

*Building an Enduring
National Public Radio Service
for the People of Sierra Leone*

**Developing Radio Partners
February 2006**

Some 75% of Sierra Leoneans live on less than two [US] dollars a day, and one in four of the population is food poor, meaning they cannot afford a basic diet, according to the World Bank. Youth unemployment is rife in the country. Two thirds of the population is illiterate and unemployment hovers at seventy percent, with 2 million jobless young people. These include a large pool of ex-combatants who could take up arms again. High unemployment rates and low expectations of a better future are a major cause of instability in West Africa.

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“This district is politically ostracized. Most of the youth are drop-outs. There’s no opportunity here for an authentic certificate. We are in the mountains. We sometimes don’t see our families for many months. The radio has connected Koinagudu. It is our only way to communicate ... It is our baby.”

Ahmed Sessay, Youth Group Member
and listener to Radio Bintumani, Kabala
Town, Koinadugu Province

Acknowledgments

Many Sierra Leoneans are struggling for food security and other basic needs each day. Bill Siemering and Virginia Prescott were inspired by the dedication, ingenuity and faith of station staff and community members. People told us of their struggles, their aspirations and their loyalty to their people and their home. We are profoundly grateful for those stories and for the chance to participate in founding a network of good information to sustain peace, invite development and encourage an active and participatory democracy in Sierra Leone.

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Project Description

Search for Common Ground hired Developing Radio Partners (DRP) to visit Sierra Leone in November of 2005. During this time, Bill Siemering and Virginia Prescott visited stations and personnel from 11 non-government-operated stations. The goal was to create a plan for developing the community radio sector that includes professional development of the stations, a structure to prompt sustainability and create an independent radio network. DRP talked with affiliated radio and television production personnel from the private and public sector, community members, government and NGO officials, print journalists and media stakeholders to develop a strategy for creating a national network. The recommendations are the result of that trip, specific background research, and the extensive prior experience of the research team.

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Executive Summary

Sierra Leone is most often described for its short comings: at the bottom of the UN Human Development Index, where 75% of Sierra Leoneans live of less than US \$2 a day and as “a tiny corner of West Africa where the wheels have fallen completely off.”^{i,ii} The U.S. State Department classifies it as a fragile state, “where conditions do not provide a sufficient foundation for long-term development.”ⁱⁱⁱ

At the same time, the Developing Radio Partners consultants found an extraordinary group of people committed to using radio to fix what is broken. In spite of working under some of the most dangerous conditions in the world, Search for Common Ground’s Talking Drum Studio (TDS) has contributed significantly to the peace process in Sierra Leone, and to mending its torn social fabric. Local radio stations, with meager resources, have shown how they can give a voice to people to solve their problems, put the people in touch with local government and celebrate their local culture.

This change is only possible with information, though, and in most of Sierra Leone, radio is the most important - in some places the only - source of information. The message is two-fold: look at what these stations have accomplished with little, and imagine at what they could do with more.

Although the gains have been significant, the local stations are very vulnerable:

- Nearly all their funds are used to pay for diesel fuel to run generators, since power grids were destroyed or unreliable.
- They depend upon the good will of volunteers, whose ability to work for less than a bag of rice a month, in some cases, will run out.
- They lack an organization that can raise funds collectively for the sector through group buys of advertising or from NGOs, corporations or the government. There is no organization to be an advocate, to tell their story to decisions makers and donors.
- There is no organization to coordinate their training needs, to provide on-going mentoring.
- Although local voices are heard in communities outside the capital, they are not heard in Freetown, and are excluded from a national conversation. All information radiates out from Freetown; it doesn’t flow from up-country to the capital.
- There is no way to share information among stations or to receive independent news and development information that would be relevant to up-country

communities. There is no on-going live network for timely dissemination of news.

Talking Drum Studio's Frances Fortune and Ambrose James led the development of local radio and through its programming has proven the effectiveness of radio to bring about change. For example, in Kabala, TDS programs are credited with increasing the number of girls in school from 40% to 60%. From citizens who would wave and call out the names of favorite TDS programs as we drove through the country to stakeholders with whom we met, TDS is held in the highest regard for its integrity and high quality of programming.

Along with other builders, including Andrew Kromah, a private station owner, engineer, and radio leader, the future of community radio development will be built upon the solid foundation laid over the last five years by Talking Drum Studio.

Enabling Environment

The Independent Media Commission (IMC) that awards licenses to radio stations is supportive of local radio, according to IMC's director, Bernadette Cole. "The Independent Radio Network should be strengthened," she said. There is movement in Sierra Leone for media reform, including the repeal of harsh libel laws and the Public Order Act (commonly known as the "secrets" act) that limits the access to government information. At the same time, there is a movement to transform the State Broadcasting of Sierra Leone to a public service.

Strengthening local stations fits well with other national goals for decentralization and accountability at the local level, fostered by the National Accountability Group and others. There is no government policy that restricts the growth of local radio and the stations already provide a constructive, learning experience for youth, boost participation among women and raise other national concerns, like accountability of local government.

A Vision for the Future

The plan we propose is based upon our meetings with station managers, youth and women's groups outside of Freetown, meetings with government and NGO stakeholders, and extensive conversations with the principle leaders of this project. Therefore, while we are appreciative of the opportunity to play a role in developing this plan and to work with so many dedicated people, **in the end it is the product of Sierra Leoneans.** We have

worked with their ideas to bring the various perspectives and organizations into an alignment that will serve the needs that have been identified.

We are mindful of the intention of Talking Drum Studio to establish itself as a local NGO and have a different relationship to Search for Common Ground. Because this is a complex institutional change it is appropriately managed within the SFCG organization as to how and when this occurs.

Because the time for this organizational transition is unsure, and because it will be valuable to maintain momentum for the project and give stations some experience with the network, we propose an Interim Phase I that will bring the present organizations together to create a network news service. Talking Drum Studio will be the administrative center of this interim phase, coordinating the various partners and fiscal accountability.

Each of the players, with their respective strengths, can create an orchestra when brought together. The time appears right to bring the separate organizations together to achieve a new level of service for the country, to benefit of all.

We propose the creation of Talking Drum Radio (TDR),^{iv} a new Sierra Leonean NGO that will provide a unified governance structure that will result in the following building blocks for an enduring public radio service:

- 1. Talking Drum Radio (TDR)**

A new Sierra Leonean NGO that will provide unified governance and coordination for the development of the sector.

- 2. Establish Professional Standards of Performance for Stations**

Working with stations, Developing Radio Partners will develop criteria for a Healthy Station in Sierra Leone. Training, mentoring, and evaluation programs will be developed and implemented to ensure they meet the criteria and certificates will be awarded. Stations will practice what they expect of local government: transparency and accountability.

- 3. Establish a Network of Independent Local Radio Stations**

Local stations will produce news and features that will be fed to a central production hub where they will be produced into news and information programs distributed nationally. As a result, for the first time, there can be a national conversation, for the voices from up-country to be heard in

Freetown. Properly funded, from a variety of sources, the news and information programs will be professional and free from outside influence, fostering a culture of professional journalism.

4. Talking Drum Studio Productions

The core of development programming will continue to be produced by TDS and distributed to all stations. Stations up-country will receive programs on the live network rather than having TDS carry cassettes to stations. The most popular radio plays, current affairs programs and *Paliament Bol At* will all continue, as will TDS's leadership of development programming.

5. Solar Com Engineering Services

Solar Com will provide contracted engineering services for the sector, train technicians at stations to maintain equipment and maintain an inventory of spare parts and back equipment.

6. Create Solar Powered Radio Station

Because most stations need to use diesel powered generators for electricity, Solar Com, working with Developing Radio Partners will work with other partners to create a model solar powered station that can be replicated throughout Sierra Leone and other countries. This will enable stations to extend their hours on air and pay staff and volunteers.

By bringing all facets of local radio (professional development, income generation, network and technical) together under a single governance and coordination structure, the sector can grow and be sustained over time. The citizens, who have all been touched by the horrors of the long years of violence, will have invaluable tools to build a better future.

Taken as a whole, this plan will directly address the underlying causes of the civil conflict and provide a foundation for long-term development.

