in Kenema town with two Internet cafés, although people complain about very slow connections. Four VSAT installations are operating in Kenema, but are not accessible to the public. Very few private homes are connected. Overall, internet use is limited to people who are computer literate and can afford to pay at least five thousand leones per hour for time.

There is little information available on PRS and Decentralisation on the World Wide Web. While there is a sizeable amount of information on the DACO site, it is not user-friendly and contains many broken links. This appears to be by far the best site for information on the PRS, however. The GoSL website contains speeches and press releases that make reference to Decentralisation and PRS but does not mention either initiative on the government policy pages, does not appear to offer any current information and is not structured to facilitate updates or regular information sharing. For more information on the results of searches for information on the Internet, see Annex Six.

## **Internet Use**

Respondents to the television survey were asked about their preferred channels for receiving public information. While the majority mentioned radio as their first choice and television second, equal numbers of respondents chose the Internet and meetings as their first or second choice for receiving public information. This is likely an emerging trend and further study into what types of information people are seeking on the World Wide Web may prove interesting.

## **Mobile Phones**

The emergence of four mobile phone companies has increased communication access and provided a medium that allows two-way communication between the government and the public. Coverage is regularly increasing to new communities. Pujehun, Bonthe, Kailahun, and Koinadugu are the only districts with no mobile phone system coverage as yet. Mobile phones are considered expensive to use, however there are many subscribers. Celtel, the largest provider, claims over 300,000 subscribers. The survey of policy makers showed that mobile phones are useful for feedback, but only by a small number of respondents use them. As problems come to their attention, policy makers are able to call the leadership in their districts to follow up, gain clarity on the issues, and help direct the response.

The mobile phone network has transformed how information flows in the country. Journalists can seek information from around the nation, expanding their coverage and accuracy without any additional travel requirements. This development applies to print, television, and radio channels. Additionally, radio stations use them to solicit feedback and foster discussion with the listening audience. It is common practice now for stations to open their phone lines at the end of discussion programmes for audience comments and questions. Mobile phones present an opportunity that has not been adequately explored as a tool to support policy dissemination.

## ***Other***

### Billboards

All over Freetown and also at major junctions outside the city, billboards are used to deliver social messages or advertise products or services. HIV/AIDS and condom use are the most prevalent messages, but there are a range of products and issues addressed.

### Posters

Posters are used primarily to advertise new movies or to launch cassettes produced by local musicians. These often-colourful posters are plastered all over fences, buildings and poles.

### Meetings

The consultative process is a new feature of democratic governance and this methodology has been used to generate information to inform policy developments. It is also an important mechanism for feeding information from officials to the citizenry. As discussed above, however, the impact of meeting is limited by the style, with the public being disinterested in formats where they have little input into the agenda or proceedings.

### Press Conferences

The Local Government Act makes it clear that councils' activities should be conducted in an open manner with information sharing to the public. Most of the Local Councils have established a Press Committee and convene press briefings monthly. There are challenges confronting regular press briefings that are discouraging their occurrence, including:

- Journalists demand money, food and beverages every time they come to press briefings.
- The councils have realized that the caliber of journalists is low and engagement is not constructive. Media reports do not reflect the discussions.
- Print media people request interviews with councils and print a center spread in their newspaper, paid for and edited by the councils. However, at least one council reports that this cooperation only occurs when the journalists need money.
- The journalists say that they are informed late for meetings and they do not have enough time for interaction on issues they want to pursue.

As an example, Bo Town Council has held five press briefings since being elected in May 2005. Presently the council pays for radio discussions with a phone-in facility through SLBS-Bo for the public to ask questions the last Saturday of every month, which they find cost effective.

## ***Professional Organisations***

Journalists and broadcasters are organized into a number of different professional organizations, some of which have become defunct, reportedly due to a lack of leadership. Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ) is the primary media organization. It changes leadership every four years, and many journalists and editors are members. The Editors Guild, Alliance of Female Journalists (AFJ) and Sierra Leone Women in the Media (SLWIM) have not been active recently, although these organizations did at one time house the interests of varying sub-groups of media practitioners. None of these groups have been mobilized as a group around the PRS and Decentralization. A listing of media organizations and their specific focus is in Annex Seven.

