The Partnership for Media and Conflict Prevention in West Africa

Supporting the Media in Liberia:

A Review of the Media Landscape for the Post-Conflict Transition Period

January 2004

Contributing Organisations:

United Nations Development Programme
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
Press Union of Liberia
Panos Institute West Africa
Media Rights Agenda (Nigeria)
Media Foundation for West Africa
International Media Support
International Federation of Journalists
Canadian Journalist for Free Expression/ International Freedom of Expression Exchange
ARTICLE 19

**The findings in this report are based upon
a joint mission to Liberia in December 2003**

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Acronyms

CEDE	Centre for Democratic Empowerment
CJFE	Canadian Journalist for Free Expression
CPA	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
DDRR	Disarmament, Demobilisation, Rehabilitation and Reintegration
ECOMOG	Economic Community of West African States' Monitoring Group
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
IFEX	International Freedom of Expression Exchange
IFJ	International Federation of Journalists
IMS	International Media Support
JPC	Justice and Peace Commission
LBS	Liberian Broadcasting System
LIJ	Liberian Institute of Journalism
LINA	Liberian News Agency
LURD	Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy
MFWA	Media Foundation for West Africa
MISA	Media Institute of Southern Africa
MODEL	Movement for Democracy in Liberia
MRA	Media Rights Agenda (Nigeria)
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NPFL	National Patriotic Front of Liberia
NPP	National Patriotic Party
NTG	National Transitional Government
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
PIWA	Panos Institute West Africa
PUL	Press Union of Liberia
RUF	Revolutionary United Front – Sierra Leone
TDS-L	Talking Drum Studio – Liberia
UNDG	United Nations Development Group
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNMIL	United Nations Mission in Liberia
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WAJA	West African Journalists Association
WAN	World Association of Newspapers

1. Executive Summary

1.1. Introduction

This report outlines the findings and conclusions derived from the assessment mission undertaken by the 'Partnership for Media and Conflict Prevention in West Africa' to Liberia in December 2003. This mission brought together the expertise of a number of the national, regional and international media development and freedom of expression actors.

The report seeks to layout collaborative approaches for supporting the media during the immediate and longer-term transition periods, both in terms of overcoming obstacles and developing capacities and resources, as well as contributing towards the creation of lasting peace, stability and democracy.

> Please note that the report is not an exhaustive analysis and audit of the numerous potential sectors and roles of the media in Liberia. Rather, due to the need to combine breadth and conciseness, the document presents an overview of a number of broad Focus Areas, providing recommendations on potential departure points for specific activities to be further developed by specialised actors in those fields.

1.2. Structure of Report

The publication is divided into three main parts. This structure aims to keep the report as simple as possible so that it can be easily and selectively read by those interested in specific issues within the broader fields of media development and freedom of expression.

The first part includes a brief summary of the **Background** and **Rationale** for the Partnership and its involvement in Liberia, as well as the current **Media Landscape** and **Political and Security Situation** in the country. These chapters have been kept brief as they contain general information that can also be accessed elsewhere.

The second part consists of the nine **Focus Areas** (please section Table of Contents) identified by the assessment mission. Each area is divided into a **Description** section, which aims to provide a detailed overview of some of the main activities and actors, including facts and figures about individual media, and **Assessment** section, which provides an interpretation of the situation based upon the specialised expertise of those organisations contributing to the report.

The third part outlines the **Recommendations** for activities in each of the Focus Areas. These are divided into short and medium/ long-term perspectives. In addition, further details are also provided about the **Partnership Activities and Funding**, as well as **Concluding Remarks**.

1.3. Overview of Focus Areas and Recommendations

The following section **briefly outlines** the descriptions, assessment and recommendations per Focus Area. These are **described in further detail** in the main body of this report (Sections 6 and 7).

1.3.1. Media Policy and Legal Reform

Description and Assessment

In terms of legislation, Liberia provides the basic framework for the exercise of freedom of expression, the media and cross-ventilation of information and ideas. However, there appears not to have been consistent conscientious action on the part of previous governments to formulate goals, objectives and policies towards the practical implementation of the various enactments.

The various institutions established to facilitate policy formulation on media related matters were either moribund or were so tied to the government that they were themselves shackled down by bureaucratic restrictions. Hence, they have not been able to match action with the growing and changing pace in the world media environment. Consequently, the media in Liberia has been unable to effectively perform its core functions in a democratic society.

The basic legal and institutional frameworks in Liberia that provide for the regulation of the media include the 1986 Constitution of the Republic of Liberia; Decree No.46 of 1981; National assembly Act, creating and establishing the Liberian Information Service, of 26 February 1958; National Assembly Act, Constituting the National Communications Policy and Regulatory Commission, of 1989; Accra Peace Agreement of August 2003; and Press Union of Liberia Code of Ethics and Conduct.

Media regulation and invariably the avenues through which the citizens of Liberia exercise their Constitutional right of freedom of expression are predominantly under the regulation and control of the government. In this regard, all the institutions vested with policy formulation and regulation of the media are currently government appendages, devoid of the requisite independence to effectively perform their roles. There is therefore an urgent need for a complete overhaul of the entire media industry and related institutions, with an initial focus on the legal and institutional framework.

Recommendations

1. Existing legislation and structures in Liberia should be reviewed as part of a process of securing the necessary freedom of expression environment. In this regard, a detailed study of the legal, institutional, regulatory and policy framework needs to be conducted, leading to a programme of comprehensive reform and the emergence of a legal and institutional framework for the media, which takes local circumstances into account, but nevertheless meets international standards.

2. Expertise should be made available to the Ministry of Information and National Transitional Government (NTG) to develop a media and communication policy that caters for the different administrative problems the media face, including licensing, legal reforms, statutory media commission/Ombudsman, a freedom of information Act and so forth.

3. State policy should progressively revive and privatise the Liberian News Agency (LINA) and the New Liberia in order for them to properly function as public service media.

1.3.2. Print Media

Description and Assessment

With just under twenty newspapers in Liberia, there is a widespread perception that the print media market is saturated. However, despite the widespread perception that the newspaper market in Liberia is saturated, newspapers remain relatively weak with little discernable impact on the economic, social and political life of the country. Most newspapers reportedly sell less than 3,000 copies a day across the country, despite there being a population of over three million people. The print media is plagued by a myriad of problems that undermines its capacity to contribute substantially to the reconstruction and democratisation process in Liberia.

The newspaper environment in Liberia is far from healthy. It faces a wide range of challenges, including that newspapers are poorly funded and undercapitalised, they lack basic infrastructure and communication facilities, they often have inadequate management capacities, reporters and editors for the most part have little formal professional training, and the difficult political, economic and social environment under which they operate means that there is very little market for media products.

A comprehensive reform of this sector is therefore required in order to redress this situation and make newspapers an important and effective tool for rebuilding Liberia. This should involve technical and logistics support, a complete overhaul of their operational strategies, improving the skills and competencies of different categories of personnel, providing essential infrastructure support and printing options, and reviewing the policy and legal framework under which they operate.

Such support should assist the print media in addressing issues such as poor funding, lack of basic infrastructure and distribution facilities, inadequate management capacities, insufficient formal professional training for reporters and editors, and limited marketplace for media products.

Recommendations

1. Individual newspaper houses should be provided with small-scale equipment to assist them in their newsgathering efforts in the immediate term.

2. A number of newspapers require assistance is typesetting and laying out their stories and articles as many currently have to either rent computer time or produce their materials at business centres.

3. Technical assistance should be provided for business planning, development and management to ensure that the newspapers become viable businesses.

4. The media community in Liberia should be encouraged to, and assisted in, entering into negotiations with the relevant government authorities to secure a waiver on tariffs and taxes on essential media materials.

5. The feasibility of running a communal printing press to service the newspaper industry in Liberia should be explored.

6. Pending an improvement in the security situation outside of Monrovia, the feasibility of establishing a joint distribution system for newspapers should be explored.

1.3.3. Independent Broadcast Media

Description and Assessment
Whilst the radio landscape in Liberia is both relatively plural and diverse, there is no functioning national television station. Although there was previously a TV channel under the Liberian Broadcasting System, this has not been operational for over a decade.

Poor governance and conflict have adversely affected the independent broadcast media over the past decades. During the conflict between 1989 and 1997, the network of community-based radio stations that had reportedly developed from local grassroots initiatives, was almost entirely destroyed. However, the radio environment in Liberia has been notably redefined since the departure of Taylor. For the meantime, the post-conflict period has served to open up this sector, thereby providing new opportunity.

The three broad basic categories of radio in Liberia (these being religious, private/commercial and community-based broadcasters) are neither clearly defined nor regulated by national media policy. Thus real pluralism and quality of radio content is not guaranteed. There are no clear and transparent frequency allocation procedures, whilst licence fees are reportedly prohibitively expensive. In terms of professional standards, in order to provide the number of professional qualified journalists necessary for the development of the independent broadcast sector, there is a need for coordination of capacity building and training activities. Based upon transparency and fairness, access to financial resources amongst the different types of stations should also be reviewed. However, the current plurality of broadcast media weighed against marketplace realities indicates that long-term viability for all stations cannot be guaranteed.

A number of the private stations reportedly viewed the establishment of UNIMIL Radio as a 'threat'. In this regard, whilst UNMIL radio may have an important role to play in the short-term emergency humanitarian phase, the long-term presence of UNMIL Radio may undermine the viability of local stations in terms of attracting listeners, hiring staff and generating income. This is particularly so if UNMIL Radio engages in programming activities that fall outside of humanitarian and UN information.

Recommendations

1. Whilst avoiding duplication with existing activities, assistance could be provided in the form of funding, equipment and power supplies to allow those broadcast media producing reliable and objective information to continue work in the immediate term.

2. A forum should be convened among all stakeholders to discuss the definition of a national broadcasting policy framework that recognizes the three sectors of independent broadcasting (religious, private/commercial and community based) alongside the public service broadcaster and UNMIL Radio.

3. A 'sound bank' of programmes should be established to collate and disseminate regular co-productions on issues of public interest.

4. Building upon existing structures, activities could be undertaken to further facilitate networking amongst community radio stations.

5. A feasibility study should be undertaken to assess the potential for a fund to be established in coordination with a specialised international actor for supporting the development of the long-term viability of private and community based radios.

1.3.4. Public Service Broadcasting

Description and Assessment
The Liberia Broadcasting System (LBS) has fallen into a state of disrepair over the past decades. LBS has been left to struggle along with meagre resources and there has been no significant outside assistance due to the ongoing political instability and intermittent conflict.

What is positive given the state of LBS is the sense of optimism within the institution. The country is at a critical crossroads and LBS has an important role to play in the coming years. Although LBS has never been a 'public' broadcaster, the leadership seemingly recognises that it must become one if it is be a substantive player that provides independent, objective and reliable products to the general public.

LBS appears to be ripe for a partnership to provide support and assistance in redeveloping its role and activities. Whilst it comes from a history of state broadcasting there are signs that it is now starting to act like a public service broadcaster. However, it is nevertheless important to initiate comprehensive discussions on what public broadcasting should be. As a state broadcaster, LBS was obliged to be the voice of the government. There were serious consequences for those who strayed from this. Experience from other situations indicates that it is not unreasonable to assume some of the 'old' mindset might still remain.

Regional and international support for LBS needs to be initiated as soon as possible. In this regard, it requires a significant amount of assistance with everything from equipment to training. To achieve the short-term goals in a systemic way that best serves the interests and needs of the Liberian Broadcasting System (LBS), a long-term commitment (of two years or more) and fund-raising efforts of a number of organization will be necessary.

Recommendations

1. A follow-up mission should be conducted to Liberian Broadcasting System (LBS) to develop a comprehensive plan to address its needs over the next two years, including a training programme and the delivery of urgently needed equipment.

2. A range of public service broadcasting Acts should be compiled for the LBS management and the Ministry of Information to consider.

3. An advisory committee of local, regional and international actors should be established to monitor the progress of the development of public service broadcasting in Liberia.