The Current Environment: Obstacles and Opportunities

Fifteen years after the start of a bloody civil war, Sierra Leone is healing. The Government of Sierra Leone (GoSL) is responding to international pressure – and contingent aid dollars – by collaborating with NGOs and citizens to replace a violent legacy with calls for forgiveness among citizens and transparency in government. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and special courts have helped Sierra

Leoneans confront the prolonged, traumatic war in a frank manner. Democratic presidential elections were held in 2002 and the government is partnering with other governments and NGOs to build capacity and efficacy. The international buzzwords of “accountability” and “transparency” headline new policy initiatives and funding proposals. Programs like the World Bank’s Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) and National Commission for Social Action (NaCSA) are working with the state to improve living conditions and schools for the poor. As is ENCISS (Enhancing the Interaction and Interface between Civil Society and the State to improve poor people’s lives), a program designed by consulting partners DIFID, Search for Common Ground, Commonwealth Policy Study Unit, Care UK and others that works to engage civil society in improving conditions and services for ordinary citizens.

Underscoring these efforts is the federal decentralization process, outlined by the 2004 Local Government Act. This policy framework outlines procedures for transparency, participation and accountability in governance. For the first time, federal and district assemblies must publicly declare assets and post budget data. Decentralization pushes decision-making capacity and legislative and judiciary process to local councils and regional power centers where citizens can participate. For the first time in modern history, official power is being exercised beyond the borders of the nation’s capital, Freetown. Even remote villagers should now have a voice. The challenge is ensuring that the government’s corrupt practices don’t trickle down to the local platform. The Anti-Corruption Commission is a cabinet-level entity attempting to create transparency at the policy level. The Commission reports directly to President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah. Social accountability is being promoted by emerging nonprofits on the local level too. The National Accountability Group (NAG) and the Center for Good Governance work with pastors, imams and teachers to educate the public in the social and economic costs of corruption.

The Mixed Success of Reform

Unfortunately, the GoSL’s track record is not as impressive as its new programs. Large-scale initiatives to move Sierra Leone forward represent a new political, social, and economic ideal. However, rampant corruption, ethnic tension, economic insecurity, crumbling infrastructure, and the bitter legacy of a civil war are closer to reality for most Sierra Leoneans. Twenty years of extremely poor governance and gross economic mismanagement preceded the civil war; the World Bank reports that “weak governance and widespread corruption were important contributing factors to the civil conflict in Sierra Leone.”^v A decade of economic and social breakdown since then has made life even more difficult for the average citizen. The war resulted in a cumulative decline of

almost 50% in GDP per capita.^{vi} Access to basic human rights such as education, healthcare and equal protection under the law is further strained for most of the population because hospitals, schools and infrastructure were destroyed. The conflict killed some 20,000 people. An estimated 50-80% of the population was displaced. Even now, more than 67,000 are still counted as refugees and an estimated 10,000 amputees are scattered throughout the country in homes or rehabilitation camps, quietly paying the cost of brutality.^{vii,viii}

Sierra Leone is rated among the ten worst countries in the world in terms of income disparity and life expectancy and has been consistently ranked as one of the most corrupt.^{ix} Many of the country's 5.2 million people struggle daily for food security and other basic needs in a country that hovers near the bottom of United Nations Development annual rating of quality-of-life indicators.^x Electrical power penetration is low and severely handicapped. Almost all power is supplied by generators run on petrol, leaving homes and businesses without those means literally in the dark. The country is categorized by the United States Government as a fragile state, "where conditions do not provide a sufficient foundation for long-term development."^{xi}

An Uneasy Peace

"We buried the hatchet, but we marked the spot."

Jusa Alpha, District Counselor, Ward 3, Kailahun District

There is still lingering anxiety about keeping the peace. The Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission cautioned that continued poverty and unemployment leave the population susceptible to discontent. People continue to feel disenfranchised from Freetown and the government is hindered in meeting their needs because very little communication flows from the countryside back to the capital. Warning that "many of the dire conditions that gave rise to the conflict in 1991 remain in 2004," the TRC concluded that the best solution for peace was for citizens to come together and forgive their compatriots and outlined broad amnesty provisions for combatants on all sides.^{xii} Unfortunately, this solution is not rooted in Sierra Leone's reality; "We can forgive, but we cannot forget," came the response from dozens of survivors we met.

In order to reintegrate former combatants into society, many of them received technical skills training, education, and counseling. Some received motorcycles and bicycles in exchange for weapons in the disarmament and reintegration process. Most bike riders in "associations" (semi-organized unions of motorcycle livery drivers) are assumed to be former combatants, predominantly from the Revolutionary United Front (or RUF).^{xiii}

Because of this perception (accurate or not), bike riders are mistrusted and resented within communities for their apparent advantages.

Revenge is the first suspected motive for murders and the flashpoint for violence is quick. Mob riots and rampages erupted in three major cities in November, 2005 alone. In Bo, the violence was political. When breakaway candidate and Peoples Movement for Democratic Change founder Charles Margai showed up for a ceremony attended by the vice president, a crowd swelled to protest Margai's subsequent detention by police. In Kenema, police confrontation with rioting "bike riders" left four dead. Another mob destroyed vehicles and the World Vision offices in Kono, within hours of a report that the NGO's vehicle struck and killed a bike rider.

Sierra Leone's Current Media Landscape

In order to help the country's transition toward a lasting peace, the government of Sierra Leone (GoSL) has declared the decentralization and poverty reduction campaigns as its major priorities. Yet when polled, media practitioners said that public awareness campaigns for these frameworks were ineffective. The public was skeptical at best and suspicious at worst as to what those programs meant for them.^{xiv} Progress is being monitored by the British High Commission, USAID and other international organizations. These bodies, along with the World Bank, are also pressing forward with the goal of a professional, independent media to keep governance in check.^{xv} USAID is looking to develop more investigative reporting in particular. **The time is ripe. Government needs a credible voice to put forward its message; Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and NGOs need a public forum for their work; and, above all, citizens need to arm themselves with good information on public polices, programs, services and expenditures.**

For new social and governmental systems to gain full cooperation from all Sierra Leoneans, information and education systems must be transformed to stimulate public debate. The National Accountability Group (NAG) director Zainab Bangura told DRP that while work is being done to hold public officials to task, the traditional tribal social structures impede accountability as the paramount chiefs are elected for life and not accountable to anyone. Devolution of power requires a concerted effort. The top-down, elite-dominated government sector must also be re-tooled to reflect the needs and opinions of citizens. The flow of resources must shift to move along the bottom of the economic scale where the vast numbers of Sierra Leone's people live.

The success of the “new” Sierra Leone requires a movement away from hierarchical governance dominated by an elite power structure toward a more inclusive and representative model that can be monitored by the public. The need, as US Ambassador Thomas N. Hull put it, is for “a credible, independent media [that serves as] a watchdog of democracy and [is] vital to the country’s recovery.”^{xvi} Press releases, meetings, government-controlled broadcasts, and print media have been the traditional means for government- to-community engagement. Those methods have been exposed as ineffective among the largely illiterate, though highly skeptical population.^{xvii}

True penetration for development and government programs requires an effective, balanced media. The current media landscape is limited by access, education and tradition. Presently there is no legitimate means of critiquing government policies, legislation or spending without the danger of being jailed. This lack of reliable and balanced information preceded the civil war, so it is not surprising that the media continues to struggle in the face of few media reforms. Rosalind Shaw, an anthropologist based at Tufts University in the U.S. went so far as to say that poor communications exacerbated ethnic and language divisions that she argues were at the heart of the war.^{xviii} During the conflict, power and control shifted quickly between political, military and mercenary groups. A lack of clarity on exactly what the Rebel Forces stood for, or what the government would or could do in defense, left a confused and divided public. Many people hid in “the bush” with little contact with others for long periods of time. Until 1998, only government news, and some signals from neighboring Guinea and Liberia, could reach the countryside. Poor roads and transport infrastructure have historically led to actual and perceived isolation among communities far from Freetown. The terrain is mountainous, with millions of acres of jungle and miles of rivers and bush separating the “Up-Country” districts from the source of almost all newspapers and broadcast in the capital.

