UNDP EXIT STRATEGY
Support to Media Development Project

JANUARY 2019
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1. Introduction
The Support to Media Development Project has been implemented over a 4-year period (2014 - 2018) by UNDP Sierra Leone. To enhance and guarantee national ownership of the programme, this guiding document is proposed as an action plan to phase-out this standalone project support to the Support to Media Development Project over a one-year timeframe (January– December 2019) and integrate programming streams within the core governance cluster to strengthen independent media in Sierra Leone.

2. Background
The media in Sierra Leone has been recognized as a strategic actor in the country’s successful post-conflict transition, peace consolidation and national development.

The UNDP intensified its engagement with the media sector following the departure of the UN peacekeeping mission in 2013. Since then, UNDP has supported the Media Reform Coordinating Group (MRCG), a platform which brings together a number of major media and academic groups advocating for legislative reform and working to strengthen the media sector’s capacities. UNDP has also worked to secure greater autonomy for the Independent Media Commission (IMC), Sierra Leone’s statutory regulatory media entity.

The UNDP Support to Media Development has focused on three key areas:

**Strengthening an enabling legislative and regulatory environment for free, diverse media:** Through several years of advocacy efforts, MRCG with the support of UNDP developed a draft media bill incorporating issues of defamation, revised the Media Code of Practice, advocated the repeal of Part V in the Public Order Act of 1965 (dealing with seditious and criminal libel laws) and drafted a proposed Chapter dealing with Media Freedom which was submitted to the Constitutional Review Committee. —Both the revised Act and Code of Practice are currently under consideration by the government. If seditious and criminal libel laws are repealed and the Constitution amended, Sierra Leone will achieve a vital milestone to ensure real independence of the media and freedom of expression protected.

**Developing stronger professional journalism standards:** Collaborating with nine major educational institutions in Sierra Leone, UNDP through MRCG has helped support the establishment of a national curriculum for professional journalism. This support included the development of a syllabi for over 50 journalism courses, technical support for the accreditation of Mass Communication Department as a Center of Excellence for Media/communication and journalism studies, the creation of opportunities for journalism students to get practical experience and the development of post-graduate programmes certificates, masters and doctoral programmes in journalism. Professional standards and capacity development for journalists have also been strengthened through training and mentoring initiatives, and launching of an Association of Communication, Journalism and Media Educators. The MRCG-supported training on conflict-sensitive election reporting and established the Media Situation Room ahead of the March 2018 elections.

**Promoting democratic dialogue and alternative media systems:** Through the MRCG, UNDP has also been supporting a network of community radio stations that use creative and innovative
programming formats to capture the knowledge and narratives of the rural and urban poor and engage them on local development issues. In subsequent stage, the project, focusing on under serviced areas outside the capital, will set up mentoring and a small grants schemes to encourage increased programming on key development issues in Sierra Leone, including gender, youth, climate change, peacebuilding and democratic governance.


While the country’s media environment continues to be hampered by serious challenges, including worries over media poverty, adherence to all ethical standards, the autonomy of the IMC and continued intimidation of journalists, there have been important achievements. Sierra Leone has seen a notable rise in professional standards for journalists, with accreditation increasingly becoming a standard requirement in the field. Indeed, during the Ebola outbreak in 2014, a stronger media was able to play a key role in broadcasting prevention messages. Similarly, during the 2018 elections, the media supported voter education and non-violence campaigns and published high quality information on the electoral process—with 83% of media institutions complying with IMC guidelines for reporting on elections.

With UNDP’s support, the MRCG has become a recognized platform for strengthening the capacities of media actors, sustaining community radios and coordinating advocacy efforts. Its persistent efforts have been pivotal in putting media reform on the national agenda. Recent elections have brought a change in administration and a growing political will to reform the legal framework around the media. Thanks to this momentum, a cabinet paper has been developed for the repeal of Part V of the Public Order Act of 1965, the draft media bill and Code of Practice have been resubmitted to the Ministry of Information and the Attorney-General’s Office and the proposed chapter on press freedom for the national constitution has already been reviewed and recommendations made.

