
Independent Radio Network
Sierra Leone

National News Program
Development & Launch

Project Report
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May 9, 2007

Independent Radio News Sierra Leone National News Program Development & Launch

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Thanks and Acknowledgements

It isn't often that radio trainers get to launch a show. We do assessments, write reports and conduct workshops. Much of the time, the results aren't immediately visible. But the launch of the IRN National News was one of the most satisfying assignments I've ever had. In just a month, we built a demo and went through two weekly news cycles.

I'd like to thank Ransford Wright, Salamatu Kemokai, Michael Jamiru and John Campbell for their dedication and perseverance. It was no small accomplishment for this team to get a news magazine up and running from scratch. My thanks to Search for Common Ground Africa Director Frances Fortune and Sierra Leone Country Director Ambrose James for their detailed briefings and terrific support. Thanks also to SFCG's Jenny Steel for her upcountry station assessments. And thanks to Andrew Kromah at the Media Foundation for Peace and Development for the vision to make Independent Radio Network news a reality. As well, my thanks to Bill Siemering and Kristin Martin at Developing Radio Partners for the excellent foundation they've helped lay. It made my work on the newscast launch a pleasure.

Lastly, my thanks to the reporters at the independent radio stations who contributed their energies to bring a community radio news program from concept to reality. This is their success. I'd be honored to return to Sierra Leone to help nurture what they've created.

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Summary

The IRN news is on the air. After careful assessment and planning, a cooperatively-produced, community-oriented national news program launched in April 2007.

Each week, the 16 stations of the Independent Radio Network contribute stories to a national news magazine. The program helps solidify the community radio sector, improve the watchdog role of the news media and end the isolation felt by many Sierra Leone residents who know little about what is happening in other parts of their country.

The show utilizes a magazine approach to maximize the reportorial knowledge at community stations without relying entirely on limited upcountry station capacity to produce audio field reports. Interview segments and re-voiced news briefs provide consistent on-air quality. The stations submitting news items are always identified, preserving the program's grassroots character.

A demonstration program and two weekly editions were produced during my time in Sierra Leone. Response from stations was overwhelmingly positive. A phone survey was conducted to assess program strengths and weaknesses.

The IRN bulletin staff received individualized training and coaching in how to nationalize community radio news reports. Script format sheets and a weekly workflow were designed to ensure team members know their roles and deadlines. News Editors from all IRN stations came to Freetown for workshop exercises in how to prepare local stories for use in a national newscast. By providing a journalistic model of how radio news can sound, with shorter stories that are tightly focused, the national news is an example for local reporters to follow.

The newscast project is a first step. As IRN matures, it can provide feeds of individual stories and text-only reports that stations can integrate into their own local news bulletins. Editions can be produced in multiple languages. Ultimately, a daily newscast can be delivered. The goal is to serve the station newsrooms, not displace them. The IRN newscast is blazing a trail for how other SFCG/TDS programs might be produced in a decentralized manner—an essential component of SFCG legacy preparations.

This report outlines the steps that made this a successful program launch, and contains detailed recommendations for editorial, technical, financial and organizational steps for the future. These steps involve creating a formal operating budget for IRN, converting IRN from an association into a legal entity, and pursuing advertising and specialized foundation funding to move IRN News toward sustainability from the very start.

Project Description

Search for Common Ground/Talking Drum Studio (SFCG/TDS) sought the assistance of Developing Radio Partners (DRP) to develop and launch a weekly national news program in Sierra Leone. The newscast is a cooperative production of 16 stations that have formed the Independent Radio Network (IRN). The stations send reports from across the country to be included in the national program.

DRP has been involved in laying the foundation for this grassroots news initiative. In 2005, DRP founder Bill Siemering and Virginia Prescott conducted an evaluation of the public-service radio sector in Sierra Leone. In 2006, SFCG consultant Jenny Steel visited ten IRN stations to assess their capacity to generate stories for a national news program.

I was selected to serve as a consultant and mentor for the newscast launch because of my experience with community radio in developing countries, creating cooperatively-produced news programming. My background can be viewed at www.fitzpatrickmedia.com.

The consultancy was planned to last four weeks. The full Terms of Reference are included as Appendix 1. The goals:

- developing a format for the news
- develop a format for receiving news from stations and sending programs to stations
- conduct news gathering and writing training sessions for stations
- work with the team on conceptual development
- assist the production team to develop news angles on emerging issues
- participate in meetings of IRN
- identify needs of reporters in the field and threats/opportunities for the project
- set up mini-production facilities in community radio stations
- support practical production skills training
- develop IRN editorial line and agreement about news
- jointly produce the first three sets of IRN national news
- develop a forward plan of action for IRN news project

Current membership of the IRN:

Station	Location
BBN	Freetown
Bintumani	Kabala
Bontico	Bonthe
Democracy	Freetown
Eastern	Kenema
Gbaft	Mile 91
Kiss	Bo
Kolenten	Kambia
Mankneh	Makeni
Maria	Makeni
Moa	Kailahun
Modcar	Moyama
Mt. Aureol	Freetown
New Song	Bo

Skyy	Freetown
Tombo	Tombo

The Need for a National News Program

No mission statement for the national news initiative has been developed. But in background briefings with SFCG/TDS and IRN leaders, several needs were identified:

- create a credible and independent news service that can present an alternative to state-run radio
- strengthen the editorial impact of member stations by unifying the community radio movement
- become a stronger watchdog on democracy
- watchdog upcountry election activity, where political parties are more likely to engage in unethical behavior because media coverage is sparse
- create a national spirit and sense of social accountability by educating listeners about events and issues throughout all of Sierra Leone
- end a sense of isolation among upcountry residents, who receive little independently-reported information about happenings throughout the nation
- end the dominance of Freetown-based stories as the only news of national significance
- build solidarity among the stations in the community radio sector
- create a shared project so that IRN stations feel the value of being a network member
- help IRN grow beyond election-only coverage by creating a permanent program that resonates with member stations
- create a grassroots model for collaborative program creation and distribution that can demonstrate a way for TDS programs in Sierra Leone to be produced after SFCG transitions out of the country
- create a new model for how community radio news can sound, breaking beyond the traditional approach of state-radio, inspiring journalists at local stations to improve their work

Design of the Program Format

To meet the needs detailed above, while remaining cost-efficient, I proposed a 15-minute news magazine format. The program would be divided into three major sections:

- a traditional bulletin of taped spot-news reports from station-based reporters
- a focus segment that features interviews with IRN station editors and eventually other types of in-depth reporting
- a news briefs section with short items contributed by stations but voiced by IRN producers in Freetown