4. In the longer-term, the perspectives for developing a public service television station should be considered.

1.3.5. Humanitarian Information

Description and Assessment
In Liberia there are a number of media outlets that make up the basis for developing capacity to provide public information services. There can be, however, inbuilt incoherencies between the humanitarian imperative and long-term objectives of stability, democratisation

and development. The need for quick impact information interventions to meet the challenges of the DDRR process and security issues should find a working model that incorporates the local media in the overall strategy. Only then can the short-term assistance correlate with the longer-term objectives of building a solid professional and pluralistic media in Liberia.

Nevertheless, timely and accurate information must be recognised as integral to humanitarian action. Providing information concerning UN activities, security, human rights, health care, and other key topics will be of vital importance during the short-term transition phase in Liberia. A lack of such information can generate scepticism, mistrust and even hostility. Support to media should therefore be an essential part of humanitarian assistance.

If there are no existing outlets capable of performing this vital service to society they may have to be established by the international community in collaboration with local and regional stakeholders. However, although international actors and UN agencies should play a coordinating role in ensuring that humanitarian information is provided in an accurate and timely manner, this should not threaten the independence and professionalism of the local media. In this regard, the role of the UN in providing humanitarian information should be mainly in the emergency phase and care should be taken to ensure that local media do not simply become mouthpieces for UN and international information products.

In this regard, whilst the UN is likely to remain the main centre for news on the peace process and humanitarian stories, local stations should increasingly be encouraged to bring such issues into their normal programming. However, humanitarian information should be made distinct from other parts of broadcasting and targeted information is not to be confused with independent news reporting.

Recommendations

1. The UN country team working group on public information and advocacy could play coordinating roles in developing strategies for UN humanitarian information/ content-based assistance.

2. In the short-term emergency phase, OCHA/IRIN together with partners could form a so-called clearinghouse or information providing facility for humanitarian/ UN/ public information.

3. Building upon what is already being done, the capacity of community radio, LBS and local independent stations could be strengthened to broadcast humanitarian information. Although such activities could be problematic, it is vital to work with community radios to develop their sustainability and any initiatives should neither encroach on independent journalistic professionalism nor develop local media as simple 'mouthpieces' for UN information.

4. UN personnel and others in the humanitarian community should be encouraged to deal directly with local radio stations, offering themselves for interviews and taking part in discussions.

5. Based upon capacity building provided to the local media, they should be encouraged to develop their own professional programming on humanitarian themes.

1.3.6. Associations and Networking

Description and Assessment

The media in Liberia has been pressured and abused during the past decade of political authoritarianism and intermittent conflict. Nevertheless, the main association, the Press Union of Liberia (PUL), has managed to retain a relatively coherent and unified approach in the face of obstruction and harassment by the authorities. In addition, there are two other associations of note, these being the Newspapers Publishers Association of Liberia and Female Journalists Association of Liberia (FEJA).

In the current situation, the media community needs strong coordinated support in order to strengthen their standing and role, and to ensure that there is access to the necessary equipment, training, policy development, legal reforms, and so forth. In this regard, the media associations should play a central role in the future development of the media environment in the country.

Due to the past record and current importance and visibility of the PUL, as well as the role it should ideally play in the democratisation process, the Union could be an ideal focal point for media development activities in Liberia both in terms of association building and wider initiatives supporting professional advancement.

Recommendations

1. A well-resourced and functional Press Centre should be developed in cooperation with the Press Union of Liberia (PUL) catering for all of the media community.

2. The role of the female members of PUL should be strengthened, including improved visibility of female journalists in the management of the Union.

3. The Publishers Associations should be assisted with accessing office resources and developing project management skills. In addition, its role vis-à-vis the PUL printing press should be clearly defined and linkages with international partners, such as the World Association of Newspapers (WAN), facilitated.

4. The role of the Publishers Association should be supported in strengthening the media houses in terms of accessing equipment, loan programmes, minimising costs through cooperative activities, and so forth.

5. The Female Journalists Association should be provided with assistance to reassert its role and activities, as well as developing its structures, reviewing and developing its regulations and organizing its members so that they are more involved in the activities of the Association. The Association should also establish contacts with other national and international media women's group.

6. A self-regulatory body should be supported in order to monitor the media in the democratisation process, with a specific orientation towards the elections.

7. Although the present economic situation of the media hinders setting up collective agreements, discussions should nevertheless take place on how the issues of low wages and poor working conditions can be addressed.

1.3.7. Monitoring and Advocacy

Description and Assessment

During the Taylor years, there was a progressive development of activities on monitoring human rights violations and advocacy for protection and reform. In particular, the monitoring of press freedom questions took on an even more sustained strength than in other aspect of human rights. From early on in the Taylor regime, the Centre for Democratic Empowerment (CEDE), Justice and Peace Commission (JPC), Press Union of Liberia (PUL), US-based Carter Center and Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) worked together to try to prevent the spate of attacks on the media by security forces. These joint initiatives led to the evolution of a coalition of civil society groups for human rights advocacy. This included the PUL, CEDE, JPC, Bar Association and others.

From 2000 onwards, international monitoring and advocacy was intensified. Regular monitoring was carried out and under collaborative programmes, MFWA, International Media Support (IMS) and International Freedom of Expression Exchange (IFEX) set up a network of monitors working in Monrovia and the provinces. The monitoring provided regular information, which was used in advocacy campaigns.

The main previous obstacle to monitoring and advocacy was the sheer ferocity of the regime's repression of the media. In this regard, the transitional period is critical for strengthening institutions and mechanisms for press freedom and rights generally. However, an essential concern about rights in Liberia is that the country has a weak tradition of governmental commitment and culture of rights protection and advocacy. Moreover, the outcome of the 2005 elections do not automatically guarantee respect for rights or press freedom. It is therefore necessary to support the continued strengthening of civil society to ensure effective popular defence and promotion of rights in the future.

Recommendations

1. The existing network of monitors should be reactivated and expanded to include monitors of other rights (in specific steps must also be taken to include women in the network of monitors and special attention shall be paid to monitoring in rural communities).

2. A series of training programmes should be conducted to enhance the monitors skills in investigating abuses.

3. The monitoring process should be provided skills and facilities that give it capacity to investigate and document cases to support proposed legal cases.

4. Orientation and training programmes should be organised for the judicial service and security agencies on human rights, with an emphasis on freedom of expression.

1.3.8. Safety and Legal Aid

Description and Assessment

Harassment and intimidation of journalists has been commonplace in Liberia during the past two decades. Autocratic political structures and a politically controlled judiciary have meant that independent voices amongst the media challenging the legitimacy and actions of the authorities have often been harshly dealt with. This harassment has mainly taken the form of arbitrary arrests and detention, and threats of physical violence.

The increase in fighting in and around Monrovia during the summer of 2003 brought additional risks for media practitioners, although the safety situation has significantly stabilised following the signing of the Accra peace agreement and arrival of UN peacekeepers. At the time of writing, the UN was still to extend its control into regional areas, as a result of which safety conditions for media practitioners are expected to improve significantly. In addition, since the signing of the peace agreement, threats of violence and attacks against media practitioners perpetrated by the authorities and other groups have abated considerably.

The application of the law in Liberia has been seriously wanton over the past decades, with little recognisable due process and direct manipulation of the judiciary by the authorities. Despite this situation, a number of organisations, such as the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission (JPC) and National Bar Association (NBA), have provided legal aid to those being harassed by the authorities.

Through both enhancing safety and providing legal aid when necessary, journalists in Liberia can be effectively assisted in fending off or avoiding harassment and intimidation. In consideration of Liberia's recent history, intimidation of journalists may also resume if and when sensitive issues relating to political and/or economic interests are addressed. In this regard, even if a functioning judicial system may be in place to help defend the media, a basic knowledge of safety issues and access to legal aid will almost certainly remain necessary.

Recommendations

1. The PUL should act as a focal point on safety issues in order to develop awareness amongst national media practitioners and provide them with a 'point of contact' for accessing further knowledge and assistance on safety related issues.

2. The work of national, regional and international freedom of expression organisations in following the application of the law should be facilitated.

3. Possibilities for a coordinated legal aid fund under the auspices of the PUL should be assessed.

4. National legal aid mechanisms and organisations should be supported to overcome the obstacles that exist in the provision of assistance to media practitioners in areas outside of Monrovia.

1.3.9. Training and Media Content

Description and Assessment
The state of media professional standards is directly connected with the country's political tragedies, particularly over the past three decades or more. In this regard, while journalistic standards may vary somewhat from one newspaper or radio station to another, the general picture is one of low professional quality. Skills in content output, such as reporting, writing, editing and broadcast production, require improvements from the basics to higher levels of handling complex issues and situations by media.

These weaknesses affect all aspects of the profession including management and technical aspects. The publication of material with potential libel content, and speculative and opinionated news writing, provides ammunition for undemocratic forces to attack the media. By far the most important concern for improving standards, however, is for the public to be better provided with objective and reliable information.

Liberian journalists eloquently expressed at a public forum with the mission members their desire to receive training. However, the most fundamental obstacle to training is human resources. At the moment the country lacks the qualified and experienced personnel. Moreover, of the prevailing media, few have staff capable of providing substantive on-the-job training. The economy of the media is another major obstacle to any kind of progress and over the years international NGOs and donor agencies have traditionally borne the costs for training.

Formal training of journalists in Liberia is in its infancy and what modest progress was made previously has been destroyed by the conflict. The two main training institutions in the country are the Mass Communication Department of the University of Liberia and Liberian Institute of Journalism (LIJ). Though the university programme and LIJ are in dire need of assistance, their presence is critically important for sustained medium and long-term training programmes.

The complexity and urgency of the imperatives of post-conflict political and social reconstruction make the need for rapid improvements in media standards urgent. In specific, there is an urgent need to organise and facilitate training and capacity building of media to meet the challenges of the upcoming elections. The demands for relevant, useful, reliable information, and consistent, educated or enlightening media to foster the processes of democratisation and unity can be met only through media with high professional capacity and qualities that engender credibility.

Recommendations

1. Training initiatives should be undertaken to meet immediate challenges, covering journalistic and writing skills, as well as be geared towards improving the competence of reporters and editors in specific areas relevant to the transition period (specifically including the elections in 2005).

2. Editors and managers should be engaged in forums to discuss the importance of training and participate in the design of activities, as well as to provide a good grounding on ethical issues and editorial balance.

3. The development of a training programme in the medium and long-term must be carefully coordinated. A meeting (or roundtable) of national and international organisations should therefore be held to produce a comprehensive multi-year training document.

4. The training programme should aim to support and develop the capacity of the Mass Communications Department and LIJ in order to sustain long-term needs in the country, including promoting scholarships and secondment of external experts and training of trainers programme for Liberian experts, as well as infrastructure and facility assistance to equip the institutions.

5. A programme providing mid-career, refresher, up-grading training projects should be initiated at the two training institutions. In addition, there should be specialised training in investigative journalism, agriculture and rural issues, public health, business reporting and so forth.

6. Production and other technical personnel should be provided with training on modern information and communication technologies and equipment.

7. A process should be initiated for assisting media proprietors and managers to develop their skills in business planning and management.

8. A special programme will be necessary to orient and train personnel, directors and staff of new regulatory bodies for media pluralism and freedom.

9. A special programme should assist information officers and public relations officers in the government.

2. Introduction

2.1. Partnership for Media and Conflict in West Africa

Following the discussion at the 'Assistance to Media in Tension Areas and Violent Conflict' seminar hosted by UNESCO and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) in Stockholm in May 2003, a meeting was held in Accra in July 2003 to further analyse media and conflict issues in West Africa, with a specific focus on Liberia and the Ivory Coast.

This meeting in Accra was hosted by the Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA), in collaboration with International Media Support (IMS), the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO)[1]. As a result of this gathering, the 'Partnership for Media and Conflict Prevention in West Africa' was formed, incorporating those organisations contributing to this report as well as others.

The objective of the Partnership is to facilitate the provision of rapid and collaborative support to the media to pre-empt and mitigate the causes and effects of conflict and their humanitarian consequences. The Partnership utilises the diverse expertise and resources available amongst national, regional and international stakeholders, thereby offering a unique approach in the provision of assistance. In this regard, holistic interventions relevant to local needs and reflecting the objectives of international institutions can be designed and implemented covering the broad spectrum of media related concerns that may arise as a result of conflict.