Economic viability of media outlets and low wages for journalists are still major obstacles to the independence of the country’s media sector. Starting in 2019, expanding its core areas of support, MRCG will introduce a new initiative to develop the financial sustainability of media outlets. Three of the constituent members of the MRCG, the IMC, Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ) and the Sierra Leone Reporters Union (SLRU) will lead initiatives aimed at intensifying advocacy campaigns aimed at ensuring that media institutions conform to the minimum wage stipulated by law and also enforcing the payment of salaries stipulated in their application and operational documents. The SLRU, which is a Union, will work with the Sierra Leone Labour Congress and the Ministry of Labour to secure a bargaining certificate which it can use to advocate the welfare of reporters.

The interventions demonstrate the way in which a free and independent media often requires a multi-pronged approach. Even as Sierra Leone’s context remains quite complex, MRCG’s successes have stemmed from its pursuit of multiple complementary actions in support of the media’s role in promoting democratic governance and peacebuilding. Indeed, these actions each represent the core areas of holistic approach to media engagement, which here include regulatory reform (enabling environment), developing professional journalistic standards (media capacity
development) and encouraging the use of the media for inclusion of democratic dialogue (social actor capacity development).

The project shows that working with national media structures and institutions can be critical for ensuring the sustainability of results. For example, UNDP’s support to the MRCG has been pivotal to the project’s success. Through the MRCG, UNDP has been able to facilitate coordinated action by a diversity of national stakeholders who have now taken ownership of the media reform agenda. As a national media leadership platform, the MRCG and its constituent organizations, will over the phase out period establish robust funding/strategic partnerships beyond the UNDP support. This entails reaching out to and working with the communication department of other UN agencies in Sierra Leone, MDAs, private sector and other development partners in and outside Sierra Leone. The MRCG has already started engaging other donors like the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) to support some components of its work. MRCG is part of the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA), a regional media platform, that is interested in its work. That partnership helps in MRCG’s sustainability. Again, MRCG is now forging partnerships with other local organizations. Moreover, the constituent bodies have discussions on how they can give some sort of support to the MRCG Secretariat from their own resources which they will generate. In short, the constituent organizations have resolved that the MRCG’s platform is crucial for effective coordination of their work and it should continue to operate.

4. Programme Sustainability/consolidation/UNDP Phase-out Plan

A four-year pro-doc has been developed to consolidate the results achieved and to align and focus on media reportage of development programmes, peace consolidation and national cohesion. It is envisaged that emphasis be on facilitating media to report results of development projects, better serve to inform and educate the citizenry on functions and programmes of democratic institutions including the Sierra Leone Parliament by strengthening the Parliamentary Press Gallery, the Outreach Department of the National Electoral Commission, media refocused attention on Local Economic Development and civic educations.

It is intended that media related interventions will primarily lend support to strategic involvement and working relations with professional journalists through the coordination functions of the Media Reform Coordinating Group. This implies that, where feasible media related activities/components of programmes to strengthen Democratic Institutions, Gender and Peace building and national cohesion, access to justice and rule of law could now be aligned and/or outsourced to reputable media players through the established media leadership platform-MRCG and its constituent organizations.

Over and beyond this, UNDP Media Developed project could now adequately interface with and work in close collaboration with the Inclusive Growth Cluster interventions providing enhanced citizens understanding, appreciations and their participation in various interventions.

Additionally, closer working relations with the Strategic Advisory Unit and the Communications Unit could leverage on ways to get the media to provide independent report on development interventions. This can enhance the credibility of UNDP country programme in terms of third-party and independent reporting on development results.
The UN SDGs Media Compact is an additional window that is geared toward sustained commitment from media houses/journalists to more involved in the polarization of the SDGs, foster government commitment and report on progress made in country. The MRCG, through its constituent bodies had hosted preparatory meetings in order to subsequently galvanize the role of media in attaining the SDGs and periodically report on progress in their implementation in Sierra Leone. Other potential areas will include civic education, Accelerator Lab, Strategic Advisory Unit i.e. launching of the National Development Report etc.