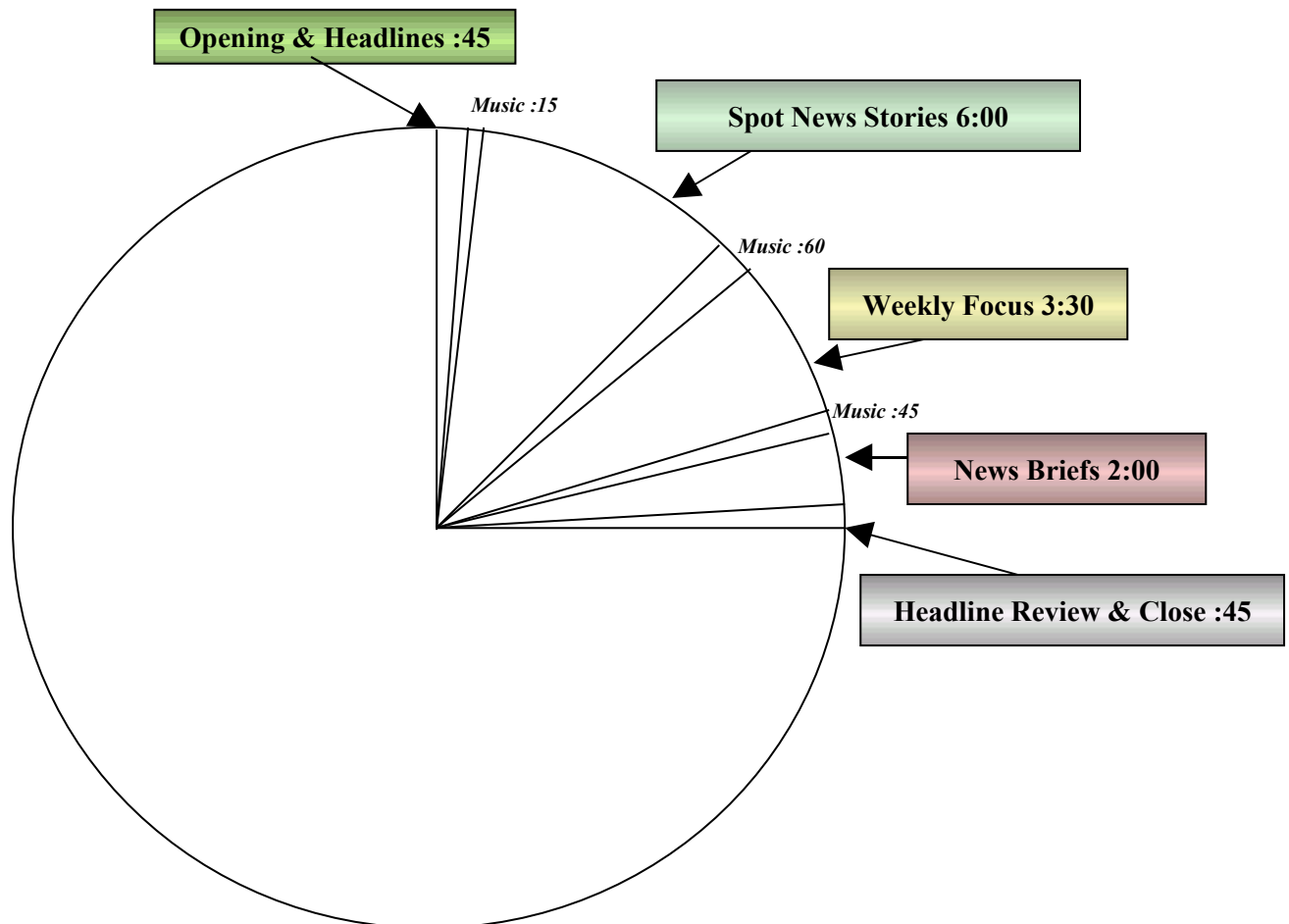
At first glance, this format might seem more complicated than a fledgling community radio network could support. Indeed, during early discussions with SFCG/TDS staff in Freetown, I discovered that the initial concept for the program involved simply excerpting stories from weekly air-check cassette tapes of IRN station newscasts.

Excerpting would be easy, but it would not allow IRN to strengthen or nationalize stories before placing them on air in a national bulletin. As well, I noticed that news production and presentation are weak spots for Sierra Leone stations. Many reporters, when I talked to them, spoke knowledgeably and authoritatively about issues in their communities. But when they sat down to write a script, and then record their voices on tape, the resulting stories lacked depth and impact.

Also, the shortcomings that Jenny Steel observed at IRN stations in 2006 have not yet been addressed in a sustained way. These include one-sided reporting, unclear writing, a lack of actuality soundbites on air, an over-reliance on official sources and a lack of everyday voices, limited use of context and explanatory information, inclusion of developmental jargon, and poor audio quality. There is training underway, and some stations are receiving new production equipment. But it will take considerable time before local station newsrooms can transform themselves.

For these reasons, the magazine format seemed prudent. IRN would rely on member stations to report the news, but significant portions of the program would be repackaged to improve the presentation. The interview block provides a segment that can be lengthened or shortened if stations generate too few or too many spot news stories in any particular week.

IRN National News Launch Program Format



Format Highlights:

- 15 minutes weekly with three parts: spot news reports, in-depth focus segment, briefs.
- Eight stories per program, including content from half of the IRN stations each week.
- Stations contribute material for the program each week. The bulletin staff will phone editors to discuss ideas and news tips for taped stories and news briefs.
- Music breaks create a consistent structure and provide opportunities for advertising or jingles.

Opening & Headlines :45

- Each weekly program will have four headlines.
- Headlines will be done in “dateline” style, mentioning the city or village where the story is coming from.
- We also promote what will be coming up in this week’s focus segment.
- Headlines will be followed by a 15 second music bridge. This space can be available for a sponsor advert message.

Spot News Stories 6:00

- Each weekly program will try to have four taped field reports, 60 to 90 seconds each.
- The program will have a Week-in-Review feel at first, with issue-oriented news reporting. This is because it is a weekly show and there will be a natural delay to getting reports from upcountry stations. As the program matures and faster movement of audio becomes possible, the nature of the bulletin can become timelier.
- IRN producers will work with station reporters in advance by phone to nationalize their story ideas and scripts, so the stories work in the context of a national bulletin.
- The name of the station contributing the report, and the reporter’s name, will be identified by the program presenter in the story introduction and back link.
- The spot news segment will be followed by a 60-second music break. This break can be used for advertising or station jingles.

Weekly Focus 3:30

- Ultimately, this segment will present different types of in-depth items each week.

The View from Here: The IRN bulletin staff will interview a news editor from one of the IRN stations. He or she will explain the news trends, major stories, public reaction to national trends, and other recent developments in the communities they cover.

Speak Out: The program will present extended person-on-the-street vox pops. In some cases these will come from one IRN station. In other cases, various IRN stations can collect vox pop interviews and the IRN producers in Freetown will assemble a national vox pop with voices from across the country.

Behind the News: The program will interview a newsmaker, civic activist or everyday community member who is making a difference on a news-related issue in their community. This interview may be done by the IRN producers, or contributed by a station.

- At first, we can launch using only “The View from Here” as our focus segment each week. This can be done live-to-tape or by phone. We can launch the other Weekly Focus segment ideas, and develop new ones, as the bulletin develops over time and our production team is working smoothly.

- The focus segment will be followed by a 45-second music break. This break can be used for advertising or station jingles.

News Briefs 2:00

- This segment will feature 4 stories each week.
- Each story will short, roughly 30 seconds each.
- Each story will be done “dateline” style, mentioning the name of the station that contributed the story.
- These will be text-only stories, contributed by the stations but read by IRN news presenters in Freetown.

Headline Review & Close :45

- A short repeat of the top four stories from the opening headlines
- The closing will mention that The IRN National News is a cooperative production of IRN member stations nationwide.

Reaction from Stations

A demo tape with this format was created and played for IRN station managers at the network’s monthly meeting on April 4. The reaction was overwhelmingly positive.

A cassette copy was given to each manager to play for their news staff, so that IRN could receive more detailed feedback. IRN phoned each station to conduct a follow-up survey. Fourteen of the sixteen stations were surveyed. BBN Radio was not surveyed because its manager is the IRN coordinator. Radio Bontico could not be reached. A summary of the survey results:

Question 1: Please give the format an overall mark, from 1 to 10. One is bad, ten is good.