In addition, the variety of stakeholders incorporated in the partnership provides a wide range of potential approaches, from UN agencies to regional media associations and local civil society actors. This collaborative process serves to enhance the potential impact and create stronger sustainability options for activities, through ensuring long-term perspectives based upon strong local ownership and the division of tasks between short and long-term international actors.

2.2. Mission to Liberia

Following the preparation of a strategic platform for the Partnership, it was agreed that Liberia would constitute the first joint collaborative approach. Between 10 and 16 December, a team of regional and international media organisations travelled to Liberia to carry out an assessment of the media situation in the country.

Those organisations involved in the mission to Liberia included:

- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO)

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[1] Participants at the meeting included (in alphabetical order): ARTICLE 19, Association of Journalists for Peace in Cote d'Ivoire, International Federation of Journalists, International Media Support, Media Action International, Media Foundation for West Africa, Media Rights Agenda (Nigeria), PANOS – West Africa, Press Union Liberia, Sierra Leone Association of Journalists, Union des Journalistes de Cote d'Ivoire, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

- United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)
- Press Union Liberia (PUL)
- PANOS – West Africa
- Media Rights Agenda (MRA - Nigeria)
- Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA)
- International Media Support (IMS)
- International Federation of Journalists (IFJ)
- Canadian Journalist for Free Expression (CJFE)/ International Freedom of Expression Exchange (IFEX)
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The joint objectives of the mission were to:

1. Review the media situation in Liberia and the effects of the conflict;

2. Compile a list of the main national, regional and international stakeholders in Liberia, including a comprehensive overview of their previous, current and foreseen activities;

3. Produce a list of priority areas clearly outlining both immediate and development related recommendations for support to the media and humanitarian information needs, including proposed activities and funding requirements;

In addition to the above objectives, the team was requested by UNESCO to provide input to the ongoing joint UNDG/ World Bank needs assessment for the transitional government period. Under the sectoral cluster on Governance and Human Rights, the mission prepared recommendations for an immediate and medium-term approach to the development of media and freedom of expression in Liberia.

In the immediate term, it was crucial for the mission to provide recommendations that will address issues of relevance to the DDRR process. However, it was also underlined that whilst the media has a role in peace-building, it is important that it develops as a free and independent actor with a responsibility for watching over good governance, public accountability and transparency. In this regard, the mission was keenly aware that whilst the Accra peace agreement represents a real opportunity for the country to break the cycle of conflict and poor governance, the success of the peace-building and democratisation process in the months and years ahead is by no means guaranteed.

2.3. Acknowledgements

The mission met with a wide range of Liberian media professionals, national and international civil society and NGO representatives, officials from the transitional government, United Nation agencies and European Union, as well as members of the diplomatic community. In this regard, the mission members would like to thank all those individuals and organisations that provided extensive and candid information about the situation in Liberia.

To enhance local Liberian involvement in the process, the Press Union of Liberia (PUL) organised an open forum where the mission members had the opportunity to present some

of its findings and discuss key issues with Liberian media professionals. In addition, the team met with the Chairperson of the National Transitional Government, Gyude Byrant, and the UN Special Representative, Jacques Paul Klein[2].

Specific thanks are also expressed to the UNMIL, UNDP, OCHA, the Press Union of Liberia (PUL) and Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace for their in-country assistance in planning and executing the mission in December 2003.

The mission was jointly funded by UNESCO, the Danish NGO Ibis, and International Media Support (IMS). Several team members also covered their own expenses through their respective organisations.

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[2] Jacques Paul Klein holds the titles of UN Under-Secretary General, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Coordinator of United Nations Operations in Liberia.

3. Rationale

3.1. The Liberian Context

The media in Liberia has been severely affected by decades of political repression and civil strife. This has restricted freedom of expression in the country and led to the substantive degradation of the media environment. For the transition process building towards elections foreseen for 2005, as well as the longer-term perspectives of the country, the development of professional media associations and outlets will be fundamental for building peace and stability.

A functional and professional media is a central factor in any programme of peace building, social reconstruction and national reconciliation. In this regard, the media in Liberia will be essential for the cultivation of a culture of public accountability, rule of law and democracy. Accessible independent media will be a fundamental building block for facilitating and supporting the process of social, economic and political transition.

Although possessing significant potential, the media in Liberia is currently facing serious obstacles and may wish to have external support in implementing the institution-building, governance and development programmes foreseen for the country. Radio stations, newspapers, printing houses and training institutions all require urgent capacity-building and professional development. However, such assistance can only be practically relevant if it is informed and driven by a needs assessment of the current media landscape and the requirements therein. It is also important to identify the challenges that could confront any post-conflict media development programme prior to the initiations of activities.

Over the years a number of media support and advocacy organisations have provided support to sustain independent media in Liberia. However, due to the nature of the government of Charles Taylor, the majority of interventions have either ceased or been undertaken at arm's length. In this regard, the creation of the transitional government and arrival of United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) presents new and promising opportunities for assisting the development of the media in the country.

3.2. The Partnership Approach

The international landscape of organisations and actors involved in media development, conflict resolution, human rights and promotion of fundamental freedoms in West Africa is broad. However, although conflict situations stimulate increased international attention by such actors, it also brings inhibiting factors that reduce institutional capacities and prevent rapid collaborative responses. A lack of coordination can result in the various actors pulling in different directions and placing focus on divergent goals. On the other hand, coordinated action and combined advocacy can have significant results.

Furthermore, the ability to access funding quickly and have in place the necessary methodological tools for rapid implementation is essential. In this regard, the creation of a preset strategy specifically tailored to a region or circumstance can assist in allowing for the quick identification of immediate needs, whilst also providing the opportunity for short and long-term activities to be overlapping and mutually reinforcing.

Although the field of media development in conflict is relatively new, significant lessons have been learnt over the past years through the activities of the international community in areas such as Kosovo and Afghanistan. The overarching conclusions are that coordinated

and collaborative action by the international, regional and national media communities is crucial for effectively addressing emergency situations, both in terms of short and long-term objectives and activities.

In the short-term, effective and collaborative action depends on the rapid and timely identification of the 'media landscape' and the potential trends and needs therein. At the same time, the numerous potential media development activities need to be prioritised and pooled among the specialized actors. In order to seek avenues in which these lessons could be applied in practice in West Africa, the Partnership for Media and Conflict Prevention was formed.

4. Political and Security Situation in Liberia

4.1. Background to Conflict

Over the past two and a half decades the West African state of Liberia has been plagued by political autocracy, economic stagnation and civil unrest. Prior to the food riots of the late 1970's, the country had been typified by relative political and economic stability. However, a period of intermittent instability and economic decline followed the coup of Samuel Doe against the government of William Tolbert in 1980.

In 1989, the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) lead by Charles Taylor began an uprising against the government, which resulted in the execution of Doe by an NPFL splinter group and the deployment of an ECOWAS peacekeeping force. Despite a number of attempted disarmament processes and peace agreements, the country continued to suffer civil strife and conflict both between and amongst rebel splinter groups, the Liberian army and ECOWAS peacekeepers, until in a peace agreement was signed in 1995 opening the way for Charles Taylor and the National Patriotic Party (NPP) to win the presidential and parliamentary elections in July 1997.

In the late 1990's, Liberian instability took on an increasingly regional perspective with assertions from Ghana and Nigeria that Taylor was supporting the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in Sierra Leone. At the same time, Taylor accused Guinea of aiding armed groups fighting in northern Liberia, culminating in cross-border incursions and fighting between Liberian and Guinean armed groups in April and September 1999[3].

Despite the seeming potential for democratic and economic progress following the 1997 elections, ingrained autocratic, nepotistic and corrupt practices continued. This period saw the formation of armed groups in opposition to the government, including the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) and Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL).

4.2. Conflict Escalation and the Accra Peace Agreement

In March 2003, the situation flared as fighting came to within 10 kilometres of the capital, Monrovia. In early June, the announcement of an indictment by the Special Court for Sierra Leone against Taylor for war crimes in Sierra Leone coincided with a new stage in the conflict as fighting intensified[4]. In specific, as described by the Liberians themselves, the fighting saw three peeks with World War I around 4 June, World War II around 25 June, and World War III around 18 July[5].

After a protracted and uncertain process, a deal to end the fighting was agreed whereby Taylor would accept asylum once an ECOWAS peacekeeping force arrived in the country. In this regard, Nigerian peacekeepers arrived in August, accompanied by a presence from the United States military, which later withdrew in September/ October.

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[3] This section makes extensive use of the text and facts presented in 'Country Profile: Liberia' text on the BBC World News website (http://news.bbc.co.uk)
[4] This section makes extensive use of the text and facts presented in 'Country Profile: Liberia' text on the BBC World News website (http://news.bbc.co.uk)
[5] 'Liberia: Security Challenges' p. 5 (International Crisis Group - Africa Report N°71, 3 November 2003, Freetown/ Brussels)

As per the deal agreed, Taylor handed over power to his Vice-President, Moses Blah, and left for Nigeria on 11 August. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA)[6] was then signed in Accra between the government and rebel groups on 18 August paving the way for a power-sharing administration, with the warring parties being allocated 15 of the 21 ministers in the government, as well as the chairmanships of several public corporations. In addition, the CPA foresaw elections being held by October 2005. The Agreement also allowed for the appointment of Gyude Bryant as the Chairperson of the National Transitional Government (NTG) and he formally took office on 14 October.

In September 2003, the UN Security Council established the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL)[7]. The mandate for UNMIL has been described as 'tough' and 'comprehensive', and includes the deployment of 15,000 troops and 1,100 international civilian police officers[8].

The strong regional and international presence in Liberia presents a significant opportunity to bring stability to the country in the short term and establishes the groundwork for addressing the country's problems and needs in the medium and long-terms.

4.3. Current and Future Perspectives

At the time of writing the security and political situation in the country looked promising, although both the previous precedent and current potential for renewed instability remains. The UN mission was increasingly establishing its presence, with approximately one-third of the peacekeepers already based in and around Monrovia; the transitional administration was in place and initiating the functions of government as foreseen under the Accra peace agreement; and the DDRR (Disarmament, Demobilisation, Rehabilitation and Reintegration) process was underway, although only its initial stages with an estimated 48,000 to 58,000 former combatants to be processed over the coming five to six months[9]. The United Nations has confirmed that the delayed disarmament programme in Liberia will restart on 15 April 2004 after a four-month delay[10].

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[6] Comprehensive Peace Agreement between the Government of Liberia and the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) and the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL) and Political Parties (Accra, 18 August 2003)

[7] UNMIL was established under Resolution 1509 and is led by the Special Representative of the Secretary General and Coordinator of the UN Mission in Liberia (SRSG), Jacques Paul Klein.

[8] 'Liberia: Security Challenges' p. 1 (International Crisis Group - Africa Report N°71, 3 November 2003, Freetown/ Brussels)

[9] 'US envoy asked to intervene in disarmament dispute' (IRIN, Monrovia, 28 November 2003)/ 'Rebuilding Liberia: Prospects and Perils' (International Crisis Group, Freetown/ Brussels, 30 January 2004)

[10] UN confirms disarmament will restart on 15 April, Copyright (c) UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs 2004

5. Media and Conflict in West Africa

5.1. Regional Conflict Perspectives

West Africa presents a volatile situation in which countries that seemingly have prosperous and stable prospects can quickly become embroiled in conflict. Conversely, countries engaged in violent conflict have taken promising steps towards the peaceful resolution of tensions with the support of regional and international actors. The picture is therefore mixed, although the presence of conflict in West Africa carries the threat to halt or regress progress not only at the national level, but also at the regional level. In this manner, the regional perspectives and implications of these national conflicts are all too apparent with the threat that violence and instability may spread across borders.

ECOWAS promotes regional political and economic integration, and citizens can therefore move freely from one country to another without legal or political restraint. Besides the periodic summits of heads of state or government and of ministers, there is a regional parliament whose mandate is developing slowly. Other regional inter-governmental consultative bodies are also in operation. Under ECOWAS, the governments in the region have made progress as a collective in interventions to resolve the major conflicts that have ravaged countries in the region. This has included holding peace negotiations as well as deploying peacekeeping operations. International interventions in these conflicts under the UN – prominently in Liberia and Sierra Leone – have followed and or complemented initiatives by the regional organization.