## Public Awareness

### *Policy Maker Survey*

Another key interest group in a decision-making role are policy makers. Policy makers are defined as individuals in government positions who influence policy decisions. A small sample (42) of decision-makers based in the provinces but working in Freetown was surveyed to see how they use information and the media to support the work that they are doing. While the results are not statistically significant, the responses are interesting and are presented below.

### Demographics

Of the sample, respondents were distributed equally across three districts: Kono, Koinadugu and Kailahun. The respondents are predominantly male and are Parliamentarians, Cabinet Ministers and Directors of government ministries.

### Information Sources

Decision makers were asked if they had sufficient information about their region to be able to use it to inform their decision-making. Almost all (89%) said yes. The primary channel of this information is the same media used by the general population, with almost three quarters mentioning radio (71%). This group listens to radio most often in the early morning for current and general information (79%). Listening for entertainment and education are lesser priorities for this group.

Newspapers were mentioned as a source of information by just over half of respondents (52%), which is interesting to note since constituents rely very little on newspapers as a credible source of information.

### Information Distribution

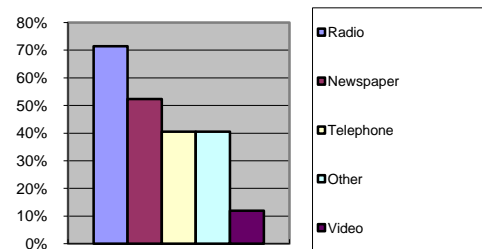
While policy makers rely on radio and newspapers as their primary channels of information, they use meetings (and not radio!) as their main channel for providing information to constituents. In the Rural Baseline Survey referred to earlier, the public does not see meetings as a preferred channel of information although a large majority (85%) of those respondents do attend meetings in the community. Almost all (92%) respondents say they give feedback to their individual constituents or stakeholder groups in response to concerns.

While decision makers rated development issues as most important to their constituents, they did not provide any examples of individual or group stakeholders coming to them with development-related concerns. It is possible that, since decision-makers use meetings most often to communicate with their constituents, constituents do not see this forum as a two-way communication method and prefer to keep their issues to themselves or discuss them in their own interest group meetings.

### *Demand for Public Information*

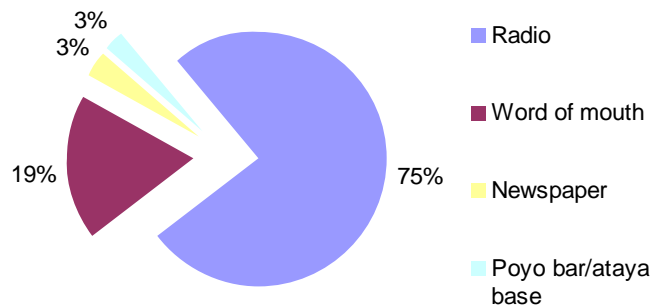
Subjects of focus groups were asked to define “public information”. They said public information has space and creates opportunities for contribution and interaction from individuals. It is timely, credible and has personality(ies) standing for it that people can trust. As much as possible, public information should come from people who are not government employees and who are not appointed by government. It should come from an entity that has a variety of people exploring the issues.

**Chart 3: Policy Makers' Sources of Information**

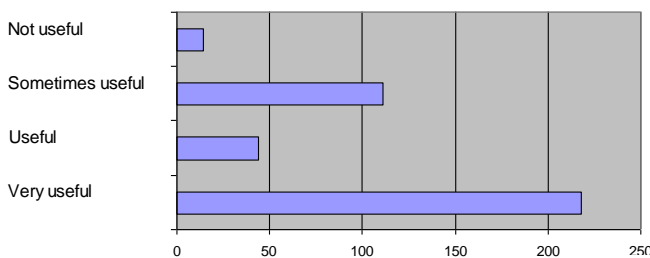


The research found consumption reflective of the demand for public information. In the rural districts of Koinadugu, Kono, Kailahun and Kenema a surprising 92% of the sample respondents said they have access to public information. The sources of this information are depicted in the chart and basically reflect the preferred channels of communication. Radio (75%) is by far the most common source of public information followed by word of mouth (19%). Newspapers and poyo bars/ataya bases are next at only 3% each. Most respondents (93%) affirmed that the radio is a trusted and most valuable source while only 2% said the same for newspapers.