- The average response was 7.61.

Question 2: What do you like about the format, and why do you say that?

- presentation and reporting is good
- story introductions are very short
- introduction of program is captivating
- it captures news around the country and synchronizes it
- reporting from the regions is very good
- stories are worth listening to
- music is enticing
- different station contributions impressed me
- the sequence at which the news comes and the music intervals are good, making the news not boring
- the editor interview was professional

Question 3: Which part of the show is the best part, and why do you say that?

- news briefs
- spot news stories from different regions
- music bridges
- good presentation style keeps you interested
- story about mad street dogs during the interview

Question 4: What do you not like about the format, and why do you say that?

- number of items should be increased
- voice quality of spot stories was poor
- noisy background on spot stories
- it was a magazine format and not a news bulletin
- should be in local languages, not English, and transcribed
- needs stronger spot news stories
- program should be longer, perhaps 20 minutes, because it airs only once weekly

Question 5: Do you have any suggestions about how to make the format better?

- improve opening headlines
- improve sound quality of spot news reports
- better to call it a magazine not a news program
- need quality field recorders to produce voice inserts in the field

Question 6: Which language do you prefer for the program: English or Krio?

- Seven preferred Krio. Six preferred English. One station said “both.” BBN, which was not surveyed because its manager is the IRN coordinator, prefers English, leaving the English/Krio question as a tie among station managers.
- IRN news editors were asked the preferred language question later, during workshops. Fourteen editors gave opinions. Nine preferred English. Five preferred Krio.
- The newscast demo was in English, and following the station feedback, the production team decided to continue broadcasting in English.

Question 7: Can you air this program on Sunday evenings?

- Yes: 11 stations. No: 3 stations (Kiss, Maria, Modcar).

Question 8: Can you receive this program by internet e-mail?

- Yes: 5 stations. No: 9 stations.

Do you want to receive this program on CD or cassette tape?

- We asked station news editors this question. Thirteen editors gave responses. Nine preferred CDs. Four preferred cassettes.

Overall, the IRN team and SGCG/TDS managers were quite happy with the station response to the demo show. The reaction underscored our assessment that pre-recorded spot-news production is a weakness at stations. By including some spot stories, but not an entire program of them, we maintained a national scope for the program and a sense of station ownership, while creating an exemplary model of quality radio production for the stations and their listeners. When I arrived, I was told that the show should not only be different, but sound different. The magazine format delivers a unique sound for Sierra Leone, one which will catch listener attention.

The magazine format also provides an opportunity for the program to grow, or contract, as circumstances warrant. Over time, the program can become longer by adding new elements. Providing the clock concept for the team will guide this future growth. Alternatively, if it turns out that 15-minutes is not a sustainable length, the team can shorten the show to 12 or 10 minutes, while retaining its basic structure. The spot-news segment can be shortened from six minutes to four minutes, and the news briefs can be dropped all together.

Two programs using the magazine format were produced and distributed to stations during my stay in Sierra Leone. The first show, as was expected, was quite a challenge. The team could not find enough pre-recorded spot news stories to fill the opening segment. So they expanded the focus interview block to fill the time. The second week included a national holiday, so the team had to work even more efficiently. It was encouraging to see that they finished producing the program early, and had more pre-recorded spot-news stories on hand than they could include. As I write this report, I've received word from the team in Freetown that the third weekly show was completed on time, with a full complement of stories, without my assistance.

On the day I left Freetown I witnessed one of the most encouraging signs for the success of the show. One of the stations called IRN, unsolicited, to offer a story, rather than waiting for IRN to call them. The grassroots ownership of the program was already starting to take root.

Editorial Team Organization & Workflow

- **Ransford Wright.** Ransford is manager of BBN radio in Freetown, and current coordinator of IRN. Ransford will serve as the executive producer and editor-in-chief for the news. And for now, he is hosting the program as presenter. Ransford is a seasoned radio professional, with an honors degree in mass communication. He has worked only briefly in radio news, but has hosted many public affairs programs and brings a thoughtful and steady hand to the team.
- **Salamatu Kemokai.** Sally has produced the TDS/IRN parliamentary program *Paliment Bol At* for the past four years. She has not worked in radio news, but has training from the Thompson Foundation in the UK on how to cover parliament, and has training in environmental coverage from a German foundation. She has an undergraduate degree in geography and is currently completing another degree in population studies. Sally will serve as the main producer and sub-editor for the national news.
- **Michael Jamiru.** Michael has been the assistant producer for *Paliment Bol At* for the past three years. Before that, he worked in a print unit of TDS and produced radio segments for the TDS program *Common Ground News Features*. He has not worked in radio news. He is currently completing an honors degree in mass communications. Michael will support the news program, and increase his responsibilities with *Paliment Bol At* as Sally divides her time between that program and the news.
- **John Campbell.** John is new to radio. His media experience comes from service in the media wing of the Sierra Leone armed forces and print experience as a reporter and subeditor at Christian newspapers. John earned a diploma in journalism via correspondence with an institution in Scotland. John spent a month observing the production team *Paliment Bol At*, and contributed segments to that program.
- A fourth position is currently open.

The production of *Paliment Bol At* has been moved from the TDS studio in Freetown to the IRN's new production center. This means that Sally, Michael and John are working from the same office and can rely on each other for technical and editorial support. Ransford is hosting the news program, though he hopes to find a suitable replacement in the future. Sally, Michael and John all have on-air roles, conducting the focus-segment interviews and voicing the news briefs. They rotate these responsibilities week to week.

I stressed that for now the IRN National News is not a news-reporting operation, but a news compilation operation. The team should rely on the stations to report the news, and should not displace them. They should help station reporters refocus and repackage their stories for national distribution.

I focused significant time explaining how a radio newsroom should operate. I created fill-in-the-blank script templates for all elements of the show, and created a handout with responsibilities and deadlines for the team (see Appendix 2).

News Acquisition and Program Distribution

- Pre-recorded spot news stories are either recorded over the phone or shipped to Freetown via bus drivers who have a long-term contractual arrangement with TDS. The goal is to have at least half of the spot stories in live-to-tape quality, because telephone audio quality in Sierra Leone is not very good. This requires some pre-planning. Softer issue-oriented spots can be pre-produced and shipped to Freetown. Stories that are breaking or developing usually require the phone.
- TDS plans to install internet access at its regional production centers in Bo and Makeni. When this happens, stations in those cities (¼ of the IRN membership) can bring stories to the regional TDS office and have them sent electronically to IRN.
- The focus-segment interview will almost always be done with live-quality sound. Many news editors travel to Freetown periodically (and another ¼ of the IRN stations are actually in Freetown.) As well, IRN's monthly meeting takes the news staff to remote communities where they can record the local station's editor for the following week's show. In other cases, an editor can record his/her end of a phone call interview and then ship the tape to Freetown so that both ends of the interview can be edited-together for live-quality sound.
- At launch, the program was being distributed on cassette tape, using the TDS program distribution system. Tapes leave Freetown on Fridays at midday. It can be e-mailed as an mp3 attachment to stations with internet access. However it is a 10 megabyte file and takes roughly 20 minutes to upload/download. The staff plans to switch to CD distribution soon.
- A more sophisticated system for acquiring reports and distributing the program should be developed over time. My advice was to use the existing networks that TDS has established until the newscast team is operating smoothly and efficiently.
- It was originally assumed that the team would have a wealth of stories to choose from, and the difficulty would be deciding which stories to run. It has turned out that this was overly optimistic. It is a significant challenge to find eight stories per week that are of national significance or interest, and then get these reports produced in time for the bulletin. This scarcity will ease over time as IRN stations become more familiar with the needs of their national news program.