Between 1991 and 2002, battling forces gained and lost territory, troops and control. During our interviews and meetings, several people complained about not knowing what was going on in the countryside or of who was in power in Freetown at any given time. During the decade of war in Sierra Leone, radio was used strategically by all parties involved in the conflict, including civilians. Like the diamond mines, control of broadcast shifted when captured by one force or another, enabling panic to spread quickly. Rumors of infiltrations became warnings, or were dismissed as unreliable. Real reporting was rare, as were reporters. International news organizations increasingly pulled out after the Revolutionary United Front or RUF, captured Freetown in May of 1997. During the height of the war, Sierra Leone was the most dangerous country in

Africa for journalists. Local reporters were threatened, attacked, and even killed by RUF soldiers. The same reporters faced detention and harassment from the government.^{xix}

The power struggle cycled through five major national entities: the ruling/exiled government; the National Provisional Ruling Council or NPRC, which toppled the government; the Revolutionary United Front, also called the RUF or the “Rebels”; the Kamajors warriors, a mostly Mende and animist fighting force; and a military regime called the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council, or AFRC, which joined with the RUF for strategic battles. On two occasions, the exiled government engaged mercenary forces, notably “Executive Outcomes,” to battle the Rebels.^{xx} International forces from the Economic Community Union of West African States armed monitoring group (ECOMOG) sometimes defeated the RUF/AFRC attacks, but were accused of being as brutal to civilians as the Rebel forces. British Paratroopers were brought in at one point. Initially, the UN sent 6000 troops to Sierra Leone. Eventually that number became 17,000 troops, the largest UN troop deployment ever. The deployment took up what turned out to be a seven years residency as the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL), and remained in the country until the end of 2005. The power struggles left a terrified and confused population. “We had no idea who to trust,” Cecilia Tokowa said at a meeting with the Women’s Forum in Bo.

Enabling Post-War Media

One of few positive outcomes of the war is the emergence of new information sources for the public. Newspapers have flourished, although their value is called into question, as detailed below. Radio stations have multiplied across the nation and some television service has been established in the provincial areas. UNAMSIL launched a radio station that broadcasts by repeaters to two-thirds of the country (though not penetrating Bo or Koidu, and some areas in the North and East). Non-state controlled radio stations have multiplied with support of international NGOs and USAID. Before 2001 there were two licensed stations; now there are twenty five. Media consumers are looking for more and better awareness after the bitter conflict and they are a dubious audience. To enhance journalism in the country, the University of Sierra Leone, Fourah Bay College started a very popular degree course in Journalism in 2003.^{xxi} One privately owned TV station launched in 2005.

The government has also played a role in the development of the media sector since the war, appointing an Independent Media Commission (IMC) in 2001 to oversee print and broadcast outlets operating in Sierra Leone. The IMC grants licenses for newspapers, radio and television; monitors government-media relations; enforces a code of rules and

conduct; and hears civil complaints against journalists and news outlets. The Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ) recommends members for the 11- member IMC; members are appointed by the President. Currently, Bernadette Cole serves as head of the IMC. A journalist herself, Ms Cole was a prime mover in setting up a radio station based at Fourah Bay College, where she heads the mass communication department. Ms. Cole says that she supports the growth of independent media and encourages media organizations must maintain independence from partisan politics and look for support for long-term sustainability. Tellingly, the IMC fees for licenses are within reason: 730,000 Sierra Leone leones (SSL) (or US \$310) for a 100 watt station, 754,000 leones (US \$320) for a 1,000 watt station.

Despite these advances, objective, reliable information is severely encumbered by the state, and has been for decades. Although increasing public awareness may help overturn outdated 1965 libel laws and restrictions on civil servants talking to the press, these laws still restrict media freedom.^{xxii} The 1965 Public Order Act was legislated in the colonial era to limit press access to government information and civil servants. The laws were not repealed after independence, and since then have helped successive governments maintain tight reign over what gets published in print and broadcast media. Under a controversial criminal defamation law, which has repeatedly been condemned by national and international press freedom groups, the publication, distribution or possession of content likely to provoke ‘public dissatisfaction’ with the president or with other officials is punishable by up to seven years in prison for the offenders and the closure of their news media. The law allows prosecution to extend beyond the journalist to the publisher, printer, street vendor and even readers. Journalist and *For di People* publisher Paul Kamara was jailed under this law in October, 2004. He was released in December, 2005 with international attention behind his cause.^{xxiii} Since the war ended, the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ) has played an active role in rallying international advocacy groups like Reporters Without Borders (RSF) to the cause of reforming the laws and for improving the welfare and legal protection of journalists.

As a result of this pressure, there is some movement toward press freedom. Reporters Without Borders reported in December that that President Kabbah wrote to the IMC with a call for the defamation law to be amended. RSF quoted Justice Minister and attorney-general Frederick Carew, previously one of the laws leading advocates, as saying “My office is open. Like the president, I am ready to cooperate with journalists to promote press freedom.”^{xxiv}

The Government Channels

Buttressed by the criminal defamation restrictions, the state-owned broadcast system (or SLBS) dominated radio and television airwaves for almost four decades, from 1960-1996. SLBS continues to operate one television station and a national radio service that can be picked up from almost anywhere in the country, with gaps in some of the Eastern region and the commercial center, Mile-91. State radio and TV programming upholds the ruling party's point-of-view and tracks the activities of the President and his cabinet. The SLBS does not cover conventions of the opposition party, for example. Salaries are poor, paying about SLL 160,000 (US \$68.00) per month. Journalists often leave to pursue other jobs. One radio manager told us that he quit SLBS because journalists "can't practice journalism there."

The government is following an IMC recommendation that the SLBS incorporate itself separate from the government. SLBS is reportedly working towards a transition to public service broadcasting that is independent from government control. Rev. Kashor Wellington, an ex-pat from the private sector was named SLBS's new director in October 2005. Likewise, SLENA (the Sierra Leone News Agency), which has been the official news broker for government ministry press releases, has drawn up a strategy to shift into a subscriber-supported news agency, like the AP or Reuters model used internationally. The results of those changes are not yet clear, and according to Bernadette Cole, not perceptible. She said that SLBS "continues in the old style, "and she told Rev. Wellington that SLBS is "even more government sounding than before."^{xxv}

SLBS state television has one kilowatt of terrestrial penetration in the country, yet reaches limited areas, primarily in Freetown, the Port Loko district and Bo. Less than 20% of the people in Sierra Leone have television; this percentage is far less in the provinces. Broadcast has been inconsistent over the past 30 years, but revived in 1996 to 7 hours on weekdays and 13 hours on weekends. Local, Freetown-based programming makes up 80% of the schedule. The UNDP co-produces a program on SLBS, as does the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Test broadcasts began on SLBS's new digital station in Kenema in November, 2005.

At a meeting with media stakeholders in Freetown, information officers working with GoSL from a variety of commissions, ministries and parastatal organizations agreed that there was no clearly understood media dissemination policy, and that the quality and restrictions on information varied wildly from one ministry or office to the next. They universally identified poor journalism and lack of funding for media dissemination strategies as major challenges.^{xxvi} They agreed that the revenues drive current media concerns.

Private Television Stations & the Reach of Television

The private station (ABC-TV) was also established in 2005, with equipment and capital investment from a former Voice of America employee. ABC covers the Western area of the country, and reaches into parts of Port Loko and Kambia districts. ABC launched with two daily news broadcasts and a mix of about 30% local to 70% international programs. Because the national grid is unreliable, both TV stations use external power sources. SLBS management cited the cost of petrol as a major concern. High-end hotels and some government offices take CNN International, BBC and re-runs of American films and TV series off of satellite. Overall, access to information via television remains limited to a few in Sierra Leone.

The Limits of Print: Newspaper Journalism in Sierra Leone

Print journalism is of inconsistent quality and poor penetration in Sierra Leone. Almost 70% of the population is illiterate. Even among readers, few choose to pay for papers. The head of the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists, or SLAJ, estimates that 16-20% of the potential market buys newspapers. On average, eight people share one newspaper in Freetown. Only 440 actual editions of newspapers circulate beyond the capital. That means that 62% of the country's 5.2 million people share 440 copies of newspapers.^{xxvii} Although several newspapers have set up websites – or have content deals to repurpose their stories on the Internet - Internet penetration is so limited that content remains inaccessible to all but a select few.

The print business is driven by street vendors, who buy papers from news agents. The vendors sell based on the consumer appeal of headlines. Rumors often show up as top-of-the-fold headlines. Stories vary wildly from paper to paper, seemingly based more on availability and commercial value rather than on investigative rigor and veracity. A reader must read 8-10 papers to get a full picture of the current news. The line between journalism and advertising is blurred by “advertorials.” This copy, paid for by government, interest groups and NGO sources, is not identified as such and appears as editorial content. Like broadcast journalists, print reporter salaries are low. Most newspapers employ people without experience, fresh from school. Reporters earn about 60,000 SLL (US \$25) a month. At such low pay, they're more vulnerable to bribery, especially in a country where the passing of the “brown envelope” is standard operating procedure.