The particular situation of recurrent conflicts in West Africa makes a partnership for conflict resolution and media freedoms pertinent. The regional character and implications of conflict means that their resolution demands collaborative national, regional and international perspectives.

5.2. Regional Media Developments

In the late 1980s and 1990s, the region experienced dramatic progress in the development of media pluralism. Ironically too, it is in the same period that the region was to be wracked by the worst eruptions of violent political conflict since the independence decade of the 1960s.

In this situation, a number of clear observations regarding the media's place and fate in these conflicts can be derived. The experiences have been common in some instances, as well as particular in others. In all cases, however, the media have generally been the losers and the worse off as a result of the conflicts. In most instances the effects have been devastating in the loss of human life and destruction of infrastructure.

Considering that the underlying social and political circumstances leading to all the region's conflicts have involved broad or specific issues of democracy and human rights, the media have often also featured centrally in the politics of the conflicts: as targets and victims of violence, as advocates for peace and human rights, or partisan promoters of factional interests.

In virtually all cases of conflict, governments and so-called rebel forces have sought to control or destroy the media. While governments have arrested and detained journalists and banned media during periods of conflict, rebel forces – exemplified in Liberia and Sierra Leone – have targeted newspapers and radio stations for destruction, burning them down,

ransacking their facilities and putting them out of use. In the 1990s, for example, more journalists were killed in the Sierra Leone civil war than in any single conflict in Africa before it. Liberian rebel groups had been notorious also for capturing and murdering journalists. All in all, journalists have suffered greatly as a result of conflict in West Africa.

While in Cote d'Ivoire there has been a remarkably low rate of journalist deaths in conflict or as a result of the conflict, media houses have not been spared the intimidation and violent harassment that usually accompany conflict. Here, however, it is allegedly been supporters of the government that have been the principal perpetrators of attacks on media and journalists.

However, the media in Cote d'Ivoire, more than elsewhere in the region, have also shown the most partisan involvement in promoting the conflict. The media have orchestrated the propaganda fuelling the conflicts on all sides of the political divide. Owned by the political parties or their leaders, the press in Cote d'Ivoire have had to spearhead the politics of their owners, trumpeting the xenophobia, ethnocentrism, and sectarianism that mark the ideological and political expressions of the country's divisive politics. The media's generally negative role in the promotion of conflict in Cote d'Ivoire has been so pronounced that it came up for singular concern in the UN-initiated peace talks and the resultant agreement document in Paris in early 2003.

Elsewhere, on the other hand, the media have been at the receiving end of attacks largely because they have invariably attempted to stand up against human rights violations, official corruption, or to stake a position against the brutality of conflict.

However, within the obviously constrained space available to perform their functions during conflict, the media have shown professional as well as technical limitations in covering the politics of the conflicts, the humanitarian consequences, and serving as generally reliable sources of information. An important explanation of this is that even prior to the outbreak of the violent conflicts, media professional standards in the affected countries were low. The legal and political conditions for the exercise of press freedom and independence were also tenuous and the economic base of most of the press was weak.

One important casualty of conflict is the public, or state-owned broadcasting services. While they were used as instruments of government propaganda before the outbreak of violent conflict, in Sierra Leone the facility was totally neglected and left to deteriorate. In Liberia, rebel forces looted the equipment in the 1990s and rendered the service nearly useless. In Cote d'Ivoire where the system has remained without the havoc done to the counterparts elsewhere, its legal status is in transition and its role as a public service facility is as questionable as that of the rest in much of the region.

As a result of the issues and concerns mentioned above, conflicts in West Africa raise for consideration several issues and needs of the media for involvement to promote processes for conflict resolution and peace. Amongst others, these include the legal and policy framework for media freedom, independence, and journalists rights; journalists' safety and protection; ownership and economic and technical viability; professional standards, ethical responsibility, capacity and competence.

6. Focus Areas

The sections below provide a Description and Assessment of both the obstacles and opportunities in each of Focus Areas assessed during the mission to Liberia in December 2003.

The **Description** sections aim to provide an overview of some of the main activities and actors in a particular sector. In this regard, the text includes details and figures about the media in order to orientate the reader and provide a more factual review of the landscape.

The **Assessment** section provides an interpretation of the situation based upon the specialised expertise of those organisations contributing to the report. This section also leads towards the recommendations for actions, which are outlined in the subsequent chapter.

The **Focus Areas** covered in this section include:

- Media Policy and Legal Reform
- Print Media
- Independent Broadcast Media
- Public Service Broadcasting
- Humanitarian Information
- Associations and Networking
- Monitoring and Advocacy
- Safety and Legal Aid
- Training and Media Content

The Focus Area sections are based upon information gathered during the mission to Liberia in December 2003. Factual information provided is therefore mainly derived form verbal interviews and has been attributed where possible. However, this information does not provide an exhaustive picture of all media related activities and stakeholders in Liberia, and is therefore for orientation purposes only. In this regard, readers should recheck information prior to use.

6.1. Media Policy and Legal Reform

6.1.1. Description of Landscape

In terms of legislation, Liberia provides the basic framework for the exercise of freedom of expression, the media and cross-ventilation of information and ideas. However, there appears not to have been consistent conscientious action on the part of previous governments to formulate goals, objectives and policies towards the practical implementation of the various enactments.

The various institutions established to facilitate policy formulation on media related matters were either moribund or so tied to the government that they were themselves shackled down by bureaucratic restrictions. Hence, they have not been able to match action with the growing and changing pace in the world media environment. Consequently, the media in Liberia has been unable to effectively perform its core functions in a democratic society. Those who struggled during the conflict to discharge their functions did so in troublesome circumstances.

The basic legal and institutional frameworks in Liberia that provide for the regulation of the media include:

The 1986 Constitution of the Republic of Liberia
Chapter III of the Constitution generally provides for Fundamental Rights. Article 15 specifically provides for freedom of expression; which entails the right to hold opinions, right to knowledge, academic freedom to receive and to impart knowledge and information, right of access to libraries to obtain such knowledge, freedom of speech, the right to be silent, freedom of the press, right of access to mails, telephone and telegraph; access to state information and its functionaries; access to state owned media, even to express contrary views. These rights are subject to limitations in a state of emergency declared in accordance with the Constitution and/or through Court proceedings with respect to defamation, invasion of privacy rights, false advertising and copyright infringement.

Articles 16 and 17 also made related provisions, as they respectively guarantee protection of privacy of the individual, family, home or correspondence, subject only to an order of court, as well as the right to peaceful assembly, expression of grievances to the government, right to form and belong to associations, trade unions, political parties and other organisations, and right to refuse to so associate.

Decree No.46 of 1981
This Decree basically created the Ministry of Information, which is responsible for the direction and supervision of all internal and external matters relating to the information programmes of the government. In this regard, it selects in accordance with government policies, issues to be broadcast or covered by news stories et al, for internal and external distribution by the government. It also liases with other governmental and private institutions to facilitate communication programmes. Moreover, it is responsible for countering unfavourable propaganda.

The Public Affairs Bureau is a Department of the Ministry of Information. One of its functions is to screen and accredit all local and foreign visiting journalists. The National Communications Bureau is another arm of the Ministry. Part of its functions are to regulate journalists and journalism in Liberia, with due consultation with professional journalists organisations. In furtherance of its regulatory functions, it registered journalists in Liberia on

an annual basis before a journalist could practice his/her profession. Any journalist who practiced without due registration was guilty of a misdemeanour of the first degree. It also makes appropriate recommendations to the Minister for the suspension of the licence of a journalist, who is prejudged to have violated the provisions of the Decree or regulations made under it. In addition, the Communications Bureau is vested with the important function of regulating the importation, exportation, publication and distribution of books, periodicals, newspapers, booklets, tracts, and so forth, including the right of the government to ban any of these and to set and enforce journalistic standards in relation to these activities.

National assembly Act, creating and establishing the Liberian Information Service, of 26 February 1958
Section 10(b) makes it a misdemeanour for any commercial business, social, civic, philanthropic and religious group to refuse or unduly delay giving information requested by the Director of the Research Division of the Liberian Information Service.

National Assembly Act, Constituting the National Communications Policy and Regulatory Commission, of 1989
This legislation established the Communications Policy and Regulatory Commission within the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications. Its functions among others are to formulate policies and regulations to govern the creation, establishment and operations of all electronic and print media. It also monitors, evaluates and gives licences to all media institutions and persons utilising electronic and print communications and other ancillary facilities and services. It is further vested with the power to impose punitive measures, including fines and revocation of licence, for violation of its policies and regulations.

The Accra, Ghana Peace Agreement of August, 2003
Part Six, Article XII, provides for Human Rights issues generally. Subsection 1(b) provides for freedom of expression, association and conscience. Subsection 2(b) enjoins education of the society on human rights issues, through schools, the media et al.

Press Union of Liberia Code of Ethics and Conduct
The PUL has a Code of Ethics and Conduct. This provides internal self-regulatory mechanisms for journalists. It seeks to ensure that journalists adhered to the highest ethical standards and professional competence in performing their duties.

6.1.2. Assessment of Situation

The clause "being fully responsible for the abuse thereof" contained in Article 15 of the Constitution appears to have created a latitude of loopholes for the flagrant infringement of freedom of expression and the media guaranteed thereof. There is no definition or laid down parameters to determine what constitutes an abuse in that provision. That clause could lend itself to multiple interpretations, depending on the facts, circumstances and the purpose sought to be achieved by the interpreter. An act perceived as an abuse could have both criminal and/or civil imputations.

The lack of specific definition of the term "abuse" in the context of the Constitution makes it extremely difficult to know exactly at what point a media publication, delivered speech or any form of the exercise of freedom of expression transcends the bounds of civil defamation to sedition, or even criminal malevolence. For instance, sometime between 1999 and 2000, Dr. James D. Torh, was charged by the Liberian Government with sedition based on an address he presented at the gathering of students at the William V.S. Tubman High School. In that address, he specifically stated that governance of the country was being run from the pocket of President Taylor. He also dismissed the claim made by the government that the country was impoverished, which he felt was contradicted by the presence of flashy and

expensive cars on the streets of Liberia. He further stated that Charles Taylor had failed Liberians, and therefore called on those who voted for and supported him to withdraw their support. Another example was in August 2001, when Sam O. Dean, the Editor of the Monrovia Guardian, was charged with criminal malevolence, based on a report published against the Chief of Police in Liberia. So in the estimation of the government, the above acts constituted an abuse of the freedom of expression provision. Therefore, they were criminally prosecuted.

On the issue of curtailing freedom of expression during a state of emergency, it was reported that in April 2003 the government of Liberia banned public preaching, which the Director of Public Affairs in the Ministry of Justice justified as a measure to protect public safety. International standards, especially Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, prescribe that no restriction on freedom of expression or information on the ground of national security/safety may be imposed unless the government can demonstrate that the restriction is prescribed by law and is necessary in a democratic society to protect a legitimate national security interest. The burden of demonstrating the validity of the restriction rests with the government. In this light, the provisions on national security used by the Liberian government during the emergency period contravened international standards.

As previously stated, Decree No.46 of 1981 established the Ministry of Information. Sections 31.5 and 31.8 respectively created the Public Affairs Bureau and the National Communications Bureau, both under the Ministry of Information. These bodies perform functions that are very significant and fundamental to the Constitutionally guaranteed freedom of expression. However, these bodies appear to be far from independent, because they are purely government departments headed by government officials and so the issue of independence does not arise at all in any of the enactment, as they perform their functions bureaucratically in accordance with the dictates of the government. The enormous powers vested in the Ministry over journalism and the organs that propagate freedom of expression create more than enough room for repression. Annual registration of journalists could only go to provide the government an opportunity to sanction a journalist who does not adhere to its dictates. The criminal sanctions that follow failure to register are an intimidating tactic and the same applies for the quasi-judicial powers of the National Communications Bureau.

Section 10(b) of the National Assembly Act, creating and establishing the Liberian Information Service, of 26 February 1958, makes it a misdemeanour for any commercial business, social, civic, philanthropic and religious group to refuse or unduly delay in giving information requested by the Director of the Research Division of the Liberian Information Service. An application of this enactment to media outfits will certainly negate the core sanctity of journalism profession. It is one that holds sacred the fiduciary obligation not to betray its informants, especially on sensitive national issues or confidential disclosures. This law should have clearly defined the kind of information that commercial business entities are under compulsion to disclose on request. To leave it as wide as it is means that all manner of information must be disclosed on request by the research Division and this, as earlier stated, will work adversity against journalists in their professional operations.