Training

Internal staff training

Because the IRN team primarily repackages news from across the country into a single program, I focused internal training on three key areas:

- how to edit a story
- how to suggest new angles for coverage to reporters at the IRN stations
- technical training on the computer editing equipment

It's difficult to communicate how much time and energy goes into actually reaching reporters at the upcountry stations to find out what they are working on and when they might be able to feed a version of their story to IRN. We found that reporters frequently had their phones switched off to conserve battery power. At one station, no one on the news team even has a phone. So, for some time the major effort will involve simply getting stories to the IRN newsroom. Improving those stories through a thoughtful editing process is something that will take time to implement.

I stressed that as a weekly program, the IRN National News should look for follow-up angles on stories. That's because event-focused reports can often be stale by the time a weekly-review show hits the air. That approach can begin to take hold soon.

For example, New Song radio in Bo alerted IRN on a Friday that an arson fire had destroyed the economics building at a university campus. By the following week, the fire itself would be old news. But IRN asked New Song to look into the impact the fire would have on university students studying economics. That follow-up angle was the lead story the following week.

Another example: a local chieftom appointed its new women's wing leader. Again, old news by the time IRN hits the air. But a mini-profile with the new leader about her goals in office is a story that can run a week later.

Still, for now the major editorial improvement that IRN can make is to delete unneeded information from spot news reports. Because the IRN staff have program production experience but not radio news reporting experience, I created an instruction sheet to guide them on editing stories contributed by stations (see Appendix 2).

Training for station reporters

The most important way to improve the quality of the IRN National News program is to work at the station level to strengthen the quality of stories sent by local reporters. This will require a sustained effort. The BBC World Service Trust is currently focusing on seven IRN stations. BBC trainers will spend a month at each one.

During my limited time in Sierra Leone, I decided the best thing I could do at the station level was to convene two one-day training projects. Fifteen of the sixteen IRN stations sent their editor or a senior news representative. Half the stations were represented each week.

Overall, the workshop goals were to build a sense of teamwork and shared purpose among the station news departments, and to get stations thinking about how news in their communities might be of interest to the nation as a whole. During these workshops, we focused on what stations need to do for their new IRN news program to succeed. This involved exercises in "nationalizing" local stories, and exercises in "talking the news" effectively while being interviewed by IRN during one of the weekly focus segments.

For example, we conducted a mock editorial meeting and asked participants to suggest how to make the following stories ready for national broadcast:

- A paramount chief and his speaker are in open conflict
- A ten month old baby is found abandoned in a field
- A conference is being held with principals from secondary schools
- Three new tractors have been donated by an international aid organization
- An unexploded mortar shell has been found in swampy land near a school

These examples are real stories. They are the kinds of stories that Sierra Leone community radio stations are covering, and the raw material with which the IRN national news works. Workshop participants did very well in identifying how to nationalize these stories, and recognized that a focus on audience impact and listener interest would strengthen their own reporting at the local level. Instruction sheets to guide the workshop sessions can be found in Appendix 2.

We also distributed the IRN Code of Conduct to news editors. All stations who have joined IRN have subscribed to this code. But we learned that many station managers had not actually distributed the code to their newsrooms. The code is included as Appendix 3.

Future Growth Opportunities

The national news project can grow in distinct phases. From its current, basic program featuring a weekly compilation of community event stories, the IRN news can expand to become one of Sierra Leone's primary sources for independently-reported news coverage. IRN can not only provide completed news programs for stations to broadcast, it can become a news agency that provides content for stations to use in their own local news programming.

IRN's greatest editorial strength is the existing network of station-based correspondents throughout the country. But IRN's greatest weakness is the fact that most of these correspondents do not operate at a professional level. These two realities underscore a vital element for future IRN development: the network must continue to grow from the grassroots up. IRN news should avoid expanding beyond the capacity of member-stations to provide quality content for the programs.

IRN's growth plans should focus as much on quality as quantity. If the network seeks to set a standard for professionalism, a model that will inspire similar craftsmanship at local-station newsrooms, it must consolidate gains before moving to the next step. The suggestions below are delineated in phases to ensure sustainable growth.

Editorial Growth Plan

Current: Program Launch. The news is on-air weekly with a flexible, simple-to-produce format that will catch listener attention and build a sense of shared purpose among member stations. Local news editors have been briefed on their role in sustaining the existing program. The bulletin staff in Freetown has been coached in how to focus stories, edit submissions for broadcast, and compile the program. IRN should avoid any urge to expand this program too quickly, except during the 2007 election when the news could expand operations for a limited period.

Phase 2: Strengthen the Stations. For at least a year, IRN should focus on strengthening the quality of the reporting inside the national news program rather than increasing the length or frequency of the show.

- Training should combat the weaknesses in local-station reporting identified by Jenny Steel: unclear writing, a lack of actuality soundbites on air, an over-reliance on official sources and a lack of everyday voices, limited use of context and explanatory information, inclusion of developmental jargon, and poor audio quality.
- International trainers should be contracted to spend extended periods of time at stations as mentors, complementing the effort already underway by the BBC. Short workshop interventions will not create a lasting effect.
- This training should be directed primarily to the station level, not the Freetown bulletin compilation staff. That is because station-based stories are the raw material of the IRN National News. If you improve reporting at its source, you reduce the need for heavy-handed editing by the Freetown bulletin compilation staff. Field training also improves station capacity to contribute to other TDS programs.
- Training should be coordinated with the supply of improved field reporting equipment at stations, which can improve station-capacity to include the voices of everyday people in news reports.

- A training-of-trainers component should be included to educate the IRN Freetown staff in news reporting skills, something they lack. An international trainer can conduct a two-week intensive course on radio news field production. The IRN Freetown staff should then travel to stations to work with station-based reporters in the field as co-producers on stories.
- Reporters at IRN stations should be seconded to Freetown for extended periods to work with the national program team. This increases their awareness and commitment to the national bulletin, educates them about nationalizing stories, and provides an extra hand in Freetown while an IRN producer goes upcountry to work with a station-based reporter as a co-producer on a field report.
- This combination of international inputs and in-country staff exchanges will build a multi-tiered campaign to strengthen the network at its grassroots level.

Phase 3: Increase Service. Once stations are generating significant quantities of nationally-usable news, IRN can consider expansion.

- The national news can be produced in Krio as well as English. Transcripts of the program can be provided for stations that want to translate into local languages.
- The weekly program can increase to 30 minutes by including a feature-news segment, a weekly vox-pop segment, an art & cultural segment, a business news segment, and even sports. IRN should avoid lengthening existing segments in the current format clock, but should expand the editorial reach of the show by adding new segments. The Freetown staff will need to expand if the show expands. Another editing workstation will be needed. An international consultant should assist this expansion effort, providing training in specialized branches of journalism. Business, arts and sports reporting require different skills than covering general-assignment news.
- IRN can expand beyond program production to offer a news-insert feed and text-only story service to stations. These offerings would make it a Reuters or Associated Press style agency. IRN could provide material that stations can integrate into their own newscasts, strengthening programming at the station level. This effort should start slowly, with a weekly feed at first, then twice weekly, etc.
- IRN can eventually offer a daily short newscast that complements the weekly program and news feeds. Short is the key. Start with five minutes, intended to piggy-back with a community station's own local news. A daily newscast is probably three years away, or more. IRN should resist the urge to go daily too soon, and should not dilute the quality of its existing weekly show or a future news-feed service. IRN could start with two newscasts per week (Tuesday-Thursday) and expand as resources allow. An international consultant should conduct a national assessment before a daily newscast is launched, to ensure adequate material is being generated at the station-level on a daily basis to provide enough raw material for a quality national program each day.