Veteran American journalist Merle Rubine worked with student and professional journalists in Freetown as a Knight Fellow for nine months from 2004-2005. She

summed the quality of newspapers up as full of “grammatical mistakes, factual errors, sensationalism and general sloppiness in the handling of information and quotes.”^{xxviii} She also reported that people on the street are wise to the inaccuracies. “*Nar so so lie then dae write*, she was told. That’s Krio for “all they write is a pack of lies.”

Connection after Conflict: The Role of Radio

For the past 30 years we only heard news from the capital. Now we know what we are doing right here.

*Sallieu Mangeh Koroma
Radio Tombo*

In a country of extreme poverty, limited electricity and only 31% literacy, radio is the preferred channel for information and communication. **The radio sector in Sierra Leone has boomed since the war.** During the 1990s, there were two non-state run radio stations. Now there are twenty-five, with at least two more under construction. **Radio is the most widespread and most used media channel; seventy-percent of the population identified radio as their premier source for information.**^{xxix} Radio is relatively cheap, far-reaching, and can be quickly produced. It is an intimate medium, connecting human voice to public ears and extending the traditional social networking and word of mouth communication predominant in Sierra Leone. When properly motivated and managed, radio creates linkages in communities that can help a post-conflict population make the transition from obedient subjects to active citizens. Because of this, radio is in demand; people are hungry for information in their post-conflict state. They want to know what their government is thinking and doing. They are unwilling to be thrown back into the confusion and deprivation of the war and, yet, **building a new Sierra Leone requires connection and access.**

Radio stations operate an average of 11 hours per day. Up-country stations are on the air for less time. All the stations we visited rely on generators for their power. The non-state stations generally interrupt broadcast for a few hours in the afternoon to give the generators a rest. Operating costs are the number one challenge identified by stations. At this writing, none of the community stations we visited could get by without aid from foreign donors. Most rely on programming fees paid by the government and NGOs to cover salaries and costs. Small fees paid by the listening community for on-air announcements of births, deaths and events make up the remainder of station income. Almost all of the broadcast studios we visited were located on hill-top areas at an inconvenient distance from city and town centers, making it difficult for staff and guests

to get to the stations. Only Radio Tombo is located on a main thoroughfare. It would be good if the studios could be located closer to the town center with a link from the studios to the transmitter on the hill to facilitate community engagement and make access easier. In many places, no one on staff makes a living wage. For example, at Radio Bintumani in Kabala Town, Koinadugu District, there is a small salaried management team. The staff members there make just SLL 60,000 per month (about US \$25). A sack of rice costs SLL 64,000 (US \$27). Station staff universally stated that they cannot survive on such stipends.

So why do they keep doing it? Sallieu Mangeh Koroma, manager of Radio Tombo in the fishing village of Tombo says that he works for almost nothing because he loves his home. It is peaceful and people care about each other there. At 30-years-old, he lives with his mother and she insists that he would be a coward to quit and take a better paying job because his work is essential to the community. Radio Tombo regularly invites district councilors, local chiefs and program implementers to discuss their programs on the air. When massive trolling ships came into the waters where local fishermen in small boats make their living, it was Radio Tombo that called the Navy representatives to talk about the issue on-air. Radio Tombo rallied, and the tight-knit community was able to hear as the officials' feet were held to the fire.

Fanta M Konte continues to work at Radio Bintumani because its programs help women. Kabala town is socked in remote cattle grazing lands in the Wara Wara Mountains of the North. It is the poorest town in the poorest district in the country. Women can still be publicly flogged there, but they are beginning to know their rights. Fifteen minutes a week is set aside for what translates to "The Headscarf," a women's issues program. But women's rights and child welfare are addressed on other programs, too. Each week, the same issue is taken up across an afternoon block of five local language programs – one language/ethnic focus each weekday. It might be early marriage one week, HIV/AIDS the next. Now women know that they can go to the Family Support Unit of the local police if they are beaten. Now, women are allowed to take a part in public meetings; they are also permitted to attend meetings of the women's forum, or other gender-based issues groups. Husbands are less suspicious and forbidding of these activities since they hear calls to meetings on the air. Radio Bintumani also advocates for the right of girls to be educated. Whereas boys dominated classrooms a few years ago, 60% of the students are now "de gal child." The Koinadugu district is large, with border towns more than 110 miles away on bad roads. Radio Bintumani unites them, as Fanta told us, "Now people can hear their own child speaking their own language. The people think that they are part of the radio."

Encouraging civil dialogue in a country where robust political dialogue is only just beginning is an important step. Democracy in Sierra Leone is young. So is radio. There is huge potential for participatory democracy to flourish alongside a medium that educates and encourages a society to know and exercise its rights. True self-governance comes with the practice of discourse and informed debate that radio permits. Sierra Leoneans are finding ways to have that dialogue. Call-in programs proliferate across the radio dial. Cellular phone technology in major towns has allowed for real-time feedback and direct listener interaction. Although most call-in discussions are not well managed (calls are not screened and few hosts are sufficiently trained to steer conversations in a productive direction), still, the conversations inculcate the public exchange of ideas into the population, exposing the variety of opinions and surfacing ideas. These programs also show people the limits of their own tolerance, and sometimes test the limits of the government.

The population has suffered under a history of government repression and the unpredictable power swings of civil war. Since the war, stations and journalists are learning the test the limits as they go. Still, they are fearful of provoking the government and local power bases when reporting on topics that concern public spending and security. As noted above, the federal government has arrested and jailed journalists. Other radio professionals are harassed by police, village and paramount chiefs and local council members for their reporting. Station managers in Freetown, Kailahun, and Bo all reported that officials monitor their broadcasts and sometimes demand scripts, tapes and sources for stories as to prove veracity.

~~—Should we cut part of this out—or move to appendix?— This could go in appendix~~

Stations have learned to be creative in developing formats and characters to engage the citizenry and, sometimes, these ~~Sometimes these~~ tools work in evading trouble for stations; however, in the case of *Dr. Owl*, authorities crack down hard. Dr. Owl (formerly Mr. Owl, played by Kelvin Newstead) is the title character on one of KISS-FM's most popular programs. In September, 2005, Dr. Owl criticized the convention just held by the ruling Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) in the northern city of Makeni. The SLPP chose Vice-President Solomon Berewa as its candidate for the 2007 presidential election without representation from voters. Dr Owl called it a "comBENTion," which enraged Bo District chief Rashid Kamanda Bongay. Chief Bongay ordered Newstead banished, and when he was ignored, he took the case to court. The court ordered a fine paid to local authorities and closed the station. The case was finally settled when Newstead had to beg for forgiveness and prostrate himself before Bongay, along with a gift of 100,000 leones (US \$42).^{xxx} Still, KISS received an eviction

notice for its studio, located next to a nearly-abandoned SLBS radio facility on a hilltop in Bo.

Local councils and police are also playing a role on the radio. Radio Bintumani features a weekly program for members of the police to talk about their work. Local councils also have regular time slots on Radio Moa. A youth radio program in Makeni's Radio Mankneh found that local councilors had reported paying exorbitant prices for office furnishings. They called the comptroller to task on the air. One of the most powerful examples of radio's role in keeping peace was in response to riots there in early November, 2005. Eastern Radio in Kenema Town worked with Search for Common Ground conflict resolution methodology to effectively manage discussions between conflicting sides with positive results [see Annex 1].

Powerful local and international organizations influence the independence of stations, too. SLBS government radio expanded its six-station infrastructure with equipment and vehicles paid for by the British government program, DFID. Three religious stations rely on support, and even governance, from organizations outside Sierra Leone. UNAMSIL Radio Station Manager and executive Producer Sheila Dallas said the station was set up to mitigate bad publicity about the UN and the mistrust of the strangers coming in to establish peace in the country. The UNDP has given the station a mandate, in her words, "to assist the people of SL with correct information until 2007." At this writing, the UNDP will work with Hironnelle, a Swiss NGO, to create a national network that survives the UN mission. Plan International, Care, World Vision, UNICEF, the Network Movement for Justice and Development, Search for Common Ground, and others support stations with direct operational or pay-for-program support.

Within Sierra Leone, the airwaves, like most everything, are for sale. One powerful PR consultant in Freetown warned that, like print, radio stations lose editorial independence when they carry sponsored programs. An advertiser could influence editorial policy by threatening to cut their advertising buys.

Growing Independent Radio – Key Players

Clearly, local radio stations have made an impact on Sierra Leone's social and political landscape, but there is much more work to be done to support lasting peace and economic development. With very few resources, local stations have managed to strengthen community connections and increase participation in the political process. They are the sole source of information and entertainment in some parts of the country. Local populations have come to depend on the fine work that they do every day. In order to

grow with the nation, local radios must grow to the next level, in partnership with those who have supported their success thus far.