**Chart 4: Sources of Information**

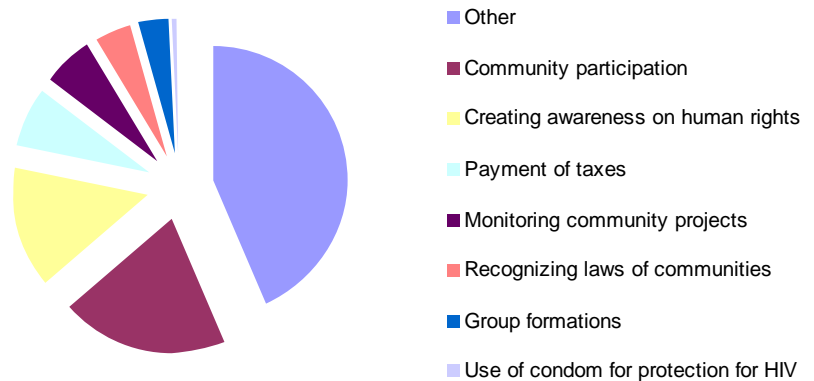


**Chart 5: Usefulness of Public Information**



Participants were asked about the usefulness of public information in their decision-making. The chart shows that public information is very useful for decision making to over half (56%) of respondents while less than 10% said it is not useful. There was no difference in responses by gender, age group or level of education.

**Chart 6: Responses to Public Information**



Most respondents (85%) said that issues raised by the radio and newspapers are discussed in group meetings. This suggests that existing groups are useful in deepening analysis of issues that are raised in the media.

To see how information is applied, respondents were asked if the information had compelled any individual or community action. It is interesting to note that people perceived that information can compel action, although only 65% of the sample responded when asked to affirm their answer with a concrete example.

In the focus groups, the subject of development issues as people’s top priority was defined and explored by the participants.

- Discussions revealed that people clearly want access to information about road construction, education, infrastructural development, health, and agriculture, but do not know how to link these concerns with the PRS.
- People’s perception about the PRS is that it is specifically about poverty, not about development. The link between poverty and development is missing, with the PRS being seen as a stand-alone document or institution.

## Decentralisation

As part of the rural baseline survey, respondents were asked about their knowledge and awareness of Local Councils. The following is a brief summary of the results of the survey.

The majority (83%) of respondents feel that Local Councils are important, with more males (87%) than females (74%) believing they are important. Desegregation also showed that people with more education or who were older rated the importance of Councils more highly. When asked if they are aware of the duties of local Councilors, 61% of respondents said yes. Just over half (52%) said they are aware of the duties of Ward Committees but when asked to provide specifics, only 38% of those who said they were aware of the duties could actually respond.

When asked whether they are getting adequate information about Council activities, just under half said yes. Females believe they receive less information than males. When asked about the kind of information they want from Local Councils, almost one fifth did not respond and two thirds said they wanted development information or some type of action plan. They also mentioned information about meetings and community problems as well. Focus groups were conducted to clarify what was meant by 'development information' and participants specified they want more discussion of details about programmes and projects intended for the area, their expected benefits, and how the community will be involved.

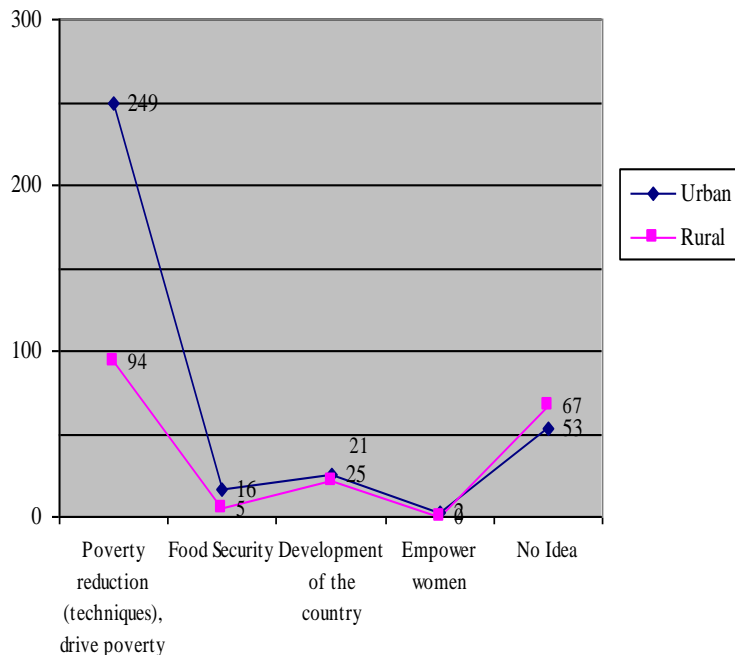
Almost all respondents (97%) belong to an interest group. They were asked about the types of interest groups they belong to and about the issues they discuss in these groups. They discuss development issues (55%), corruption (28%), taxation (18%) and fairness and equity issues (18%). (Total responses exceed 100% because respondents were allowed to select more than one issue.)