Technical Growth Plan

Current: TDS Couriers. The news now uses the TDS system to receive taped stories and distribute completed programs. This is a reliable system, and can support the news show for now.

Phase 2: Internet Connectivity. The IRN office in Freetown is already supplied with high-speed internet. Most stations are not. The network would benefit greatly if stations become internet enabled.

- With internet, stations can feed studio-quality voice reports and soundbites to the national news team by using simple FTP software.
- IRN can economize on cell phone calls by communicating with stations via e-mail. More thorough and thoughtful sub-editing of story scripts can occur via e-mail.
- Transcripts and translations can be sent by internet.
- A daily news-feed of tape clips and text stories can be sent by internet.
- And, ultimately, stations can download completed programs via FTP transfer, reducing the need for and costs of TDS couriers.
- Internet service would benefit the IRN in countless other organizational ways as well. Stations can use their internet connection for educational purposes—self-guided BBC journalism modules are available online, for example.
- And stations can generate revenue if they become a community internet connection center.
- An international news trainer should be consulted, and not just an IT expert, when designing an IRN network connectivity strategy. An IT expert is essential, of course. But it should be the programming needs of the stations, and not just the technical aspects of network design, that drive the architecture of an IRN internet project.

Phase 3: Satellite Connectivity. This is years away. A satellite is needed if and when IRN wants to provide daily newscast service. The costs and logistics of a satellite uplink will consume as much time and energy as providing stations with downlink capabilities. Stations will also need synchronized clocks.

This phase will involve a major overhaul of IRN news operations, requiring international training support. Switching from a weekly to daily news operation will involve new workflow design and training in daily newscast compilation skills. A daily newscast should be short, 5 minutes at first, and can grow over time. Training in satellite uplink technology will also be required.

I recommend that IRN continue its Weekly Review program even after it launches a daily newsfeed and newscast, to maintain the grassroots collective spirit that a magazine show engenders.

Financial Growth Plan

Current: Launch. The existing news program format contains opportunities for sponsorship messages or advertising.

Phase 2: Advertising & Budgeting.

- Advertising opportunities should be seized immediately so that the program embodies a sense of self-sufficiency and sustainability from the very beginning. NGO messages and commercial adverts should be placed into the program soon. A rough calculation estimates the show can generate roughly SLL 70,000 per week by selling the existing 90 seconds of available advert time (SLL 3500/minute Freetown rate x 4 stations + SLL 2500/minute upcountry rate x 12 stations). This is not including the 15 second sponsorship message availability at the beginning of the show.
- The program also needs an operating budget and fundraising plan. Currently there is no way to plan for growth, and no way to pace expenditures, because annual operating costs have not been calculated. Once an operating budget is in place, an informed strategy can be developed to raise the money required to run the program and plan for expansion.

Phase 3: Commercial Production. IRN can raise funds by producing adverts for clients, not just selling airtime to them. This is especially true for NGOs, who may have a message they want to distribute nationally on radio but do not have the means or experience to craft an effective radio spot. IRN can also use its new facilities to produce short programs and other NGO-funded radio initiatives as a studio for hire. IRN should be careful not to create an impression that NGO shows produced in its studio will automatically be aired on IRN stations.

Phase 4: Website Launch. IRN should create an internet presence. This isn't because Sierra Leone residents want internet based news distribution, but because a website is a useful tool to attract foundation support and advertisers. The website need not be an actively-updated news page, but a simple design that assures advertisers, production clients and foundations that IRN is a solid organization. Eventually IRN might want to create a more substantial weekly news presence online, because it could provide additional advertising opportunities for hotels, helicopter services and others eager to reach international business travelers coming to Sierra Leone. These advertisers are unlikely to buy audio spots domestically in the weekly news show.

Phase 5: Foundation Fundraising. IRN's grassroots focus means its news program will cover issues that international NGOs want to support. Grants to cover issues such as the environment, public health, women's empowerment, literacy, etc. can be sought. Developing Radio Partners or other international grant writing consultants can help IRN raise these funds, and establish protocols so that foundations do not dictate the news coverage they are helping to finance.

Timeline for Growth

Below is a possible schedule for implementing my suggestions for growth. These dates are intended to project an orderly development strategy, based on the capacity of the network and its stations to absorb new initiatives. Exact dates need to be adjusted, of course, based on the availability of funding year to year. Long-term development work on the IRN bulletin will have to wait until the 2007 Sierra Leone elections and their aftermath, so I begin the timeline in October 2007.

Current: April 2007

- News project Launch

Year One: October 2007 to September 2008

- Strengthen stations with sustained on-site training of local news reporters and provision of field recording equipment
- Begin sending IRN reporters to the field to work with stations
- Begin to bring station reporters at IRN for periods of secondment
- Develop internet connectivity at stations
- Develop operating budget for IRN news operations
- Sell advertising spots in IRN bulletin

Year Two: October 2008 to September 2009

- Acquire stories from stations and deliver show to stations via internet
- Move toward internet communication with stations about story ideas, etc.
- Launch second-language version of the show in Krio
- Launch website for fundraising purposes
- Write foundation grants to seek funds for specialized reporting
- Begin commercial production to generate additional revenue

Year Three: October 2009 to September 2010

- Launch periodic text-only and spot-news feed to stations using internet distribution, start with once weekly, and expand as the supply of stories allows
- Expand weekly bulletin to 20 minutes with a business or culture segment, include specialized training for these types of reporting

Year Four and Beyond: 2010 and Beyond

- Expand weekly program to 30-minutes with feature reporting and sports segments, include specialized training for these types of reporting
- Satellite distribution and a daily news feed can be considered after three years of successful weekly operations. This will involve a major technical and editorial overhaul with international consultants.

Benchmarks for growth

It's difficult to provide precise benchmarks that will indicate IRN News is ready to move from step to step in the growth plan I've outlined. This is because much of the plan involves improving story quality—and that isn't an easy thing to measure. But I can provide some ideas that SFCG/TDS and IRN can include in future work plans.

Story Quality Benchmarks

Each year, a consultant can evaluate a random sampling of IRN stories for various indicators of quality. For a baseline, we can use the launch program, and compare subsequent stories to it. We can create a scale from one to ten, and grade each story as a university professor would mark a student's project. The indicators we should measure involve the same shortcomings that Jenny Steel's evaluation has already identified: one-sided reporting, unclear writing, a lack of actuality soundbites on air, an over-reliance on official sources and a lack of everyday voices, limited use of context and explanatory information, inclusion of developmental jargon, and poor audio quality. We can give the IRN national news an overall mark each year, which would provide a quantitative measurement of whether training interventions are having an effect. It's not a perfect measure, but it is consistent from year to year.