Search for Common Ground/Talking Drum Studio Sierra Leone

Search for Common Ground (SFCG) is a leader in conflict resolution programs across the globe, and a leader in Sierra Leone's media landscape. The NGO works to transform the way the world deals with conflict: away from adversarial approaches, toward cooperative solutions. The broad reach of the organization in conflict and post-conflict zones is strengthened by its work in locally-based media. In Sierra Leone and Liberia, SFCG's Talking Drum Studio integrates conflict resolution methodology into public affairs, entertainment and practical education programs. Programs focus on issues of concern to populations usually ignored in the political process: women, children, refugees and rural people.

Search for Common Ground is not a media company, but an international NGO that has effectively used media as a part of its practical "toolkit." The organization enjoys a solid reputation among donors and is respected within Sierra Leone for getting things done. With trained staff at production nodes and offices throughout the country, SFCG also has proven its organizational capacity to manage and administer high-level donations and long-term projects from sponsors such as USAID, the European Union, and the British, Dutch, Swedish and Swiss governments. In conversations throughout the trip, DRP learned that SFCG is known for its reliability, performance and reality-based cost structure. SFCG is also regarded as an honest broker in a country where corruption is found at almost every level.

Search for Common Ground does not own or operate radio stations. Its methodology is to activate local populations in media production and consumption. In Sierra Leone, SFCG does this through its Talking Drum Studio (TDS) radio production arm. SFCG launched the Talking Drum Studio with a targeted outreach strategy and production of radio programs, made accessible in the national Krio dialect and other local languages. TDS allows SFCG to play an active role in building and equipping stations, and a close role in transferring the conflict resolution skills required for stations to complete their peace and development focused missions. TDS doesn't produce "straight" news, but uses radio drama and characters to surface issues and interact with listeners. In fact, it would be a liability for SFCG to be perceived by national or local government authorities as advocating for one position or another. In a political climate as restrictive as that of Sierra Leone, simply giving the opposition party airtime could lead to harassment or trouble. SFCG depends on TDS-produced programming to communicate its mission.

On the surface, these programs are a significant part of the lives of citizens. On a deeper level, programs reinforce the SFCG process for resolving societal conflicts and educating a population not far from the brink of relapsing into war. SFCG maintains that many of the root causes of the war still have not been addressed by the government and society of Sierra Leone. So, SFCG radio programs focus on poor governance, corruption, unequal distribution of wealth and a youthful population languishing in unemployment.

According to a 2004 evaluation of Search for Common Ground Sierra Leone's media work, the method of putting information in a format that is entertaining, independent, and free from political influence gets results. The *Key Findings* from that evaluation document real gains in terms of child welfare and access to education. Additionally, the exposure of "small-scale corrupt practices" has occurred in direct correlation to TDS programs; "SFCG has managed to address issues of corruption while including village and paramount chiefs in areas in which it works, while managing indirectly and diplomatically to hold them accountable."^{xxxix, xxxii}

Currently, SFCG pays stations to make sure programs, such as "Atunda Ayenda," and Common Ground News Service, get on the air. Terms are outlined in Memoranda of Understanding. These MOUs are set up with 8 stations in the country. Program airtime and frequency is monitored and reported by designated, anonymous listeners within the respective listening community. Support for the stations comes from SFCG under the name of TDS. TDS produces programs with a staff of actors, producers and reporters paid under the umbrella of SFCG. More than a dozen programs are produced and copied onto cassette for distribution from production hubs in key parts of the country each week. TDS then distributes the programs on cassette to 20 stations across the nation, using its own vehicles, petrol and drivers to make sure that stations have programs to air on a weekly basis. TDS underwrites the airing of its own programs with direct financial support. There are only two stations we talked with which do not regularly air TDS programs.^{xxxiii}

In addition to producing content for stations, SFCG has a mentoring relationship with several independent, community-based stations. TDS-affiliated radio stations are the only source of regular national programming independent from government or international political influence. Search for Common Ground has been committed to the slow business of capacity building in these small, under-funded operations. SFCG's experience in community development and institution building has been mobilized to help stations plant themselves in community processes.

The community-based stations are in need of equipment and transportation on the one hand, but they also require the organizational and management skills with which to engage communities in a meaningful way and to undertake long-term issues of sustainability in a weak market economy and a precarious political climate. Talking Drum Studio staff trains journalists in the ethics and practices of journalism in a country that has been dominated by poor print and state-owned broadcast outlets for 40 years. TDS provides intensive, three-month training programs for production and, to a limited degree, management. It supports station start-ups in configuring boards, and establishing by-laws and rules of conduct. TDS provides some stipends for station personnel; technical support, and trains staff in issues of governance.

Media Foundation for Peace and Development (MFPD)

Andrew Kromah is another key player in the development of local radio, in large part because of his leadership and vision in multiple fields. He is the private station owner of KISS-FM in Bo and SKKY-FM in Freetown both of which played groundbreaking programming for peacemaking, voter education and anti-corruption reporting. As an engineer, he has installed the equipment and towers at most of the local radio stations and is called to do repairs when equipment breaks down. **Working collaboratively with TDS, the created the Independent Radio Network to provide election coverage, and he's the coordinator of IRN.**

In addition he created the Media Foundation for Peace and Development (MFPD) in 2000 and has history and credibility with Western donors from to Knight Foundation to the National Endowment for Democracy. The MFPD presently serves as a news production center and the development arm for funding projects on KISS and SKYY-FM, two private, commercial radio stations owed by Andrew Kromah. It was Andrew's vision for creating an independent national public network in Sierra Leone (loosely based on the National Public Radio network in the United States) that became a motivating factor for funding DRP's engagement and this report.

The MFPD is registered as a local NGO in Freetown with a mission to “develop independent media in Sierra Leone for peace, development and democracy”and to “support for sustainable community radio listening, governance and technical support to public radio station pluralism.” Some other projects MFPD seeks funding for include setting up an Independent National Public Radio; investment in radio for youth and children; capacity-building for KISS 104 FM in Bo and SKYY Radio in Freetown; and an audience empowerment project which includes setting up community resource centers and solar-powered batteries and chargers to make radio listening less expensive to the

average citizen. Mohammed Kamu, Project Officer and Coordinator for MFPD told us that MFPD has a goal to help “the ordinary people understand their responsibilities in good governance and development programs.”

Andrew and Mohammed reported that MFPD is training youth in journalism and that the foundation’s funding is used for the “Youth Radio” and “Kiddies Radio.” These programs, however, and the construction of a Kiddies Radio studio at the SKYY-FM site, are supported personally by Andrew Kromah.

Solar Com

Solar Com is a solar panel business, owned by Andrew Kromah that has installed solar power for MODCAR - Moyamba District Community Awareness Radio, for example and provided clinics with solar power so they can be open at night. Because of his experience in this field, he will be an excellent partner with others DRP is working with to create a solar powered radio station. This is a model that could be easily replicated in other countries and prove a significant benefit to local radios stations around the world.

The Independent Radio Network

*For the first time, the North could hear the South and the South could hear the North.
Listener from Makeni, on the IRN
Election coverage*

In 2004, a loose federation of non-government stations came together to cover the first local government elections after the war. Called the Independent Radio Network, or IRN, this grouping was linked together by what Andrew Kromah called “rapid deployment” technology supported with Search for Common Ground funding. Radio signals were sent from a central location in Makali and received by portable mobile antenna radio transmitters set up in key areas. Reporters with cell phones were stationed at polling precincts. On that historic election day, IRN stations gave listeners across the country the first-ever national coordinated news independent of government or international sources. For the first time, voters in one part of the country could hear the voices and concerns of others across the nation. The reporting turnaround was so quick that even local police and government officials were calling for information and tuning in to hear results ahead of the official bureaucracy.

Station managers reported that the quick results and the fact that IRN secured rights to broadcast results gave listeners the sense that the network was strong and trustworthy.

Talking Drum Studio was the reception center for election reports, which were then screened and released to the public along with a warning that the results were preliminary. Andrew Kromah said that results proved to be 99% accurate, which was born out by the National Election Commission results shortly after. IRN and TDS continue to collaborate on the weekly *Paliament Bol At* program which reports on legislative processes and spending.