The National Assembly Act of 1989 established and constituted the National Communications Policy and Regulatory Commission under the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications. The composition of this body is the absolute prerogative of the President. This creates the situation where there is no independence for this very important body in performing the functions of regulation and licensing of media bodies. It gives ample room for the government to dish out licences to loyalists and on the basis of other political and personal considerations. Obviously members are likely to demonstrate their allegiance to the President in performing their duties. In this situation it becomes easier for the

government, through the Commission, to deal ruthlessly with dissenting journalists and media institutions.

Media regulation and invariably the avenues through which the citizens of Liberia exercise their Constitutional right of freedom of expression are predominantly under the regulation and control of the government. In this regard, all the institutions vested with policy formulation and regulation of the media in Liberia are currently government appendages, devoid of the requisite independence to effectively perform their roles. The result in the past was that either policies were not formulated in keeping with the changing trend of events and developments, or unilateral actions were irregularly taken at the peril of media practitioners. There is therefore an urgent need for a complete overhaul of the entire media industry and related institutions.

The transitional government through its relevant ministries (specifically the Justice and Information Ministries) made commitments to this assessment mission to assist with ensuring respect for the right to freedom of expression and collaborate closely with civil society, especially the PUL on the reform of media policies. It was agreed that media is a key pillar of the national reconstruction Liberia has embarked on since the signing of the Accra peace agreement.

6.2. Print Media

6.2.1. Description of Landscape

Introduction
Newspapers produce information in permanent form, which is particularly important for documenting 'history as it is made' for future reference. It should ideally also provide in-depth coverage, as well as analysis of news, events and issues, which radio and television lack the capacity to do. They are therefore important news media, even if the high level of illiteracy in Liberia suggests that their utility is limited.

However, despite the widespread perception that the newspaper market in Liberia is saturated, newspapers remain relatively weak with little discernable impact on the economic, social and political life of the country. Most newspapers reportedly sell less than 3,000 copies a day across the country, despite there being a population of over three million people. The print media is therefore plagued by a myriad of problems that undermines its capacity to contribute substantially to the reconstruction and democratisation process in Liberia.

A comprehensive reform of this sector is required in order to redress the situation and make newspapers an important and effective tool for rebuilding Liberia. This should involve technical and logistics support, a complete overhaul of their operational strategies, improving the skills and competencies of different categories of personnel, providing essential infrastructure support, and reviewing the policy and legal framework under which they operate.

There are approximately 18 newspapers in Liberia, although only a handful of them appear on newsstands regularly. These include The Inquirer, The News, The Independent, Poll Watch, Patriot, New National, Analyst, Evidence, Heritage, National Chronicle, The Telegraph, The New Broom, National Forum, The Liberian Standard, Concord Times, New Liberia, Monrovia Guardian and Daily Times.

Publication and Circulation Figures
As an example from one end of the spectrum, The Inquirer and The News, which are widely regarded as the market leaders, are published five times a week. The Inquirer usually prints 1,000 copies of 8 pages daily, although its sales average 500 copies per day. The News, presently the oldest newspaper in the country, prints 600 copies of 8 pages per day and its sales are less than this figure.

Other newspapers also usually print 8 pages and are published either weekly or two or three times per week. However, circulation figures are not substantial. For instance, the Heritage is published bi-weekly with a print-run of 1,000 copies, although it is not clear how many of these are actually sold. At the time of the assessment mission, the Analyst was being published three times a week (because of the approaching Christmas season, although it usually prints twice a week) and prints 700 copies per edition, out of which it sells 300 copies. The Telegraph, one of the newest newspapers in the country, is published weekly and prints 500 copies each week, selling around 200 copies. In general, the newspapers print between 500 and 1,000 copies per edition, but normally sell less than their print run.

The conflict has severely limited the circulation of the newspapers as they are now restricted to Monrovia only. For instance, Philip Wesseh, the managing editor of The Inquirer, stated that six years ago, the newspaper used to circulate between 5,000 and 6,000 copies per day nationwide. Similarly, Jerome Dalieh, the managing editor of The News, said that when the

paper first started in 1989 it was selling about 15,000 copies per day and circulating in the countryside.

Circulation figures are also affected by high cover prices of newspapers. Paper sells for approximately 20 Liberian Dollars (about 50 US cents), which is high given the income levels in the country. Besides the cover price, high levels of illiteracy in the country also restrict sales, especially outside Monrovia[11].

Infrastructure and Financial Resources
Many of the newspapers lack basic infrastructure. There is no electricity supply in the country, so all the newspapers, like other enterprises and businesses in Liberia, rely completely on generators for their power needs. As generators are expensive, the majority cannot afford to own even small generators and have to rent them and buy fuel, which is also costly.

Local salaries paid to journalists and other professionals in the media industry are reportedly low, with reporters earning between USD 10 and USD 20 per month. Editors appear to be only slightly higher paid, reportedly earning between USD 20 and USD 35 per month. In addition, many of the newspapers are often unable to pay employees in a timely manner, or at all. The result is that many journalists work without pay and have to do other jobs part-time to earn money or depend on incentives from their news sources, given to encourage them to either publish or suppress stories.

Although the condition of some of the newspapers has been brought about by the conflict, during which their offices were vandalised or looted, most of them, which have been established during or after the conflict, have never had the capital to acquire basic facilities and infrastructure.

Printing
The cost of printing a newspaper is the highest operational expense. It reportedly costs approximately USD 165 to print 1,000 copies of every edition of a newspaper, excluding purchasing newsprint and other production costs. For example, The Inquirer and The News each reportedly spend USD 225 daily for newsprint and printing of their newspapers.

There is only one major newspaper printer in Liberia, the Sabannoh Printing Press, which has an effective monopoly. Besides the high cost of printing which has characterised this monopoly, it is also unable to cope with the printing demands of the newspaper industry. The number of pages and regularity of newspapers is in part dictated by the limited capacity of Sabannoh Printing Press as it reportedly has difficulty coping when newspapers attempts to increase their number of pages or the regularity with which they are published[12].

In addition to this, Sabannoh Printing Press was allegedly susceptible to political interference under the Taylor government, which made it possible for the authorities to exercise editorial control over the content of publications. A number of newspaper managers complained that the printers sometimes changed the headlines in their stories and articles after they were submitted for printing without reference to the editor or the publisher, and in some cases,

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[11] Illiteracy rates are reportedly at 80 per cent, meaning that the reading public is relatively small.
[12] For instance, at a meeting held with members of the Partnership on 11 December, Mr. Mohammed Kanneh, the managing editor of The Heritage, said the newspaper, which is published on Mondays and Wednesdays, had wanted to start publishing on Saturdays, but could not because Sabannoh Press was unable to accommodate it.

refused to print a newspaper if prevailed upon by the government not to print a particular critical edition[13].

Early in December 2003 (a week prior to the assessment mission), the Analyst newspaper started printing at another press, Dremags Printing Press. Dremags Printing Press has been in existence for some time as a commercial press, printing documents and other minor jobs. However, it began to try printing newspapers with the Analyst, although it reportedly has limited capacity and the costs are essentially the same as those of Sabannoh Printing Press. There is limited prospect of it having any impact on the printing situation in the country, unless it acquires more printing machines.

Two years ago, the US Agency for International Development (USAID) donated a Heidelberg offset 46 by 64 cm printer to the PUL, along with a generator and lithographic equipment. However, this facility was not reportedly being used at the time of writing mainly because of difficulty in renting or acquiring appropriate premises to install the press, as well as other operational issues.

Distribution
A major challenge in the distribution of newspapers is the security situation in the country, which currently makes areas outside Monrovia inaccessible. Distribution is therefore restricted to the capital city where it is done by vendors who gather at the Sabannoh Printing Press on production days to collect and sell publications for a commission. Although some of the newspapers said they had some subscriptions, it does not appear that any significant quantity are sold in this manner.

Ownership
The ownership structures of the newspapers vary. All the newspapers currently in operation are privately owned. The only government-owned newspaper, the New Liberian, is one of those not being published at the time of writing. The majority of newspapers appear to be owned by journalists under partnership arrangements, whilst business interests also own a few.

6.2.2. Assessment of Situation

The newspaper environment in Liberia is far from healthy. It faces a wide range of challenges; newspapers are poorly funded and undercapitalised; they lack basic infrastructure, including vital communication facilities; they often have inadequate management capacities; reporters and editors for the most part have little formal professional training; and the difficult political, economic and social environment under which they operate means that there is very little market for media products.

Financing
The disruption of the country's electricity supply means that all their newspapers, like other enterprises and businesses in Liberia, have to rely entirely on generators for the power needs. Many cannot afford to own generators. In fact, of those newspapers visited, only one owned a small generator of less than 2 kva. They therefore sometimes have to resort to borrowing generators at high costs, in addition to the equally high cost of buying fuel to power them.

Although a number of the proprietors insist that if they were to receive funding and equipment, their economic fortunes would dramatically improve, the reality seems to be that

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[13] In separate interviews, Mr. Mohammed Kanneh of The Heritage and Mr. Ignatius George, an editorial consultant to The Analyst, complained about such practices.

there is little prospect for their survival on the basis on such support alone. On average, 80 per cent of the income of each of the newspapers reportedly comes from advertising while 20 per cent comes from sales. The possibility of increasing advertising revenue without a drastic solution to the other challenges is problematic as the advert market has seemingly reached saturation. The low circulation figures do not make them attractive for advertisers.

If the on-going disarmament and demobilization process in the country takes its full course and is successful, it is reasonable to assume that access to other parts of the country, aside of Monrovia, will be possible and with it an increased penetration by the newspapers. This could significantly improve circulation figures of many papers, if they are able to put effective distribution mechanisms in place. It could also increase advertising as economic activities increase in those areas outside of Monrovia.

Printing
One of the main challenges that the press in Liberia faces is access to an efficient cost-effective printing press. The existing monopoly in this area has resulted in indirect control over the editorial content of newspapers by a commercial printer beholden to political authorities. However, beyond this, the limited capacity of the printing press has hindered the growth of the newspaper industry in a number of ways. Firstly, it has not allowed newspapers that want to move from being bi-weeklies to dailies to do so, because it reportedly cannot handle the additional printing. Secondly, it has limited the ability of newspapers to increase their pagination, were they are so inclined.

Moreover, a printing press is one of the most vital institutions in the print media business. The general public cannot have access to information without production of the papers that contain it. Therefore, if due to high cost of production resulting from a monopoly situation, or inability of the printer to cope with the pressure from numerous demands wherefore most publications are not printed, or where the government keeps vigil at the premises of the printer to cross check in advance papers for publication and then either prevent or confiscate dissenting publications et al, this has the dangerous potentials of technically depriving the people of exercising and enjoying freedom of expression and of the media.

If a merger of newspapers in the country was undertaken, it could be anticipated that the surviving or emerging newspapers would have to substantially increase their print run to thousands in order to be viable. However, if the number of copies that the printing press can produce remains limited, then the merger would not be able to achieve this. Besides, with the expected improvement in economic activities in Liberia following the peace process, even if no reduction in the existing number of newspapers is achieved, there would still be room for the individual newspapers to develop and expand, for instance, by getting more advertising in a thriving economy, more readership amongst a more financially buoyant population, increasing their print run, increasing their pagination and some of them migrating from bi-weeklies to dailies. The present situation of the printing press will constrain such growth. It could therefore be beneficial if alternative printing presses emerge in the country.

Distribution
The distribution of the newspapers to locations outside Monrovia is currently largely affected by the security situation, although even if the disarmament and demobilisation are successfully concluded, the newspapers will face the additional challenge of efficient distribution nationwide given the poor communication infrastructure.

Most of the newspapers do not have transportation and would have to make use of commercial vehicles for distribution. This would be expensive and difficult for individual

papers to organise given their low level of resources and the lack of national structures to coordinate such distribution. The solution could lie in a joint, or at least, coordinated distribution arrangement that enables participating newspaper organisations to pool their resources and share costs. The possibility of improving on the subscription system should also be explored as this will mean that newspapers can have some guaranteed sales even before they print.