News Quantity Benchmarks

It's important to gauge if IRN stations are generating enough material each day/week before moving to more frequent distribution of news material or lengthening the program. One way to measure would be to evaluate how many times the staff has been unable to fill the spot-news block of the existing show. We could ask staff to also retain the weekly news meeting rundown documentation where they evaluate what stories stations have generated each week that might be useful for the national newscast. An analysis of these two measures could provide insight on the network's capacity for expansion. If the current news program has to scramble to fill its weekly news hole more than once every two months, I don't think the network would be ready to take its next step. There should be a reliable overcapacity of stories on a weekly basis before IRN moves to a longer program or more frequent broadcasts.

Technical Capacity Benchmarks

Much of my focus on technical development suggests moving away from physical transportation of tapes and the use of the telephone, to using internet acquisition/distribution technologies instead. Evaluating whether internet capacity is installed is easy. But evaluating whether this internet capacity is reliable is another story, and it's especially important in Sierra Leone working conditions. Extended periods of dual-distribution via couriers and internet should be conducted and evaluated before IRN relies on the internet. Anything less than a 90 percent internet transmission success rate would be cause for concern, in my opinion, and grounds to hold off moving to internet reliance until the bugs are worked out.

Financial Capacity Benchmarks

Something more easily measured is money. The National News has been launched without a budget, and without determining if it can sustain itself financially with the advertising breaks built into its format. This should not happen again. The costs of future expansion projects must be calculated, along with reliable revenue projections. IRN should not dilute the quality of its existing projects by launching new services that it cannot afford to sustain.

Challenges

Lack of Formal Operating Budget

When the idea surfaced for a national newscast, it was assumed that the major costs would be to hire a staff and create a studio. Operational costs have not been mapped out and the news team now operates without a formal budget.

Because the annual operating costs have not been calculated, the news team doesn't know how much money must be raised to keep the project alive. They don't know if the current advertising availabilities built into the news magazine format are sufficient to support the program's production costs. They cannot pace their spending into monthly or quarterly targets to ensure that they don't consume money too quickly. They cannot adequately plan major activities such as election coverage. They work day-to-day, hand-to-mouth. For example, there were days when we sat for several hours in Freetown unable to call IRN stations for news because we had to wait for cell phone top-up credit cards to arrive from TDS.

I asked what the bottom-line budget was for the project, and was told "we're working on that." For the sake of financial transparency, sustainability, grant writing, and editorial independence, the news project needs a formal budget, a formalized process for requesting grant money from TDS, and a formal memorandum of understanding with TDS about how the two organizations will work together.

It is commendable that SFCG/TDS has carried the development of the IRN news; this project could not have launched without this assistance. And certainly the news program will depend on utilizing SFCG/TDS resources for the foreseeable future. But eventually the news and IRN itself need a working budget. Without one, the news is vulnerable to shifting global priorities by SFCG, and to any change of staffing or falling out among key role players in Sierra Leone.

Costs include generator fuel, office rent, salaries, cell phone use, office supplies, production supplies, etc. Revenues include advertising, spot production, foundation grant writing, and in-kind support from TDS. Developing Radio Partners can assist IRN in crafting a budgetary baseline and financial development plan for the news and other IRN programs.

Lack of Legal Status for IRN

Currently IRN exists as an association and has not incorporated. There are costs to incorporating, and risks. But until IRN becomes a legal entity, its sustainability remains vulnerable. IRN cannot raise funds itself and relies on others to control its finances.

While SFCG/TDS has an established track record of fundraising, there remains the potential for a conflict of interest. SFCG/TDS is not a news organization, and its senior staffers are involved in social advocacy work, the kind of advocacy that the IRN National News is likely to cover. This does not present a problem at the moment because everyone is on friendly terms. But as a matter of institutional design, IRN news needs to move toward financial independence. This could raise a significant challenge if TDS and IRN plan to join together to form a single entity.

News organizations create firewalls between the financial and editorial sides of their operations. Effort is needed now, in the early days, to get this kind of organizational structure in place for IRN's news operations. This involves the separation of financial and programming roles, currently filled by one person at IRN. It involves the creation of a financial mechanism that ensures grant revenue and advertising receipts generated by IRN news remain separate from TDS funds. It involves the development of an annual budget to

guarantee that IRN news has a reliable operating cash-flow. It involves ensuring that IRN staff members that produce news programs, manage news operations, or control news funds can conform to the network's code of conduct (see Appendix 3).

Too Many Projects, Too Few People

The IRN staff seems stretched too thin. The project coordinator is paid part-time, and besides overseeing the news each week, he has the IRN itself to run, as well as his own radio station. Three staffers now produce a 15-minute newscast and two 30-minute editions of *Paliment Bol At* each week, assist a weekly one-hour *Election Talk* program, and will soon be involved in other election-related projects.

The addition of a fourth person will ease pressure at the production level. But the management of IRN needs staffing support. The separation of financial and editorial responsibilities, needed for organizational reasons, creates the need for both a Programming Director and a Financial Director. When the network begins to sell advertising, produce spots, launch a website, seek foundation grants, and move to more-frequent program distribution, it will be too much for one part-time person to handle.

Competition: Cotton Tree News (CTN)

The IRN National News has launched at the same time that another major news initiative, Cotton Tree News, has hit the airwaves.

CTN is based at Mount Aureol College, and has substantial international financial support. CTN is hiring eight upcountry correspondents and plans to offer per-story payments to IRN-station reporters who contribute stories to CTN (IRN offers no compensation). Cotton Tree News is now on the air daily.

In the next month, CTN plans to launch two-hours of election-related reporting daily, broadcast three times, and will provide a free satellite dish to IRN stations who agree to carry the coverage. CTN is currently heard on the Mt. Aureol station, an IRN member, as well as United Nations radio. It has offered its programming to state-run radio if they agree to air the show without editing it.

It seems that CTN's approach is to improve Sierra Leone journalism by training its next generation of journalists at the college. It has an impressive newsroom, with ten new audio workstations.

CTN faces two challenges. First, it is a two-year project, after which it may scale back to become a student-run journalism-lab news operation. Second, it needs to branch beyond the campus station and UN radio to reach a sustainable audience. UN radio is scheduled to close next year.

CTN poses two challenges to IRN.

The first challenge is not immediate. CTN news is daily and IRN news is weekly. There's plenty of space for both programs to co-exist on-air. However, as IRN develops and reaches a point where it's ready to broadcast daily, it's unclear if CTN will have beaten IRN to the punch. IRN has utilized a sustainable grassroots development approach, which will allow it to grow over time. CTN's financial structure is the opposite, and it's unclear what kind of newscast it will be able to air when its initial funding runs out.

The second challenge is immediate. CTN and IRN are competing for the same news stories, and in some cases are asking the same upcountry reporters to file stories. I spoke with CTN

Project Coordinator Anne Bennett from Foundation Hironnelle about this, and she said that CTN does not want to strip IRN of its upcountry reporting capacity. I advise that IRN engage in discussions with Anne to be sure that both organizations find a way to work cooperatively upcountry rather than competitively.

Other Project Activities

Briefly noted:

- I attended the monthly IRN station manager meeting in Kambia on April 4. It was fascinating to see that IRN has established a peer-review mechanism where the community radio movement can offer advice on how to resolve conflicts within a member station. IRN does seem to have invested considerable energy in establishing a cooperative base of support before launching the national news. This will help ensure the news program's success because the show is seen as a joint effort. Everyone is a stakeholder and wants to succeed.
- I participated in a planning meeting for *IRN Election Talk*. This limited-run weekly show is being supported by BBC World Service Trust Sierra Leone Elections Project Director Hassan Arouni. The launch meeting helped outline the program structure, and developed a launch list of program topics.
- I visited six IRN stations during my time in Sierra Leone (Radio Tombo, Radio Gbaft, SKYY, KISS, Democracy Radio, and Radio Mt. Aureol). Most of these were short drop-in visits to say hello and see their facility. At Democracy Radio I conducted a two-hour training session on Adobe Audition audio editing software.
- I did not get to set up mini production facilities at community radio stations, as envisioned in the Terms of Reference. No equipment had been secured for this aspect of the mission. This activity can be a major focus of continued training initiatives for IRN news, which should focus next on building the network's newsgathering capacity at the station level.