The IRN is the only existing group of in-country based, private radio stations that has actively collaborated on a broadcast. The IRN has no central governance structure, but Andrew Kromah is the coordinator. It is a loose affiliation, but one moving towards unity. As IRN member Ahmed Sesay put it, “we want [the country] to get to place where it’s ok to disagree.” The IRN has decided to meet regularly and prioritizes not only reporting on elections in 2007, but Search for Common Ground also reported that at a recent meeting the IRN outlined voter education initiatives to prepare for the 2007 elections along with aggressive anti-corruption reporting and more focus on production of local language programs at the station level.

A VISION FOR THE FUTURE: RECOMMENDATIONS

The plan we propose is based upon our meetings with station managers, youth and women’s groups outside of Freetown, meetings with government and NGO stakeholders and extensive conversations with the principle leaders. Therefore, while we appreciate the opportunity to play a role in developing this plan and work with so many dedicated people, in the end the plan is the product of Sierra Leoneans. We have worked with their ideas to bring the various perspectives and organizations into an alignment that will serve the needs that have been identified.

Recommendations for Building an Enduring Public Radio Service

Overview of Phase I (6 to 9 months)

An Interim Phase to Build Momentum for a National Public Radio Service

Because the time for this organizational transition is unsure, and because it will be valuable to maintain momentum for the project and give stations some experience with the network, we propose an Interim Phase I that will bring the present organizations together to create a network news service. This is intended only as an Interim Phase because the long-term viability depends upon a central, single entity.

Overview of Phase II (9 to 18 months)

Building Blocks for an Endurable Public Radio Service

This proposal rests on the foundation of a single entity that will manage the development of the community radio sector in Sierra Leone. By bringing all facets of local radio (professional development, income generation, and network and technical requirements) together under a single governance and coordination structure, the sector can grow and be sustained over time. The citizens, who have all been touched by the horrors of the long years of violence will have invaluable tools to build a better future.

Taken as a whole, this plan will help citizens address the underlying causes of the civil conflict: weak governance, corruption and ignoring the needs of rural citizens. It will provide a solid foundation for long-term development.

The steps to create this entity (Talking Drum Radio) are outlined below:

- 1. Launch Talking Drum Radio (TDR)**, a new Sierra Leonean NGO that will provide unified governance and coordination for the development of the sector. All community radio stations that meet agreed upon criteria will be invited to join this network. Talking Drum Radio's board of directors will include representation from local radio station managers, TDS, the Media Foundation for Peace and Development and other stakeholders identified by the founding core board of directors.

TDR will represent the public radio service sector to government, donors, and advertisers. TDR will establish criteria of performance for stations to receive grants and advertising funds. With the support of member stations and the board, TDR will work to aggregate resources from group advertising, corporate contributions, NGOs, and other donors who see the value of media in developing a strong civil society. TDR will both an advocate for the sector and lead its development.

One of the great challenges of transitioning from an International NGO to a local one is the need to establish an organization that has strong governance, management, fiscal controls and accountability to give donors confidence to invest in the organization, and to give more substantial grants than is often the case with local NGOs. The new NGO *must* be regarded as the central place to invest in local/national public radio with a development mission. We need to

ensure that the core TDR staff has the proper training in management, operations, fiscal accountability, and monitoring and evaluation.

2. **Establish Professional Standards of Performance for Stations.** Working with stations, Developing Radio Partners will develop criteria for a Healthy Station in Sierra Leone. Training programs will be developed and implemented to ensure they meet the criteria and certificates will be awarded. Mentors and semi-annual evaluations will ensure that stations continue to meet the standards. Stations will practice what they expect of local government: transparency and accountability.
3. **Network Independent Local Radio Stations.** Local stations will produce news and features that will be fed to a central production hub where they will be incorporated into news and information programs distributed nationally. This will replace the IRN. Information of particular interest to rural residents will be included in the national news. As a result, for the first time, there will be a national conversation, with the voices from up-country being heard in Freetown. Properly funded, from a variety of sources, the news and information programs will be of high quality and free from outside influence, fostering a culture of professional journalism. Not only problems but solutions can be brought to public attention.

The new network will develop a distinctive style of presentation as public, development broadcasting. Programs will be interactive with local stations, enabling them to cutaway for local inserts. Hearing music and other cultural programs from various parts of Sierra Leone will create an appreciation of the rich diversity of the country and sense of nationhood.

4. **Build Capacity of Talking Drum Studio Productions.** The core of development programming will continue to be produced by TDS and distributed to all stations. Stations up-country will receive them on the live network rather than having TDS carry cassettes to stations. The most popular radio plays, current affairs programs and *Paliament Bol At* will all continue. TDS will continue leadership of development programming.
5. **Partner with Solar Com Engineering Services.** Solar Com will provide contracted engineering services for the sector, train technicians at stations to maintain equipment and maintain an inventory of spare parts and back equipment.

6. **Create Solar Powered Radio Station.** Because most stations need to use diesel powered generators for electricity, Solar Com, working with Developing Radio Partners will work with other partners to create a model solar powered station that can be replicated throughout Sierra Leone and other countries. This will enable stations to extend their hours on air and pay staff and volunteers.

Specific Recommendations for Implementation

Interim Phase I: 6 to 9 months

Objectives

- Provide a daily, professional news service to stations and listeners that includes reports from up-country, and the capital.
- Give stations experience in both producing for the national network and integrating the news and information service into their schedules to give them more buy-in for the project.
- Provide voter education programs in preparation for the 2007 elections.
- Give the various organizations a central project to gather around and develop systems of governance and accountability.
- Establish a presence in the media rapidly changing landscape, to claim the space for development, public service radio in Sierra Leone.
- Test various aspects of the system that will inform Phase II.
- Begin laying the foundation for the long-term single entity model.

Structure

Talking Drum Studio will be the administrative center, coordinating the various partners and fiscal accountability. A board of directors composed representatives from the IRN, TDS, and MFPD will set operational and editorial policies for the project and be responsible for evaluation. The Media Foundation for Peace and Development will use their newsroom in Freetown as a production hub for this interim service, gathering material from around the country and packaging them into a news and information program service. KISS-FM in Bo will transmit programs that will be picked up off air by stations and rebroadcast locally.

Phase II: 9-18 months

(1) Talking Drum Radio

Establish NGO and organizational structure

- a. SFCG and TDS manage creation of a local NGO, “Talking Drum Radio” (TDR)
 - i. The case for TDR: TDR will serve as the unifying entity that coordinates and manages all functions of the committees (including fundraising, network, technical, and programmatic teams)
 - ii. Set criteria and benchmarks for SFCG to determine when TDR will have the organizational capacity for independence
- b. Convene a meeting of station managers, SFCG staff, and other key players to address station manager questions, describe the proposed network, and build consensus among the key players.
- c. Elect TDR board of directors
 - i. Principle members to include representatives from radio stations, SFCG, MFPD, and others with experience in fundraising and development.
- d. Register TDR as local NGO

Business Development

- a. Define role of Media Foundation for Peace and Development, which may change from the news agency production hub.
- b. Build institutional support
 - a. Major funds
 - i. Raise major funds for new organization and TDS from international donors
 - ii. During this time, SFCG may be a primary donor (50% or more)
 - b. Partnerships
 - i. Target prospective partnerships with NGOs and funding sources during TDR’s evolution into the public face SFCG.
 - c. Corporate and private sector sponsorship
 - i. Cultivate corporations, businesses for support
 - d. Government
 - i. Represent the interests of TDR stations to government and other stakeholders
- c. Develop a sales strategy
 - a. Create sales strategy that emphasizes uniqueness of TDR and its capacity to make a difference

- i. Professional delivery and smooth production for a national market.
 - ii. Create sales package for underwriters
- b. Set specific fundraising goals and timeline to build administrative and fundraising capacity of TDR
- c. Establish guidelines on what kinds of advertising will be accepted in a group buy from sponsors or NGOs and develop a process by which funding will be accepted

(2) Establish Professional Standards of Performance for Stations

- a. Meet with stations as a group to establish criteria for Healthy Stations in Sierra Leone
 - i. Please see the text box below, which describes the Healthy Station model
- b. Conduct an audit of stations to determine if they meet criteria
- c. Develop and implement Healthy Station / journalist training
- d. Identify trainers/mentor for each station
- e. Develop on-going evaluation methods to monitor programming quality and content. Evaluation methods should include regular community feedback mechanisms to ensure that programming is representative of local needs.

Working to Build Healthy Stations

Developing Radio Partners proposes a plan to establish professional criteria for performance that will give confidence to donors to invest; give stations professional standards; and be a model of accountability and transparency.