Management, Training and Content
In addition to the technical and infrastructure problems, many newspapers also suffer from poor management and personnel training in a wide range of areas relating to the media business. Few appear to have business plans, although some of them have accountants or business managers. The management capabilities of most of the newspaper proprietors and managers could be upgraded to allow them to operate with enhanced professionalism.

Based upon the current number of pages published by each newspaper, the space available for reporting on the critical issues of peace building, reconstruction and democratisation is severely limited with the result that they are frequently not addressed. Besides, there is sometimes a lack of diversity in the editorial content of the newspapers. For the press to be able to play an effective role in these processes, the problem will need to be addressed particularly by finding ways for the newspapers to profitably increase their pagination and the space devoted to editorial material.

Given the small and poorly developed reading and advertising market, there appears to be no rational explanation for the high number of newspapers in the country. Although a number of the proprietors visited thought a merger of some of the newspapers was desirable, many said it would be extremely difficult to implement, because most were reluctant to lose the prestige of being newspaper owners.

6.3. Independent Broadcast Media

6.3.1. Description of Landscape

Introduction
Whilst the radio landscape in Liberia is both relatively plural and diverse, there are no functioning national television station(s). Although there was previously a TV channel under the Liberian Broadcasting System, this has not been operational for over a decade. TV can be accessed by satellite, but remains the preserve of a few. In addition, there does not appear to be any realistic perspectives for establishing a national TV broadcaster in the near term. As a result, this section of the report deals exclusively with issues relating to radio.

A number of radio stations were visited during the mission in and around Monrovia, including Radio Veritas, Peace FM, Rock FM, Radio DC-101, UNMIL Radio and the Liberia Broadcasting System (LBS).

From the information gathered, it appears that based upon the criterion of ownership, mission and funding, radio stations in Liberia can be roughly divided into the three broad categories of religious, private/commercial and community-based broadcasters. Aside from these three general categories, there are also the public service broadcaster and UN broadcaster. LBS is state funded, whilst UNMIL Radio is run by the United Nations. Many stations cooperate with international actors and broadcast programmes such as those produced by Talking Drums Studios, UN agencies and others.

Background
The broadcast media has been adversely affected by poor governance and conflict over the past decades. During the conflict between 1989 and 1997, the network of community-based radio stations that had reportedly developed from local grassroots initiatives, was almost entirely destroyed.

LBS was also looted and its transmitter removed to be used by Kiss FM, the station of Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPLF). When Taylor was elected President in 1997, he extended this propaganda apparatus by stetting up the Liberia Communications Network (LCN), a conglomeration of radio stations (and newspapers) that he owned either directly or controlled through others. This reportedly included stations such as Kiss FM, Joy FM, Love FM and so forth.

The radio environment in Liberia has been notably redefined since the departure of Taylor. For the meantime, the post-conflict period has served to open up the broadcast media, thereby providing opportunity for new stations to emerge.

Church Stations
Two radio stations were visited that could be placed into the category of church stations. Firstly, Radio Veritas, which is controlled by the Roman Catholic Church, and secondly, Rock FM, which is controlled by the US Pentecostal Churches. As both stations are controlled by religious institutions, they devote a degree of their airtime to religious issues. In addition, this means that religious perspectives sometimes influence editorial policy.

The respective churches fund the radios, although there was some difference between the stations staffing and equipment resources. It should also be noted that Radio Veritas has been operating for a number of years in Liberia, including during the conflict, and has developed a respected professional track record.

Private/ Commercial Stations

The majority of private stations are owned by individuals or companies (although LIJ Radio was sponsored by the Liberian Institute of Journalism), such as Crystal FM, Power FM and DC-101. However, it is interesting to note that three of the newest commercial stations in Monrovia have been launched by media professionals and/or media related institutions. In addition, a number of these stations expressed the wish to produce and broadcast professional news programmes.

Some of these stations are funded through sponsorship and donations from both national and international organisations, although many also rely on generating funds through announcements and advertising. In this regard, it seems that much of the commercial/ private radio sector depends heavily on outside donors to complement revenue generation. Equipment at the stations was often basic, although those supported by external donors often had better facilitates, including digital equipment.

A number of the private stations reportedly viewed the establishment of UNIMIL Radio as a 'threat'. It was felt that because UNMIL Radio could perform a number of functions that they would like to fulfil (such as broadcasting PSAs) and have access to better funding and technical resources, this could potentially limit their ability to attract listeners, hire professional staff and generate income. However, when visited UNMIL Radio had a cooperative approach to developing a professional and sustainable radio sector in Liberia (please refer to UNMIL Radio section).

In addition, a number of private/commercial radios located in Monrovia are reportedly presently on test diffusion, including LIJ Radio, Crystal FM and Power FM. Therefore, counting Radio DC-101, there will be approximately four private/commercial stations in the Monrovia area in the coming months competing for personnel, advertisement and donor assistance.

Star Radio, which was created by the Hirondelle Foundation in 1997 but closed down by the Taylor government in 2000, will reportedly also be restarted. This station previously translated its news into fourteen local languages, as well as English, Liberian English and French. The news bulletins were published daily on the Internet and sent through e-mail to approximately 650 readers, mainly amongst the Liberian Diaspora worldwide.

Community Based Stations

Peace FM (formerly Stone FM), which is run by the Firestone Agricultural Workers, was visited during the assessment mission. This station, which is an example of community-based stations in Liberia, services 75,000 people living in the area of Harbel (the village where the workers of the Firestone plantation live). Funding for the licence and equipment was provided by the workers' union, whilst electricity is given free of charge by the Firestone company, which also provides premises for the radio. Other operating costs are covered by revenues from announcements, a monthly subsidy from the union and voluntary work.

The equipment used by the station is dated and professional training limited, although they have now established cooperative relations with the PUL, IRIN, Mercy Corp and Talking Drums Studios. As can be expected, the majority of programming concerns local community issues, although national and international news is also broadcast. Topics for programmes about local issues are selected based upon public surveys. In addition, programmes from international partners in Liberia are also used after being translated into indigenous languages.

Mercy Corp has initiated an extensive community radio programme with funding from USAID. This project reportedly entails the provision of self-sustaining solar electrical power, digital equipment, and computers for editing and broadcasting for a network of local community stations. A radio production specialist will reportedly also be based in Liberia to work with the stations and establish a network for programme exchanges. At the time of writing, Mercy Corp had initiated activities with three stations in the Monrovia area, with plans to expand the network following the spread of stability in the countryside. It is foreseen that this network will include around 20 stations.

Furthermore, as of March 2003 IRIN Radio formed a partnership with Mercy Corps to provide training workshops and practical assistance in broadcast programme production. IRIN Radio has engaged in co-production work with state broadcaster, ELBC, commercial Monrovia station, DC-101 and Peace FM and has identified several radio stations for training over the next six months. To date, local journalists have been trained in the compilation of reports for broadcast, including field-based reporting, using mini-disc and microphone, editing on computer, script writing and studio recording. A rough guide on reporting techniques was also compiled based on lessons learned in both Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire and has been made available in both English and French.

UNMIL Radio
The UNMIL radio station was established in accordance with the UN mandate for Liberia and is expected to run in its current form until the elections in 2005. The station is well equipped and presently reaches approximately a quarter of the country, although this is expected to expand as the peacekeeping troops established control over the rest of the country. The station currently has a 1 kw transmitter, although it is foreseen that this will be expended to ten 5 kw transmitters across the country.

The station broadcasts 24 hours a day in English and Liberian English, but not in indigenous languages. A focus for the station is the peace and disarmament process, using a variety of programming styles including drama and music. For example, a programme called 'Let's Reason Together' is based around drama, music and folktales, along with a review of the daily newspapers and current affairs.

Although staff are reportedly paid based upon average local rates, it can be assumed that in reality this is higher than the 'true' average as local rates are low. The idea of rotating personnel from local broadcast media through the UN radio as part of a training initiative was raised in discussions. Moreover, it was suggested that local radio stations might take UN programming as a relay service.

However, as mentioned in the 'Private/ Commercial Stations' section, there is anxiety amongst the local broadcast media about the role UNMIL radio. Some local broadcasters feel the station will hinder the development of local capacity, disempower broadcasters and attract capable staff away from local stations[14].

The radio station(s) under the Liberia Broadcasting System are not dealt with as it is more fully addressed in the following section, 'Public Service Broadcasting'.

6.3.2. Assessment of Situation

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[14] As an example from the region, it is noted that the UN radio in Sierra Leone continues to operate, with suggestions that it become a permanent institution.

As a primary consideration, the development of the independent broadcast media in Liberia should be planned within the context of ensuring that the stations have both the capacities and means to contribute to the peace process and democratisation, including holding free and fair elections in 2005.

Media Policy & Allocation of Frequencies
The three categories outlined above (religious/ private-commercial/ community based stations, as well as the UN and public service broadcasters) are neither clearly defined nor regulated by national media policy. Thus real pluralism and quality of radio content is not guaranteed.

There are no clear and transparent frequency allocation procedures for both the high-power FM and Short Wave frequencies, which cover large parts of the country, and the low-power FM frequencies for limited community radio coverage. Furthermore, licence fees reportedly cost USD 3,500, which is prohibitively expensive and does not take into consideration the varying circumstances of the different types of stations.

Professional Training
In terms of professional standards, in order to provide the number of qualified journalists required for the development of the independent broadcast sector there is a need for coordination at the national level. This is particularly so as previous experiences show there is a likelihood for training to be undertaken by a number of external donors without proper linkage between them.

The potential for this process to be coordinated through existing training entities, such as the Department of Mass Communication at the University of Liberia, Talking Drum Studios, PUL and LIJ, needs to be assessed. In addition, specific areas of immediate concern are community journalism and conflict resolution reporting.

Access to Resources
Based upon transparency and fairness, access to financial resources amongst the different types of stations should be reviewed. However, the current plurality of broadcast media weighed against market-place realties indicates that long-term viability for all stations, especially the community-based ones in rural areas, cannot be guaranteed.

The presence of external financing for independent broadcasters, such as UNMIL Radio and Star Radio through the Hirondelle Foundation, could be used as an opportunity for the development of a pluralist radio landscape in Liberia. The place for such stations within the national broadcasting system, the rules and regulations they should abide by, the role they could play for example as a training facilities and as production centres, should ideally be discussed and clearly defined amongst national and international stakeholders.

Furthermore, whilst UNMIL radio may have an important role to play in the short-term emergency phase by working together with OCHA and UN agencies to provide accurate and timely humanitarian information, the long term presence of UNMIL Radio may threatened the viability of local stations in terms of attracting listeners, hiring staff and generating income. This is particularly so if UNMIL Radio engages in programming activities that fall outside of humanitarian and UN information.

6.4. Public Service Broadcasting

6.4.1. Description of Landscape

The Liberia Broadcasting System (LBS) is in a state of disrepair, functioning mainly through the persistence of its employees. Only one of its two buildings is functional, the other being gutted during the years of conflict. There are obstacles in performing the most basic of tasks such as writing a newscast. The newsroom has only two typewriters and it was observed that much of the newscast is handwritten. Moreover, there is only one functioning studio, the equipment in which is old and in disrepair. LBS has been left to struggle along with meagre resources and, because of the conflict, there has been no significant external assistance for years.

What is positive given the state of LBS is that there's a sense of optimism amongst those the mission met with. The country is at a critical crossroads and LBS has an important role to play in the coming years. LBS must literally be built from the ground up and they appear eager to work with international partners who will put much more than just financial resources into helping them do so.

LBS has never been a 'public' broadcaster, although the leadership knows that it must become one if it is to be an important player and truly serve the people of the country. In this regard, international partners are urgently needed to develop and deliver resources and training that is required at every level in LBS.

Liberia Broadcasting System (LBS)
Background
Liberia Broadcasting System was established in the 1940s and is comprised of the FM radio station ELBC, the Short Wave radio and a TV station. The state-owned LBS was not spared during the conflict that engulfed the country. Situated in Paynesville on the outskirts of Monrovia, LBS first suffered the shelling of its FM 89.9 studio and a rocket attack on its main radio/TV building in 1990. The station changed hands several times between troops loyal to the late President Samuel Doe and rebel forces of Charles Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL).