Appendix 1

TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR WORK WITH IRN NATIONAL NEWS PROJECT

Background:

SFCG and MFPD have been in partnership since the start up of the SFCG programme in 2000. As the proprietor of two radio stations in Sierra Leone with the largest coverage, MFPD is a key strategic partner with SFCG and has contributed airtime and many ideas to the development of TDS, the independent production studio of SFCG in Sierra Leone.

IRN, a co-creation of MFPD and SFCG in the 2002 elections when through collaborative both worked on Election Day reporting for the 2002 General and Presidential elections fulfilling the information needs of the populace. The partnership further developed in a joint radio production and airing of a radio programme called “Paliment Bol At” which SFCG hosts and support the producers in their studio whilst the radio stations provide free airtime. In 2004, IRN and SFCG also reported on the local council elections and expanded its programme to cover local council issues and activities.

The process of institutionalizing itself, also contributes to the transition strategy of SFCG. IRN has forged a partnership with MFPD to host it organizationally. IRN will service the member stations with national news, which they contribute to and it can develop other centralized functions as the solidarity is built.

While MFPD has undertaken technical support to radios, it is apparent that there are other expressed needs, which IRN can address. In the quarterly IRN meetings the radio stations have mentioned training, equipment and access to more information as priority needs.

As the 2007 general and presidential elections approach, IRN in collaboration with MFPD has recently received grants from The Canadian High Commission in Cote d’Ivoire and Free Voice in Holland. The two grants seek to support IRN through MFPD and to building MFPD in its leadership and organizational capacity so as to capacitate IRN in building its leadership, institutional and membership capacity. The projects’ main objectives for IRN include:

- Providing a central hub for gathering news stories from around the country and making them accessible for broadcast by local radio stations.
- Building the capacity of the leadership of IRN and its affiliate station staff

From the 11th-25th November 2006, SFCG sought the services of a consultant to conduct an assessment around the capacity of IRN member stations to produce the national. News. The consultant visited 10 IRN member stations (Radio Bintumani, Eastern Radio, Kiss 104, Radio Gbafth, Radio Moa, Radio MODCAR, Radio Tombo, Radio New Song, Radio Maria and Radio Mankneh) representing the various regions of Sierra Leone and produced a report with recommendations.

As a follow up to the recommendations from the report, SFCG requires technical assistance to support IRN in the implementation process. SFCG is seeking support from an intern/colleague who can assist IRN in achieving its aspirations.

Major Responsibilities:

IRN is committed to bringing news from the community stations into a central news programme and sending it back out through their network producing the first membership based news production as a service to its membership. However the staff at IRN do not have

much news production experience and this is an area that is specifically weak in the radio stations. Therefore the major responsibility of the consultant is to support IRN to produce its community based national news once weekly.

Specific Duties:

Working with the IRN Coordinator at their office and production studio and with the IRN team of 4 producers, the Consultant will have the specific duties as below.

- Review recommendations from assessment report
- Work with the two newly recruited IRN producers in developing a format for the news
- Develop a format for receiving news items from the radio stations as well as sending finished products to the station
- Conduct news gathering and writing training sessions for IRN stations
- Working closely with *Paliment Bol At* team and the newly recruited staff around conceptual development
- Assist production team in identifying and developing news angle on emerging issues.
- Participate in production, team and planning meetings of IRN.
- Work closely with IRN stations and identify needs of reporters in the field and keep coordinator/management informed of threats and opportunities for the project.
- Work with SFCG to set up mini production facilities in community radio stations
- Support practical production skills training as and when necessary.
- Finally SFCG would like recommendations from the consultant at the end of the working period to indicate the way forward for IRN for the IRN news project according to his/her own experience.

SFCG and IRN will be responsible for the following:

1. Provide transportation to facilitate the work of the consultant.
2. Link consultant to IRN stations in Freetown and the provinces.
3. Provide report and minutes of IRN meetings.
4. Schedule appointments for the consultant.

The consultant will be responsible for the following:

1. Formulating the IRN editorial framework and agreement on design of the news.
2. Jointly produce the first 3 set of IRN national news with IRN team.
3. Workable delivery plan for IRN National news.
4. Holding practical training sessions with the IRN production team.
5. Submit a final comprehensive report that documents the process and methodology of the IRN news.

The contractor will receive assistance from:

- Ambrose James, Country Director, SFCG in Sierra Leone
- Ransford Wright – IRN Coordinator
- Andrew Kromah – Executive Director MFPD

Deliverables:

Within the time frame, the deliverables are:

- Formulate IRN Editorial framework and agreement on design of the news
- Jointly produce the first 3 set of IRN national news with IRN team
- Workable delivery plan for IRN National news

- Forward plan of action for IRN news project

Appendix 2

IRN Training Handouts

IRN National News

How to Produce and Edit the Weekly Program

Monday & Tuesday

- We receive stories on cassette or by phone.
- Edit these stories to the proper length, roughly 1:00 to 1:20 on tape.
- Write the presenter introduction, headline for this particular story and technical information on a story format sheet in the computer. You will find the blank form in the show folder for that week's show.
- We use computer-format dates for each show: Example: 20 April 2007 is 070420. Example: 13 June 2008 is 080613.
- We also receive briefs for the show. Enter the briefs into the blank form in the show folder for that week's show.

Wednesday

- We tape and edit the station news editor interview. If you tape the interview earlier in the week, do not edit the tape until Wednesday. That is because this segment may run as short as 3:15 on tape, or as long as 5:15 on tape, depending on how many stories we have received and how much airtime we must fill with the interview block.
- The show producer copies the headlines from each story format sheet and pastes the text into the show opening and show closing forms. The blank copies of these forms are in the computer in a folder for that week's show.
- The producer then prints all forms for the presenter to read the next morning.

Thursday

- We record the program presenter links first thing in the morning.
- Record the opening of the show as one audio file.
- Record all the spot news bulletin links in order, along with the ending of the spot news bulletin, as one audio file.
- Record the introduction of the focus interview and the ending of the focus segment as one audio file.
- Record the briefs introduction as one audio file.
- Record the show closing as one audio file.
- Then build each major segment of the show as a separate Adobe Audition session: spot news bulletin, focus interview, news briefs. Mixdown each session into a separate audio file.
- Then take the show opening, the spot news bulletin mixdown, the focus interview mixdown, the briefs mixdown and the show closing and put them together with the music as a new Adobe Audition session. When you mixdown this session, you will have a complete show.