## PRS

Most (69%) of survey respondents have heard about PRS on the radio, 7% by newspaper, friend or meetings, and 5% by television or other. While there is some awareness of PRS, there is little knowledge,

however, about what it actually is and this was evident from the responses received in the focus groups and surveys. Chart 8 gives the public perspective of PRS. It is apparent from the Chart 7 that the name of the PRS has been popularized both in the urban and rural sector however the substantive understanding of the concept as related to its major issues and priorities have not been developed.

**Chart 7: Public Perception of PRS, Frequency Response**



A majority of people (65%) think PRS is about poverty reduction, which, to them, includes helping the poor achieve a better standard of living, helping the needy, and fighting poverty. They also identified development (9%) and food security (4%) as parts of the



program. Almost a quarter (23%) had no idea what PRS is about.

Focus group participants were asked about their perception of the PRS's likelihood for success. They were dubious and provided a number of reasons for their doubt:

- While government is talking about poverty reduction, hardship continues to increase.
- Sierra Leoneans are skilled at developing papers and documents but have difficulty with implementation.
- How will the government market a document to the public with their current track record especially as corruption is increasing?
- The resignation of the head of DACO is an indication of a lack of support from the government and a sign of frustration of those responsible for the initiative.
- Overall, communities do not trust those who implement these projects as they are appointed by government and can be arm-twisted and bend to government pressure or face the consequences.

In addition to the consumer research, 36 traditional and opinion leaders who had been targeted in the sensitisation process to both receive and disseminate public information were asked for their perceptions about the PRS. Their perceptions are quite different from those of the citizen group. One notable difference is that the leaders trust the source of information (government officials) whereas the public does not. Some of their thoughts about PRS are:

- They admit to a superficial understanding of the document that is very complex and difficult to read.
- PRS is supposed to be the method of bringing about improvements such as new hospitals, a reliable water supply and good governance.
- PRS is a programme in the country designed to alleviate poverty.
- It is a mechanism to be put in place aimed at reducing poverty in particular settings.
- It an idea put forward by government to eradicate poverty.

These opinion leaders feel that a variety of information dissemination channels are important to develop an understanding of PRS. Their perceptions about the potential of the PRS are:

- There is too much information and nothing has been done.
- The implementation will not be effective because of the high level of corruption in the country.
- If properly implemented PRS will reduce the number of poor through transparency and accountability.

It appears as if the leaders are already focusing on implementation while average citizens, while mainly familiar with the terminology are not yet familiar with what PRS is and how it affects them. List of resources available for PRS and Decentralisation are in Annex Eight.

## **Conclusions**

Information dissemination and awareness raising campaigns are crucial to the implementation and, more importantly, the success of the PRS and decentralisation process.

Government agencies as well as other non-state actors have adopted several mechanisms to enhance the level of information flow around the two policies. Whereas almost all of the identified actors claim to have made significant gains in empowering the people in participating in these two processes, the results emerging show that the level of awareness and understanding of the fundamental tenets of the PRS and decentralization are still very low.

Most of the activities undertaken to date to raise public awareness on the PRS and decentralisation are largely restricted to District and provincial headquarter towns through traditional leaders and other

officials. Meaningful channels of communication and information dissemination, both vertical and horizontal, have been underemployed and not used appropriately. Consequently credibility of information sources is an issue with consumers.

Implementing agencies complain about limited resources. This not only impedes their degree of expansion but also prevents them from consolidating their communication campaigns, creating more gaps in information flow. The survey findings also revealed a real difficulty in accessing information, particularly from government institutions.

These shortcomings notwithstanding, development issues are a key agenda item of the citizenry. Linking this consciousness to the PRS and decentralisation requires a well-articulated strategy linking vertical and horizontal information flows with built-in feedback mechanisms. The development of the strategy could provide an opportunity to engage a whole host of media practitioners and other key stakeholders, spurring their commitment to the processes moving forward.