When the ECOWAS Ceasefire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) arrived, NPFL's forces retreating from the city looted nearly all valuable equipment including the station's FM 89.9 transmitter and set up a propaganda station, Kiss FM, in Gbarnga, Bong County, headquarters of Taylor's NPFL. Prior to the battles between the forces of President Doe and Charles Taylor, LBS was given grants and training by the government of Japan.

The station suffered serious neglect during the administration of Taylor. Taylor's Liberia Communications Network (LCN), a conglomeration of radio stations and newspapers, usurped the functions of LBS. Up to Taylor departure, LBS employees had reportedly not been paid for 30 months. The station is also in massive disrepair, with no television broadcasts for 11 years, no short wave broadcast, no outside broadcast equipment and no vehicles.

Current Situation
LBS currently has only one FM station, with a 1 kw transmitter that reaches Monrovia and its immediate surroundings. The station broadcasts for 16 hours a day, but is unable to run for longer because the generator is in need of repair and the cost of fuel is prohibitively high. The generator regularly breaks down forcing the station off air. Officially the station has

nearly 200 employees, but in reality about 35 personnel reportedly keep it operational. The mission members were also informed that the LBS employees had not been paid in more than two years. The radio also relays British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and Radio France International (RFI) programming, but on a separate frequency[15].

A new Director General was appointed to LBS in November 2003. One of the two deputies is a woman, which is a positive sign in an environment where there are only a handful of female media practitioners. The Director General is keen to promote the LBS goals of objective coverage, free speech and social responsibility, stating that LBS is 'not the propaganda arm of the government.'[16] The statute that established LBS is currently being reviewed, with the objective of seeking changes that bring it up-to-date with modern practices.

Programming and Equipment
LBS programmes fall into the broad categories of information, education and entertainment. The major news programmes are in the morning, early afternoon and early evening, with a current focus on disarmament and reconciliation.

The newsroom consists of one room with two typewriters and no computers. Observations from one newscast indicate that most of the script was handwritten and the news is a mix of local, national and international events. Much of the news broadcast could also be categorised as announcements. The station's programming, including the news, is produced by approximately 80 people, with the majority learning their skills on the job. There is religious programming on Sunday and the station also translates some of the English programmes into local languages three times a week.

The equipment is old and out-dated (Revox reel-to-reels, turntables and cassette players), with no digital equipment. There is also a recording studio, but the equipment is in need of repair and it is virtually unusable.

LBS would like to re-establish their short wave capabilities in order to concentrate on public information in the different local languages, with the focus of the FM radio then shifting to entertainment. In this regard, serving the regions and its many language groups will be critical in this transitional period leading to elections in 2005. Moreover, LBS also expressed the need to have training in all areas, including newsgathering, field reporting, production and technical training.

Public Service Media
In addition to the radio station, there are two other public service media of note, including the New Liberian newspaper and Liberia News Agency (LINA).

New Liberian
The New Liberian is the government daily newspaper founded in the 1970s. The paper suffered the marginalisation of state-owned media under Taylor. The premises of New Liberian and LINA, located in the Ministry of Information, were extensively looted during the recent conflict and there is neither furniture nor equipment, rendering the staff jobless. Only the damaged printing press remain, which, according to workers, needs to be repaired before it can be operational.

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[15] Funds generated from the services were poorly managed by the former directors who enjoyed the confidence of President Taylor.
[16] Interview with Director General of LBS (13 December 2003)

Liberia News Agency (LINA)
LINA was established in 1979 through the Liberia-Germany Cooperation Agreement. The German government charged the German Agency for Technical Corporation (GTZ) with the implementation of its contribution while the Government of Liberia charged the Liberia News Agency with the implementation of the project. In keeping with the agreement, West Germany reportedly provided a USD 1.8 in soft loans.

The project was reportedly designed to be carried out in two phases covering a period of four years after which the Agency would emerge as an autonomous entity. The second phase of the project was not implemented due to delays by the Liberian government, although the Germans nevertheless continued to fulfil their side of the agreement. Germany reportedly withdrew its support to LINA in 1989 having realized that support given, including vehicles, air conditioners, photocopiers and stationery, were being diverted by the Ministry of Information.

LINA also suffered under the marginalisation of state-owned agencies by the Taylor government. Up to the time Taylor left Liberia, the Liberia News Agency reportedly had no infrastructure and its 52 employees, including 38 journalists, had not been paid for 19 months.

6.4.2. Assessment of Situation

LBS appears to be ripe for a partnership to provide support and assistance in redeveloping its role and activities. Whilst it comes from a history of state broadcasting there are signs that it is now starting to act like a public service broadcaster. However, it is nevertheless important to initiate comprehensive discussions on what public broadcasting should be. As a state broadcaster, LBS was obliged to be the voice of the government. There were serious consequences for those who strayed from this. Experience from other situations indicates that it is not unreasonable to assume some of the 'old' mindset might still remain within LBS.

One example that LBS is moving in the right direction is the programme 'Reconciliation Today'. Whilst the mission was visiting the radio station, two government officials were guests on the programme and the hosts did not allow them to use it as a government platform. The guests were challenged and the hosts were quick to intervene with good, thoughtful questions.

Regional and international support for LBS needs to be initiated as soon as possible. In this regard, it needs a significant amount of assistance with everything from equipment to training in order to play an important beneficial role during the transitional period and beyond.

6.5. Humanitarian Information

6.5.1. Description of Landscape

When crisis or conflict occurs, access to information and communications are often significantly hindered or obstructed. Reliable sources dry up and the media cannot give the full picture. Without constantly updated and accurate information on the humanitarian and security situation, it is difficult to effectively provide and access assistance where it is most required, which is essential for avoiding some of the worst humanitarian consequences of conflict. Assistance to media should be recognised as an essential part of any humanitarian intervention and be implemented independently from political, military, economic or other interests, including those of the international community.

A state weakened by conflict is incapable of delivering public information services, but in Liberia there are a number of media outlets that make up the basis for developing this capacity. There can be, however, inbuilt incoherencies between the humanitarian imperative and long-term objectives of stability, democratisation and development, which is also evident in Liberia. The need for quick impact information interventions to meet the challenges of the DDRR process and security issues have yet to find a working model that incorporates the local media in the overall strategy. Only then can the short-term assistance correlate with the more long-term objectives of building a solid democratic and pluralistic media in Liberia.

Content-Based Information Initiatives
Talking Drum Studio
In 1997, Search for Common Ground in Liberia and Common Ground Productions opened the Talking Drum Studio - Liberia (TDS-L), which includes a radio production facility in Monrovia that focuses on producing programming related to mediation, reconciliation and empowerment. The programmes are aired through existing local stations.

TDS-L is presently moving forward with the production of a number of programmes, which are a mix of news and infotainment, such as soap operas and dramas. Programmes include news issues affecting the peace process and humanitarian work in Liberia, gender and youth, the situation of child soldiers, peace and conflict, and public health. The format highlights issues facing IDPs in one programme and then airs the OCHA response in the following programme. Another programme deals with dialogue between different stakeholders in the Liberian peace process.

Radio Stations
A number of radio stations are engaged in broadcasting content-based public service humanitarian information. For example, Radio Veritas provides programmes in civic education, human rights and HIV/AIDS. The station also provides airtime for UNMIL information and some of the programming is based on Talking Drum Studio material. Star Radio, which will potentially be restarted in the coming months, will reportedly cover topics such as gender, civic education, community development, health and educational issues. In addition, some of the Liberian Broadcast System (LBS) programmes fall into the categories of information, education and entertainment.

UNMIL has also launched an information and sensitisation campaign designed to inform the population and combatants about the DDRR process and UN activities. The campaign includes a variety of communication methods such as theatre, dancers and comedians, although the bulk is through UNMIL Radio.

International Exchange Networks on Humanitarian Information
Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN)
The Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), which is a part of OCHA, has a distinct, well-defined role. IRIN was launched after the 1994 crisis in the Great Lakes region and its reporting focuses on strengthening universal access to strategic and non-partisan information so as to enhance the capacity of the humanitarian community to understand and respond to emergencies. In this regard, the aim of IRIN is to provide accurate and impartial reporting to improve the response of the aid community and counter misinformation and propaganda.

Although IRIN uses e-mail and the internet extensively, conscious of the importance of radio as a medium, IRIN also developed its own radio projects, principally as a medium to reach local populations. In Liberia, IRIN Radio has focused on training and co-production, working with local stations. While the aim is to produce humanitarian programming, covering key social issues, the main task is to build the capacity of local broadcasters. This means improving the content of news bulletins, teaching basic reporting techniques, accompanying local reporters on assignment, passing on tips on presentation and interview technique. The rationale is that local professional journalists are better equipped to cover humanitarian problems more authoritatively.

The work of IRIN Radio seeks to complement that of UNMIL, as well as other actors such as Talking Drum Studios, whilst retaining the main objective of leaving behind a stronger network of local broadcasters. In this regard, IRIN Radio is working in partnership with Mercy Corps, providing equipment and specialist training in the framework of Mercy Corps' own Community Radio programme.

Humanitarian Information Centre (HIC)
The Humanitarian Information Centre (HIC) is a common service to the humanitarian community working in Liberia and the surrounding countries. The Centre is managed by OCHA and operates in Liberia in co-ordination with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), UN Joint Logistics Cell (UNJLC), Department for Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), UK Department For International Development (DFID), USAID's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) and Aid Workers Network. The HIC targets the international humanitarian community enabling the sharing of information more widely. In addition, it provides a range of services and products designed to help the international community make operational decisions in the emergency period.

6.5.2. Assessment of Situation

Timely and accurate information is recognized as integral to humanitarian action. Providing information concerning UN activities, security, human rights, health care, and other key topics will be of vital importance during the short-term transition phase in Liberia. A lack of such information generates scepticism, mistrust and even hostility.

The disarmament process, which started in December 2003, faced some initial obstructions, resulting in public disorder and looting by disaffected groups. The provision of information concerning the DDRR process may have helped avoid some of these troubles. However, although Liberia has a relatively vibrant media sector, the conflict has significantly weakened it at a time when it needs to play a role in disseminating information about the DDRR process.

Support to media should therefore be recognised as an essential part of humanitarian assistance. Developing information strategies that are based on collaboration with and/or

development of an independent media structure is essential for both providing necessary information channels for humanitarian assistance agencies and local populations, and for kick-starting the rehabilitation of independent media in Liberia.

This is particularly true in the interior of the country where radio services are still rudimentary, local tensions are high and there are lots of contradictory rumours and stories in circulation. Concerns have been expressed by local NGOs and others about delays in the disarmament process and the need for information about the process in the rural areas. These stemmed in part from very real concerns about the local situation, but were also due to a lack of coherent information.

It is also worth nothing that, with the Liberian story effectively 'over' in terms of the international media, there will be less 'mainstream' coverage of the main issues in Liberia by international stations, which have a huge listenership in the country.

If there are no existing outlets capable of performing this vital service to society they may have to be established by the international community in collaboration with local and regional stakeholders. It should be noted that it is of vital importance that any information strategy seek to lay the best possible foundations for a democratic and pluralist media sphere. Furthermore, the focus is often best placed on radio, specifically in regions and countries with high illiteracy rates, as it is most cost efficient and can be set up to reach larger geographical areas.

Moreover, although international actors and UN agencies should play a coordinating role in ensuring that humanitarian information is accurate and timely, this should not threaten the independence and professionalism of the local media. In this regard, the role of the UN in providing humanitarian information should only be in the immediate emergency phase and care should be taken to ensure that local media do not simply become mouthpieces for UN information products. In addition, the need for longer-term actors to carry the coordinating role forward after the UN emergency actors have departed must also be foreseen and adequately accommodated.

While UNMIL is likely to remain the main centre for news on the peace process and humanitarian stories, local stations should increasingly be encouraged to bring such actors into their normal programming. Pre-packaged themed programmes on issues like disarmament and displacement play an important role, but stations should also be developing their own programmes on these themes. For example, an UNMIL supplied news/information item on demobilization in Buchanan could be combined with an illustrated report on how demobilisation is going locally, examining the challenges, addressing misconceptions.