Friday

- We make the cassettes or CD copies of the show by noon.
- We call all IRN stations in the morning to find out what stories might be available for the next week's show.
- We fill-in the story tracking form on the computer, to indicate which stations have submitted spots, briefs or the interview. We must do this every week to make a record of the program.
- We burn the data-CD copy of the show for our archive...the CD should hold up to 10 or more copies of the show, archived in .mp3 format.
- We have our editorial meeting at 2 p.m. to plan the following week's show

IRN National News

How to Edit a Spot News Story

Listen

- Do not begin to edit at first. Listen to the story to be sure you understand it.
- If someone is reading the story to you on the speakerphone, use the minidisc or the studio workstations to record a copy so you can play it back later and listen more carefully the second time

Ask Questions

- Is the news item interesting or does it have an impact on people's lives? If not, what can be included to add listener impact?
- Is the story told in a clear way? If not, what can the reporter do to be more easily understood?
- Is the story about one thing? IRN station reporters tend to go to meetings and read the agenda on-air as their report. Is there a way to get the reporter to focus the story on one most-important element?
- Are important details missing? If so, is there a way the reporter can find out this information and include it? Often the reporter knows the details but decided to skip them or forgot to include them under deadline pressures.
- Are there any date references like today or "this week" or "tomorrow"—those must be deleted for the IRN version because the time reference is no longer valid by the time we air the story
- Are there facts or allegations in the story that should be attributed to a source?
- Are people attacked without a chance to respond? If so, we should delete the attack from the story.

Speak to the Station

- Ask the reporter to revise to the story if necessary
- Do not use words like "fix" or "improve" the story—the reporter will be insulted
- Instead, use words like "nationalize" the story or make some "adjustments"
- If the story has a lot of unnecessary information in it, don't bother asking the reporter to delete this. We can easily delete material on Adobe Audition. Use the reporter's time to include new information or to polish the language or shift the focus of the story

- We can't make every story perfect. The quality of stories will improve over time as training takes hold at stations. Do your best to work on the major problems with a story.

Shorten

- A lot of stories can be strengthened by shorting them in Adobe Audition.
- Also, you can often delete the first sentence of a voice report and use the information for the IRN program presenter introduction.

Be a Diplomat

- Remember to thank and compliment people on their work
- Make them feel good about sending stories to IRN

IRN News Editor Conference

How to Nationalize Community Radio News

What makes a national story?

- Something important that everyone in the country needs to know
- Something interesting that everyone in the country would want to know
- Ask yourself: why would someone in another part of the country want to hear this story?
- Think about whether the event in your community is an example of a larger issue.
- Meetings are not stories. What happens at the meeting is the story.

Covering events and issues

- Look for the reasons behind why things are happening: what are the root causes of this event or policy?
- Look for the impact of things that are happening: how will this affect people's lives?
- Find concrete examples—make it real.

Effective news sources

- Experts or officials can speak with authority and give you the big picture
- Everyday people can speak from experience and give you the human impact

Effective soundbites

- Qualities of a good soundbite: Emotion, opinion, personal experience, conviction, urgency, passion, persuasion

Effective narration for IRN stories

- KISS: Keep it short and simple
- Write like people talk
- Avoid specific date references

Story structure

- Set the scene
- Identify the problem
- Examine solutions if possible
- Look to the future

Editorial Process

- IRN will call your station each week to ask for story ideas
- IRN will work with you to revise your story for national use
- IRN can edit your story for you if your station does not have the technical capacity
- IRN has a code of conduct for member stations

IRN News Editor Conference

Talking the News

Each week IRN will interview news editors to learn what has been happening in their communities. Here are tips to prepare.

Content

- Pick three or four top stories to talk about, you can't cover everything
- Pick stories that are of national interest or impact
- Don't forget that colorful events or cultural festivals can be newsworthy too
- IRN will call on Friday afternoon or Monday morning to let you know that your station has been selected and ask what you might want to talk about.
- Don't worry if it is a slow news week in your community...tell IRN about recent happenings in the past few weeks...look for trend stories not just recent events

Preparation

- Do not write out every word you plan to say, just write down bullet points of the highlights. You will not be reading, but talking.
- Write questions for the IRN interviewer to ask you. Two questions per story.
- Keep your answers short, only 15-20 seconds per question
- Practice your interview before IRN calls...talk your answers out loud without reading your notes.

Production

- IRN will call or record you on Wednesday morning.
- The segment lasts 3:15 to 5:15 on tape, but the discussion will last longer and IRN will edit the recording down to time
- IRN might ask to do a second take if there were technical problems
- Do not read a script, that will sound artificial and won't feel like a real conversation. Talk normally, like you are at a dinner table telling the news to your family or friends.
- IRN might ask you to record your end of the phone call in your studio or on a portable recorder, and then send the tape to Freetown. IRN will then edit both ends of the call together for better audio quality than cell phones provide.

Appendix 3

IRN CODE OF CONDUCT

Preamble

Members of IRN radio stations cognizant of the role election monitoring plays in ensuring free and fair elections and our commitment to provide access to information by the citizenry, voluntarily declare and agree to collaborate under the appellation Independent Radio Network (IRN), hosted by the organizational platforms of Search for Common Ground/Talking Drum Studio and Media Foundation for Peace and Development. IRN therefore, with a membership network of independent radio stations sharing resources in terms of personnel, airtime and expertise to promote democracy and good governance, sharing a dedication to ethical behaviour, adopt this code to declare the network's principles and standards of practice:

1. Strive for accurate and balanced information and exercise care to avoid inadvertent error.
2. Diligently seek out subjects of news stories to give them the opportunity to exercise their right to reply.
3. Identify all news sources except when disclosure betrays journalistic confidence or endangers source. The public is entitled to as much information as possible on sources' reliability.
4. Make certain that headlines, sound bites and quotations do not misrepresent news/story. They should not oversimplify or highlight incidents out of context.
5. Avoid undercover or surreptitious methods of gathering information except when traditional open methods will not yield information vital to the public. Use of such methods should be explained as part of the story.
6. Avoid stereotyping by race, gender, age, religion, ethnicity, geography, sexual orientation, disability, physical appearance or social status.
7. Give voice to the voiceless; official and unofficial sources of information can be equally valid. A member shall protect confidential sources of information.
8. Distinguish between advocacy and news reporting. Analysis and commentary should be labeled accordingly.
9. Distinguish news from political advertising and shun hybrids that blur the lines between the two.
10. Use special sensitivity when dealing with children and inexperienced sources or subjects.
11. Recognize that gathering and reporting information may cause harm or discomfort. Pursuit of the news is not a license for arrogance.
12. Recognize that private people have a greater right to control information about themselves than do public officials and others who seek power, influence or attention. Only an overriding public need can justify intrusion into anyone's privacy.

13. Be cautious about identifying juvenile suspects or victims of political malpractice/crime.
14. A member shall not accept bribes nor shall he/she allow other inducements to influence the performance of his/her professional duties.
15. Avoid conflicts of interest, real or perceived.
16. Remain free of associations and activities that may compromise integrity or damage credibility.
17. Refuse gifts, favors, fees, free travel and special treatment, and shun secondary employment, political involvement, public office and service in community organizations if they compromise journalistic integrity.
18. Disclose unavoidable conflicts of interest.
19. Be vigilant and courageous about holding those in power accountable.
20. Deny favored treatment to political advertisers and special interests and resist their pressure to influence news coverage.
21. Admit mistakes and correct them promptly.

Photos



Salamatu Kemokai and Ransford Wright work on launch program script



John Campbell and Salamatu Kemokai write the launch program script



Michael Jamiru edits the launch program.



Michael Jamiru interviews an INR station news editor for the launch program.



John Campbell records reports from IRN station reporters



IRN station news editors come to Freetown for workshop exercises



Typical upcountry IRN station studio: Radio Tombo.



Some upcountry stations are receiving new production equipment.



The IRN news compiles field reports from station-based reporters like Ibrahim Conteh.