9. NGO Activity

9.1 Key changes and developments in NGO activity in the past five years

Since the end of the war and the setting up of various democratic institutions by the government (such as the IMC, the National Privatisation Commission and various other commissions), civil society has become increasingly engaged in participatory democracy through dialogue. This has led to an increase in advocacy programmes, especially those that deal with freedoms such as free expression and the need to access information.

NGOs have become increasingly interested in issues around supporting media freedom and upholding fundamental human rights and principles. The need for high-quality, relevant information to be made available to the general population via diverse media has also become the centrepiece activity of many NGOs. Many have recognised that, because in previous times the population was given only minimal information, it is now expedient to use the media to sensitise this hitherto uninformed populace.

In response to the vast increase in number of NGOs appearing after the war, the government decided to create the Sierra Leone Association of Non-Governmental Organisations (SLANGO). NGOs are now required to register with the Ministry of Development and Economic Planning. After registering with the Ministry, it is mandatory to register with SLANGO. The fee for this is the equivalent of around US$50 (SLANGO, 2005). SLANGO is a consortium of NGOs, both local and foreign, and its primary role is to ensure co-ordination among its members. SLANGO's purpose is to serve as a unified voice for the NGO community and to interface with civil society organisations around the country. It seeks to build the capacity of civil society organisations (CSOs) for increased participation in governance and to reduce the duplication of their efforts.

Figures for the number of NGOs operating in Sierra Leone are unreliable and information is disparate. One available figure, however, is for the number of international NGOs officially registered to act within Sierra Leone, a number which increased from 47 in 2000 to 189 in 2005 (DACO, 2006).

9.2 Key NGOs involved in media development activities

Some of the main funders of media development activities in post-conflict Sierra Leone have so far been USAID, the UK's DfID, Canada's CIDA and the Open Society Initiative of West Africa (OSIWA). Intermediary organisations which receive funding from the aforementioned agencies include Search for Common Ground (SFCG), the British Council, the Thomson Foundation, Canadian Journalists for Free Expression (CJFE), the Centre for Media, Education and Technology (C-MET) and the Informotrac project of the Radio Netherlands Training Centre (RNTC).

The following are some of the key NGO-driven media development efforts in the country:

Talking Drum Studio Sierra Leone (TDS-SL)

With financial assistance from USAID and implementation driven by the Search for Common Ground (SFCG) NGO, the Talking Drum Studio (TDS-SL) project has done much work in media development. Since 2000, TDS-SL has been principally involved in training, programming, advocacy, institutional capacity-building through the provision of funds, and provision of equipment for the running of community media. TDS-SL has been at the forefront of media initiatives that aim to disarm, demobilise and re-integrate ex-fighters, particularly children. Their public sensitisation and education programmes are designed to promote a culture of peaceful resolution to conflict and are broadcast across the country. A popular TDS-SL programme called *Golden Kids News* is played on 13 radio stations. Children serve as producers, reporters and actors, identifying issues for and about children and advocating on their behalf (SFCG, 2006).

DfID, British Council, Thomson Foundation

The UK's Department for International Development (DfID) has focused much of its media development funding on improving professional media standards through training programmes (run by the British Council and Thomson Foundation, as mentioned earlier in the 3.8 Journalism section). DfID has also sought to support enhanced performance by the state broadcaster SLBS through provision of equipment.

Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), Canadian Journalists for Free Expression (CJFE)

The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), with implementation by the Toronto-based NGO Canadian Journalists for Free Expression (CJFE), has funded establishment of the Media Support Group (MSG), which in turn has supplied a printing press that does work for major newspapers in the country. The project has now been turned over to a local board to manage (CIDA, 2001).

Open Society Initiative of West Africa (OSIWA), International League for Human Rights (ILHR), Centre for Media, Education and Technology (C-MET)

The Open Society Initiative of West Africa (OSIWA) and the International League for Human Rights (ILHR) have channelled funds through a local NGO, the Centre for Media, Education and Technology (C-MET). OSIWA's aim is for media to be utilised to promote democracy and human rights. C-MET, which began operation in Freetown in 2000, has supplied computers, scanners and printers to several media houses and has organised training schemes for media practitioners from both private and state-owned media[8]. As well, the community radio network CORNET receives equipment from OSIWA.

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[8] For more information, see http://www.comminit.com/africa/experiences/pds22004/experiences-2213.html

Initiative for Mobile Training for Community Radio (Informotrac)

The Initiative for Mobile Training for Community Radio (Informotrac), previously mentioned in the 3.8 Journalism section of this report, is a project established by the Radio Netherlands Training Centre (RNTC). Informotrac focuses on training, programming and the supply of basic equipment to community and public media. There are now plans to make Informotrac a local NGO, as RNTC's contribution has come to an end.

Media Law Reform

Organisations involved in media law reform in Sierra Leone include the National Democratic Institute[9], the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA), the Commonwealth Press Union and Article 19, a London freedom of expression and communication rights group[10].

As well, there is the Media for Democracy in Africa programme run by the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ)[11].

New Trends in Training

The Media Foundation for Development and Peace is currently focusing on peace education, while the Guild of Newspaper Editors concentrates on ethical training for members. The Centre for Media, Education and Technology (C-MET) has recently broadened its focus by going into Internet training for editors, as well as supporting research skills on human rights issues.

9.3 Climate of opportunity for media development activities

With so much NGO focus on media development in Sierra Leone over the past five years, some commentators[12] have advanced the argument that this might lead to duplication of projects and wastage. Some NGOs involved in media have had to divert into different fields. A few of the key players have now limited their activities to advocacy, while those with the necessary funding from donors have continued to supply equipment, especially to the electronic media.

Some NGOs, for want of properly defined and well-focused media development projects, have erroneously identified the holding of seminars or workshops for media practitioners as the only way of helping to develop the media. There is certainly more to media development than mere one-day workshops.

Key findings

☐ The main funders of NGO media support work include USAID, DfID, CIDA and OSIWA.

☐ Key implementing bodies are Search for Common Ground, the British Council, the Thomson Foundation, Canadian Journalists for Free Expression (CJFE), the International League for Human Rights (ILHR), the Centre for Media, Education and Technology (C-MET) and the Radio Netherlands Training Centre (RNTC).

☐ Key projects are the Talking Drum Studio, British Council/Thomson Foundation professional training, the Media Support Group printing press project and the Initiative for Mobile Training for Community Radio (Informotrac).

☐ The heavy focus on media development in the NGO community in recent years has led to concerns about potential overlap and wastage of resources.

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9 For more information see http://www.ndi.org/worldwide/cewa/sierraleone/sierraleone.asp

10 For more information see http://www.article19.org/work/regions/africa/index.html

11 For more information see http://www.ifj.org/default.asp?Issue=MFDAfrica&Language=EN

12 I. El-Tayyib Bah, personal communication, April 2006; I. Massaquoi, personal communication, April 2006.