Working with the local radio sector, DRP will develop the qualities that define a Healthy Station and create a training program to ensure that each station qualifies. These benchmarks will include overall good management practice, the maintenance of proper financial records, and adherence to standards of professional journalism, programming and community engagement. Once a station meets these standards, they will be awarded a Healthy Station certificate. The station will practice what it advocates for others in civil society: accountability to the community.

A mentor will be assigned to visit each station twice a year to offer guidance and ensure the station is meeting the standards. The mentor can be called upon during the year for advice and assistance. This will provide on-going support for stations. With the understanding of the stations, several community members will monitor the station twice a year to ensure that the program schedule is followed.

The stations will provide programming and financial reports to the Talking Drum Radio Network to ensure donors that their investment has been properly used and that contracted services -advertising or sponsored programming - have been fulfilled.

(3) Establish a Network of Independent Local Radio Stations Under TDR

- a. Appoint editorial team to develop programming that is distinctly development-centered and of high quality
- b. Determine how the network will work, including how program exchange and interface with TDR and TDS, governance, and management structure of the network
 - i. Discussion to include the financial aspects of program sharing, i.e. do stations pay the network for programs? do NGOs pay stations to carry programs?
- c. Develop membership criteria for IRN stations (in line with Healthy Stations criteria)
 - i. Establish editorial procedures and standards
 - ii. Develop application criteria for new stations to be developed, especially in sparse coverage areas like Pujehun and Kambia.
- d. Roll out pilot programs and national news feeds

- e. Evaluate programming by stations, listeners
- f. Develop nation-wide campaign to make public aware of “independence” of new NGO and the shift in ownership from an international NGO to a locally-based entity that encourages greater ownership by the people of Sierra Leone.
 - i. Set up community advisory boards at local stations to regularly invite listener feedback in programming decisions and progress.
- g. Launch Talking Drum Radio network for coverage of May 2007 elections
 - i. Create and roll-out public relations and events strategies for official launch of the new national network transition from IRN to TDRN.
 - ii. Convene Media Stakeholders group in advance of launch for coordinating elections and transparency strategies.
- h. Roll out full spectrum of network programming

(4) Talking Drum Studio Productions

- a. Integrate TDS program into network schedule
 - i. Eliminate need for physical distribution of cassettes to stations
- b. Determine best method of technical delivery.
 - i. There are two primary models on which to build an independent radio network: one signal/one source vs. a multi-station model. Each is described in the box below. Stations should play an integral role in this process and determine balance between local and national programming and the place of local language programming on community radios. (See Annex 2.)

(5) Solar Com Engineering Services

- a) Audit stations equipment needs so stations have professional studio equipment and proper transmitters and correct antenna placement
 - i. Assess station ability to interface with a national network
 - ii. This itemized list of individual station needs will be used to establish fundraising goals
- b) Purchase and install needed equipment
- c) Train local engineers in maintenance
 - i. Designate and contract a reliable engineering unit to implement network plans, equipment purchases, set-up and maintenance
- d) Develop an inventory of spare parts and back-up equipment

(6) Create Solar Powered Radio Station

- a) Identify solar technology partners
- b) TDR and Solar Com determine the model station for solar power
- c) Raise funds for project
- d) Implement model station

CONCLUSION

We propose a comprehensive plan to fortify community radio's impact. Working in tandem with national efforts to decentralize power and administration, this plan works to empower local communities. By coming together, community radio stations can reverse the flow of information from Freetown; creating a process to send information from up-country to the capital will improve the professional quality of journalism and real-time news and information exchange in Sierra Leone. A unified network will fortify the press in its role to provide checks against a government plagued with corruption. Additionally, the collective efforts of stations to raise money will help them become sustainable; with a strategic programming and business plan, this national network can collectively attract levels of funding far above those raised by a solitary station.

Community radio in Sierra Leone has already shown that, if properly harnessed, it is a powerful tool for reaching isolated populations. Radio programs from SFCG and other sources increase citizen awareness and inclusion in the political process, and reach across fragmented populations to fortify the country's fragile peace. Locally-based radio can reach everyone in the country, regardless of whether they are literate or not. Community radio can bring up-country messages to the capital, and can also reach villages and chiefdoms that other media access poorly.

Fifteen years ago, war was quickly fomented among an impoverished, restless and disenfranchised population. A network of locally-based stations that produce, feed and capture news, information, and features from a national network holds the potential to As broadcast outlets proliferate, the people of Sierra Leone are growing into more discerning and demanding news consumers. A network truly born out of the national culture and identity is an important step on the path to stability, self-determination, and development.

*If we did not have information sharing in this country, even the peace we are boasting
of would not have been realized.*

Mohammed Kamu, Project Officer and Coordinator
Media Foundation for Peace and Development

ANNEX 1: EASTERN RADIO WORKS THROUGH VIOLENCE IN KENEMA

Eastern Radio calls itself the “Voice of Justice and Development on Freedom Mountain in Kenema” and station manager, Ahmed G. Kallon, says the station is working to earn its title. “The highest authority cannot reach people like we can,” Kallon says, in describing how the station played a fundamental role in subduing a deadly November, 2005 riot.

Eastern Radio broadcast the conflict in real time, giving the public a pipeline to report on the trouble, officials a place to comment, and citizens reliable warnings of possible danger. Ultimately, the conflict resolution tools taught by Search for Common Ground were used to bring the two quarreling sides together in a public forum that aired live on Eastern Radio on Friday, November 11. On the day of the riots, however, Eastern Radio responded quickly and even-handedly, illustrating radio’s ability to help secure peace in a post-conflict zone.

In the early morning of November 7, 2005, the bodies of two bike taxi drivers were brought to the Catholic Pastoral centre.^{xxxiv} They had been found dead of laceration wounds, and were presumed to have been killed the prior evening. A reporter from

Eastern Radio confirmed seeing the two corpses and he called in to report the incident to the station. Eastern Radio called the head of The Bike Rider's Association (BRA) of Kenema Town to comment on the situation and realized that BRA's president had not learned of the incident yet.

Station manager Kallon said that when other bike riders discovered the news, they took to the streets. In minutes, the newsroom received several calls from people describing a thick crowd gathering in the streets. The station gave a play by play of where the horde was headed and continued their coverage during the following few hours of trouble.

Police Constable, Jonathan Tamba Kondokwi of the Police Media Unit reported that a mob of bike riders came to the precinct station and demanded immediate action. In response, the police commissioner informed the crowd that the police were probing the murders, and needed time to conduct a thorough investigation. Once repelled from the station, the bike riders blocked all entrances to the station and invaded. As Kallon tells it, Regional Police Commander East, Elizabeth Turay, called Eastern Radio to report that the commissioner was being held at the station by a mob and that the police were calling in all reinforcements. She wanted her statement on record on the radio. Eastern Radio put out a call to the head of the BRA to come quiet his colleagues.

At that time, police and/or military forces arrived to subdue the crowd. Although ordered not to use force, shots were fired into the crowd and, by noon, four people were confirmed dead. The crowd was largely disbursed, and the Police Commissioner responded by ordering the town under a strict curfew from 14h00 in the afternoon until 6h00 the following morning. UNHCR's Field Safety unit advised personnel to monitor the situation on local radio.

Eastern Radio invited the Regional Police Commander East, Elizabeth Turay, to meet with leader of the Bike Riders Association to settle the situation. Throughout the day, Eastern Radio broadcast conversations with several bike riders and police representatives. The police talked about what the violence and curfew would cost the citizens. The BRA relayed grievances about police cracking down on bike riders for license fees and minor violations. The police and traffic wardens said the BRA could not control its members. The curfew held but was dismissed on Wednesday. The BRA advised its members to stop rioting on the air

Search for Common Ground/Talking Drum Studio followed up with a meeting with key groups in the transport sector including local authorities and the rider's association in Kenema on Friday 11th November 2005. The SFCG team from Bo took along five

members of the Transport Stakeholders and Traffic Management Taskforce, which SFCG had initiated and supported over the years. In the end, more than 50 people attended the six-hour meeting. Tapes of the meeting reveal a tone of calm, thoughtful interaction, although there were tense moments. Namely when the Traffic Warden's representative refused to accept the apology of the BRA head on behalf of the association.

There the BRA complained about forceful arrests and extortion from police, traffic wardens and even soldiers or off-duty officials. BRA members complained about arbitrary justice and the danger of their jobs.