To substantiate UNDP phasing out support, the undermentioned issues have been identified, remedial actions proposed and timeframe indicated (see table below)

As recommended for the sustainability of the operations of the MRCG, the staffing should be reviewed considering current realities.

First, there should be an overall Programmes Manager who will oversee the operations of the MRCG. In the absence of the required funds to secure the services of the Programmes Manager, the Chairman/National Coordinator will perform such functions until recruitment is done.

For the new day to day operational structure supported for now by the Chairman/National Coordinator, the following have been recommended for effective and efficient operations that will guarantee the sustainability of MRCG.

1. Admin and Finance Officer
2. Project Officer
3. Research and Project Assistant
4. Finance and Management Assistant
5. Office Assistant

The positions of Finance and Management, and Research and Project Assistant have been suggested to replace the former position of Management Assistant because the MRCG is expanding and therefore requires a Finance Assistant to assist the Admin and Finance Officer on financial issues including budgeting, liquidation and reporting. Research has been added to the work of the Project Assistant because the holder of the position will be required to embark on massive research of organizations working on media development programmes. These two positions are vital for the sustainability of the operations of the MRCG.

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<tr>
<th>ISSUES</th>
<th>PROPOSED ACTION</th>
<th>TIMEFRAME</th>
<th>EXPECTED RESULTS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Continuation of media reform agenda</td>
<td>Align on-going media reforms with current media</td>
<td>February – December</td>
<td>A free and responsible media that will contribute to the democratic processes</td>
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<td>(repealing anti-press laws and adhering to</td>
<td>development priorities</td>
<td>2019</td>
<td>in Sierra Leone</td>
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<td>Problem Statement</td>
<td>Proposed Action</td>
<td>Timeframe</td>
<td>Expected Outcome</td>
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<td>Low/inadequate capacity of media houses and organizations</td>
<td>Develop and implement a framework for capacity building, sustainability and accountability</td>
<td>February – December 2019</td>
<td>A media industry that is run as professional, viable, vibrant, responsive and self-supporting businesses. This will encourage editorial independence and serving the public interest.</td>
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<td>MRCG dependency on UNDP support</td>
<td>Exit strategy developed and mutually agreed</td>
<td>January 2019</td>
<td>Phase-out plan endorsed by MRCG</td>
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<td>Limited visibility of MRCG activities</td>
<td>MRCG website updates, media appearance and discussion of reform agenda, intensify</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>Increased visibility and awareness on MRCG and the media reform agenda.</td>
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<td>Inadequate measurement of and communication of media reform results</td>
<td>Train MRCG secretariat staff on result measurement and communication, collect evidence and disseminate evidence of MRCG media reform processes</td>
<td>March - June</td>
<td>Established Result measurement framework and evidence based reports of Media Reform agenda.</td>
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<td>Inadequate focus on resource mobilization</td>
<td>Consolidate existing partnership and funding arrangement with development partners</td>
<td>January – December 2019</td>
<td>Established funding agreement/commitment with 4 organizations.</td>
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<td>Restructure MRCG SL Secretariat</td>
<td>Realign MRCG media reform programme activities and hire a dedicated Programme Manager</td>
<td>January – June 2019</td>
<td>A lean Secretariat staff coordinating defined media reform programme with established framework for measuring results. The programmes areas are: - Strengthening an enabling legislative and regulatory environment for free, diverse media - Developing stronger professional journalism standards - Promoting democratic dialogue and alternative media systems</td>
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5. Conclusion
While much need to be addressed especially with strengthening the work of the IMC, the Public Service Broadcasting and addressing incidences of un-professional reporting, UNDP Support to Media Development in Sierra Leone is now positioned to maximize returns on investments. Significant impact of the media is envisaged especially with promise of repeal of Part V of the Public Order Act of 1965. Among other things, there is growing recognition of the indispensable role of media in democratic governance and national development of Sierra Leone’s nascent democracy. There is some improvement in media contents and the sector continues to attract professionals and some investors and interested persons establishing media institutions. Sustaining and consolidating the gains already made are crucial to the work of the MRCG.