The police countered with disappointment that the community failed to support them during the riot, even accusing the public of covering up for the culprits. The Local Unit Commander admitted using force to quell the riot saying he had received intelligence that the riders were planning to attack them; made worse when they saw the riders approaching the station armed with machetes, sticks and stones

In the end, the BRA agreed to work closely with Drivers' Union and to avoid riding in dangerous and isolated areas late at night. In other words, to be more mindful of security than money-making. The BRA also said it would enforce proper rules, licensing and documentation, and seek the welfare of its members. Police and wardens agreed to not be selective in their duties, and to handle detainments quickly, so as not to cost riders money. A discussion started over distinguishing ex-combatants from those who were not, a distinction that not considered to be productive, and might even push ex-combatants to feeling isolated, branded and defensive.

The interaction helped change policy. For Kenema Town, two sides locked in a bitter conflict sought out concrete steps for lasting change. Kallon said that 95% of the BRA are ex-combatants and that their position must be looked at to create a lasting peace "The Eastern Radio is playing a vital role to enhance unity, and more particularly post war reconciliation." As one district councilor put it, "these boys have only ever known the rule of the gun."

The handful of people in Kenema we met said that it was the radio that gave voice to the issues that brought about the disturbance of the peace. "We were concerned for the security of our people," Margaret Moiwa, a petit trader, recalled. "The police were pouring petrol on the flames, the radio put it out," she said.

ANNEX TWO: 2 MODELS

Station-Based or One-Signal	Station Hub Model
<p>This model is based on the idea of producing one national signal feed that will emanate from one source point and be available to all stations as a radio broadcast. That signal will have the sound, TDR station Ids, promo spots, underwriting, and delivery of a fully-operational station. The advantage to this model is that it simplifies feeds into one source point and can then be carried across country using a 3500-watt relay tower at Makali. This model employs one continuous stream of network programs available for stations to access at any given time by radio signal. The switch from local to national programs would simply be that: an A/B switch.</p> <p>The disadvantage to the one-signal model is that the signal will be strong enough for anyone to pick up, which can override weaker local stations. In other words, if one doesn't like the program on one's local station, one can simply tune into the TDR feed. This takes loyalty away from individual stations, but may be an advantage to listeners in many markets because they can listen to their choice of programming. If this model is used, the system for inter-station communication could simply be by cell phone in coverage areas, or by V-SAT in remote</p>	<p>This model uses the AM band signal to interconnect a series of producing, or hub stations, for uplinking and downlinking programs produced at other hubs. This is more of an inter-station service than polished broadcast. Under this model, there is still one national frequency delivering service to stations, but that signal would run on the AM band and would sound less like a radio station broadcast and more like an internal program service. Selected stations will uplink their locally-produced programs and news pieces for national air to this signal They will also downlink live TDR-branded national news headlines and programs feeds from that signal, but not be bound by its schedule.</p> <p>Stations may choose to carry local programs, for example, rather than the national feed of "Paliment Bol At." This model increases listener loyalty and station autonomy on the local level. It could complicate the national sales packages and group buys that we think will be a big draw for companies and NGOs, in that there is greater probability of national programs not getting played. It could make the network less cohesive in that a listener in Bo might not hear the same national news program at a consistent time if he or she travels to Kono.</p>

areas.

ENDNOTES

- ⁱ “Human Development Report 2005,” UNDP publication, http://hdr.undp.org/reports/global/2005/pdf/HDR05_HDI.pdf
- ⁱⁱ Gregg Campbell, *Blood Diamonds: Tracing the Deadly Past of the World’s Most Precious Stone*, Westview Press, Boulder, CO, page xx.
- ⁱⁱⁱ USAID. *Fragile States Strategy*. Washington, DC: US Agency for International Development. January, 2005.
- ^{iv} Talking Drum Radio is a working title, selected because of the name recognition of Talking Drum Studio among the public, donors and government. It also reflects a broader mission than Talking Drum Studio.
- ^v World Bank. *Conditions for Social Accountability in Sierra Leone*, Draft Concept Note, February, 2005.
- ^{vi} *Ibid.*
- ^{vii} *CIA World Factbook 2004* online <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/index.html> (accessed January 20, 2006)
- ^{viii} “Diamond Hunters Fuel Africa’s Brutal Wars.” *Washington Post*, Saturday, October 16, 1999, Sec A 1
- ^{ix} *CIA World Factbook 2004* online <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/index.html> (accessed January 20, 2006)
- ^x UNDP’s 2005 Human Development Report ranks countries on three basic dimensions of human development - a long and healthy life, knowledge and a decent standard of living. The 2005 report can be found at http://hdr.undp.org/statistics/data/indic/indic_8_1_1.html.
- ^{xi} USAID. *Fragile States Strategy*. Washington, DC: US Agency for International Development. January, 2005.
- ^{xii} Special Court. *Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Vol I*, Executive Summary, Freetown, Sierra Leone, October 2003.
- ^{xiii} In every city, people assumed that large percentages of the local Bike Riders Association was made up of former combatants, asserting anywhere from “70%” to “95%”
- ^{xiv} *Media Sector Mapping in Sierra Leone*, SFCG/TDS SL, October 2005
- ^{xv} Information and media were identified as “Key Issue Areas” in the “Conditions for Social Accountability” noted above.
- ^{xvi} “And Then There Was One,” *Knightlines International*, Summer 2005, page 13
- ^{xvii} *Media Sector Mapping in Sierra Leone*, Search For Common Ground/Talking Drum Studio, Freetown, Sierra Leone, October 2005.
- ^{xviii} Rosalind Shaw, at a Carr Center for Human Rights presentation at Harvard University, March 2005, for more on Professor Shaw, see http://www.usip.org/fellows/reports/2004/0429_shaw.html
- ^{xix} Committee to Protect Journalists, *Attacks on the Press, 2004* <http://www.cpj.org/attacks04/africa04/sierra.html>
- ^{xx} A South African security company founded in 1989 by a former SA special forces officer. Executive Outcomes was hired by SLA Captain Valentine Strasser, who led a coup against Momoh in 1992. EO was contracted to rout rebels from diamond areas in exchange for rights to the mines. They were fired under pressure from world leaders. Journalist Greg Campbell writes that EO “is either the embodiment of all the worst things about mercenaries or a source of stability and security in a continent...abandoned by Europe and America to fend for itself.” Campbell, Greg. 2004. *Blood Diamonds*. Boulder, Co: Westview Books.
- ^{xxi} UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office Regional Report on Sierra Leone, online at <http://www.fco.gov.uk/servlet/Front?pagename=OpenMarket/Xcelerate/ShowPage&c=Page&cid=1063633918237> (accessed January 6, 2006)
- ^{xxii} This may well be changed within the next year. Most recent brief filed in court by SLAJ’s Alhaji I.B.Kargbo in October 2005 is stirring up international pressure to loosen up laws.
- ^{xxiii} Reporters Without Borders Press Release, October 2005, http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=15260
- ^{xxiv} Reporters Without Borders www.rsf.org 12.10.05. In the same issue report: “For Di People acting editor Harry Yansaneh died of internal injuries on 28 July 2005, two months after being badly beaten by thugs allegedly acting on the orders of ruling parliamentarian, Fatmata Hassan Komeh. Although found guilty of homicide, Yansaneh’s assailants were freed on bail.”
- ^{xxv} Bernadette Cole, head of Independent Media Commission (IMC) and also head of mass communications at Fourah Bay College, in conversation with William Siemering of DRP. November, 2005.
- ^{xxvi} Information Sharing Meeting convened at China House on 21 November, 2005
- ^{xxvii} *Media Sector Mapping in Sierra Leone*, SFCG/TDS SL, October 2005

^{xxviii} “And Then There Was One,” *Knightlines International*, Summer 2005

^{xxix} *Media Sector Mapping in Sierra Leone*, SFCG/TDS SL, October 2005

^{xxx} *Reporters Sans Frontieres* Press Release, September 2005

^{xxxi} Search for Common Ground, *Eavlaution of Search for Common Ground Activities in Sierra Leone, December 2004*

External Evaluation, evaluation conducted by independent consultants Paul Everett, Tennyson William, and Mary Meyers. Freetown, Sierra Leone, 2004. For full evaluation, see www.sfcg.org/sfcg/evaluations/evaluations.html

^{xxxii} *ibid* p.2

^{xxxiii} Citizens Radio and Voice of the Handicapped, both in Freetown, do not air TDS programs

^{xxxiv} According to the Incident Report filed by UNHCR’s Field Safety Advisor, Kjell Lauvik,