However, humanitarian information should be made distinct from other parts of broadcasting. Targeted information is not to be confused with independent news reporting. When humanitarian information is delivered by intergovernmental institutions, it cannot be regarded as independent. However, it is vital that the UN system and other organisations dealing with humanitarian assistance have access to information channels, such as local media. When targeting the local media it is important that the provider of humanitarian information respects the independence of the local media. It may, however, be constructive to offer capacity building for local journalists and media outlets in information gathering and dissemination of humanitarian and public information. It is also vital that a clear distinction is made between public diplomacy of the UN administrators and the humanitarian and advocacy efforts.

6.6. Associations and Networking

6.6.1. Description of Landscape

Media Practitioner Organisations

There are apparently three active associations in the Liberian media, these being the Press Union of Liberia (PUL), Newspapers Publishers Association of Liberia and Female Journalists Association of Liberia (FEJA).

Press Union of Liberia (PUL)

The PUL was formed in 1964 and reportedly has around 350 members, including 75 female members[17]. However, FEJA estimate that there are presently only 16 practicing female journalists in Liberia, all of whom are members of FEJA and PUL[18]. Every two years the PUL holds a congress and endorses the mandate of the five-member Executive Committee (EC). The present EC was elected during the 2002 congress.

The PUL is a member of the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) and the West African Journalists Association (WAJA), with the PUL Vice-President currently also holding the post of Vice-President in WAJA.

The PUL is seemingly the most representative and visible of the media practitioner organisations in Liberia. The majority of Liberian journalists, including media owners, seemingly claim to be PUL members. In addition, a number of other media organisations in Liberia operate under the umbrella of the PUL, including the Publishers Association.

Despite years of intermittent conflict, the PUL has continued to function and promote the interests of the media community. However, it was noted by some external observers that on certain occasions when media practitioners were faced by adversity the actions of the PUL had been lacking.

The PUL succeeded in obtaining the mandate from the authorities (formerly held by the Ministry of Information) for granting accreditation to journalists and media practitioners. In addition, the Union has an ethics committee that settles disputes when called upon to consider the actions of the media.

In an attempt to address the problems relating to access to printing, the PUL obtained a printing press with USAID funding (see Print Media section), although it is still waiting for the authorisation from the authorities to operate it. The PUL has also received support from the US Embassy in Monrovia for setting up internet facilities for journalists.

The Union has not yet been able to effectively address trade union (social) issues, including wages, working conditions and so forth. In this regard, the effect of the conflict on the media houses means that it is difficult to properly tackle such initiatives. However, in the longer term the issue of collective agreements to ensure better conditions of work should be considered. This is particularly important as a number of journalists complained about low salaries and poor working conditions, which they sometimes felt were the result of poor management by media owners.

The Female Journalists Association of Liberia (FEJA)

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[17] Interview with PUL Secretary General (14 December 2003)
[18] Interview with FEJA (15 December 2003)

The Female Journalists Association of Liberia was described as an association bringing together all Liberian women media practitioners, with the objectives of promoting the interests of female journalists and highlighting issues relating to women and children.

The Association was established in 1998 and originally had 22 members, although some have either left the country or moved to other professions. As a result, there are now only 16 members, which is reportedly the total number of female media professionals in Liberia, including some who are no longer practicing journalists. When the Association started, it met once every month. However, this was later reduced to once every quarter, as it was difficult to organise regular meetings. Now it reportedly only calls meetings when there are pressing issues to be discussed.

Although the Association is legally registered, it has no premises and few resources. Many of its former principal officers, including the President and Secretary, have left the country or the media profession. The current Acting-President is a full-time journalist with Radio Veritas, whilst the Treasurer works with the Ministry of Education.

The Association has no on-going projects, although its members stated that they have implemented activities in the past, particularly with the Centre for Democratic Empowerment (CEDE). However, the FEJA has not been able to get its own funding, which it attributes to its low profile and level of activities. Nevertheless, the members have ideas about projects that they would like to undertake, although these have not yet been elaborated on paper. The Association has not established links with female journalists organisations in other countries or international women's groups working in the media or broadly on women's issues.

Newspapers Publishers Association of Liberia
Not much information about the Publishers Association was forthcoming and it was not possible to meet with any of its officials during the mission. The Association was formed in 2000 and all newspaper publishers and managers are reportedly members, although it has no offices and does not hold regular meetings.

The main the purpose of the Association is to discuss issues of concern to newspaper publishers and proprietors and plan common actions. It has served as a platform for discussions about the possibility of 18 smaller newspapers in the country merging to make them more viable (see Print Media section).

In terms of media owners associations, apart from newspapers publishers, there is apparently no collective body for electronic media owners.

Ministry of Information
The Ministry of Information, which also served as the base for the New Liberian and Liberia News Agency (LINA), was extensively looted during the conflict with all of the equipment being removed. As a result, the Ministry needs to be completely reequipped, including the development of a media policy for the country. Moreover, a Media Commission established in 1987 is not presently functioning.

The relationship between the Ministry and the media community is promising. A number of officials from the Ministry are former media practitioners and PUL members. This collaborative attitude should substantially benefit planning for the future.

6.6.2. Assessment of Situation

The media in Liberia has been pressured and abused during the past decade of political authoritarianism and intermittent conflict. However, despite this the PUL has managed to retain a relatively coherent and unified approach in the face of obstruction and harassment by the authorities.

Currently, the media situation is somewhat chaotic and there are far more media outlets than the market can support. Until the situation is stabilised and media outlets can generate sufficient revenue to pay reporters adequate salaries the problem of journalists' extra curricular activities will remain. The accepted practice in Liberia is to pay reporters and editors to carry news about the work of government ministries. Officials at the Ministries also often pay for a news item to be run or for a particular interview. The practice continues, as editors need the extra income to keep their media outlet running.

In the present situation, the media community needs strong coordinated support in order to strengthen their standing and role, and to ensure that there is access to the necessary equipment, training, policy development, legal reforms, and so forth. This process will be particularly important during the coming year as the peace process continues and the 2005 elections approach. The media associations will most probably play a central role in the future development of the media environment in the country and this should be actively encouraged and facilitated.

Due to the past record and current importance and visibility of the PUL, as well as the role it should ideally play in the democratisation process, the Union could be an ideal focal point for media development activities in Liberia.

6.7. Monitoring and Advocacy

6.7.1. Description of Landscape

During the Taylor years, there was a progressive development of activities on monitoring human rights violations and advocacy for protection and reform. In particular, the monitoring of press freedom questions took on an even more sustained strength than in other aspect of human rights. A number of factors account for this.

Attacks on media and press freedom started virtually from day-one when Taylor took office following the elections. Almost immediately too, civil society, particularly led by the local Centre for Democratic Empowerment (CEDE), Justice and Peace Commission (JPC) and Press Union of Liberia (PUL), responded strongly with protests, appeals and dialogue with security agencies. Very early in the Taylor regime's life CEDE, PUL, the US-based Carter Center and Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) worked together to attempt to stop a spate of attacks on media by security forces.

These initiatives over the years led to the evolution of a coalition of civil society groups for human rights advocacy. This included the PUL, CEDE, JPC, Bar Association and others. This coalition was the principal instrument for defending victims of abuse. In the process several leaders of the individual organisations were themselves brutalized, arrested, detained or forced into exile. Human rights defenders themselves became targets.

From 2000 onwards, international monitoring and advocacy was intensified. Regular monitoring was carried out by a permanent correspondent of the MFWA, working with the PUL and CEDE. This was later expanded and strengthened. From 2002, under collaborative programmes, MFWA, International Media Support (IMS) and International Freedom of Expression Exchange (IFEX) set up a network of monitors working in Monrovia and in the provinces. The monitoring provided regular information, which was used in advocacy campaigns. They were circulated widely around the world through the IFEX network. This Partnership was initiated in direct response to the emergency situations in Liberia and Cote d'Ivoire, around which were organised a number of activities.

6.7.2. Assessment of Situation

The value of the network of monitors was that it helped to identify issues before they significantly worsened. During the critical period, these reports alerting the organisations about impending problems assisted in formulating activities and directions in the human rights campaign in Liberia.

The main obstacle to monitoring and advocacy was the sheer ferocity of the regime's repression of journalists. In this regard, the transitional period is critical for strengthening institutions and mechanisms for press freedom and rights generally in Liberia.

The presence of the UN and the international community to ensure peace and promote democracy, provides enormous opportunities for improving mechanisms and structures for the protection and expansion of rights. However, the principal challenges remain political.

An essential concern about rights in Liberia is that the country has a weak tradition of governmental commitment and culture of rights protection and advocacy. The transitional political arrangement includes political forces under whose dominance the media experienced terrible repression of rights.

With regard to civil society, the brutalities of Taylor's rule and the wanton violence and destructiveness of the conflict have weakened their organisational strength and resources. They face several difficulties that make it hard for them to take full advantage of the opportunities opened up by post-conflict circumstances.

The outcome of the 2005 elections do not automatically guarantee respect for rights or press freedom. It is therefore necessary to support the continued strengthening of civil society to ensure effective popular defence and promotion of rights in the future.

Advocacy work is central to the entire work of the Partnership and various aspects shall require the specific expertise of particular members in the Partnership. Strengthening the local organisations and their coalition is the most important contribution to effective advocacy work. The idea of a "local Partnership" should be based on the local coalition of organisations.

6.8. Safety and Legal Aid

6.8.1. Description of Landscape

Safety Issues

During the past two decades harassment and intimidation of journalists have been commonplace in Liberia. Autocratic political structures and politically controlled judiciary have meant that independent voices amongst the media challenging the legitimacy and actions of the authorities have often been harshly dealt with.

This harassment of the media in Liberia has taken a number of forms. Arbitrary arrests and detention has been commonly used to intimidate and silence journalists. As an example, the Taylor government used the conflict to declare a state of emergency in February 2002 that widened the power of the authorities to limit press freedoms. Subsequently in June of that year, Hassan Bility, editor-in-chief of the independent weekly The Analyst, was detained on suspicion of collaborating with rebel groups. Despite rulings demanding Bility appear in court, the authorities declared him an 'unlawful combatant' and continued to detain him incommunicado. Bility was not released until December, when he was remanded into the custody of the US Embassy and subsequently left the country[19].

Threats of violence and physical attacks have also been used to coerce the media. In this regard, the former editor of The Concord Times, Lyndon Ponnie, has reportedly been a victim of harassment and death threats for allegedly embarking on a campaign to discredit the Taylor government. In 1999, The Concord Times, used the auditor general's annual report as a basis for a series of articles that pointed to corruption in the government. The paper was subsequently banned by Taylor's government in 2000. In addition, more recently Ponnie reportedly narrowly escaped injury when armed men attacked his home in June 2003[20].

As in most conflict situations, the increase in fighting in and around Monrovia during the summer of 2003 brought additional risks for media practitioners. As an example, two investigative reporters of the independent newspaper The News, Bobby Tapson and Bill Jarkloh, as well as Joe Watson of the state-owned Liberia Broadcasting System (LBS), were abducted in June by LURD. They were released approximately one week later. Stanley McGill, also a reporter for The News, was attacked and robbed by armed men wearing uniforms of the presidential elite guard, the Anti Terrorist Unit (ATU)[21]. In this fashion, the safety of media practitioners during periods of heightened conflict was also seriously threatened.

The safety situation for journalists has significantly stabilised following the signing of the Accra peace agreement and arrival of UN peacekeepers. Although at the time of writing, the UN was still to extend its control into regional areas, the process of establishing order was underway. In this regard, the stability and security being created in and around Monrovia should be extended to other areas of the country and safety conditions for media practitioners should improve significantly. In addition, since the signing of the peace agreement, threats of violence and attacks against media practitioners perpetrated by the authorities and other groups have abated considerably.

Legal Aid

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[19] Committee to Protect Journalists - Attacks on the Press in 2002: Liberia (http://www.cpj.org)
[20] MISA-MFWA Alert (IFEX, www.ifex.org, 17 June 2003)
[21] MISA-MFWA Alert (IFEX, www.ifex.org, 17 June 2003)

The application of the law in Liberia has been seriously wanton over the past decades, with little recognisable due process and direct manipulation of the judiciary by the authorities. Despite this situation, a number of organisations have provided legal aid to those being prosecuted by the authorities.

As an example, of those consulted during the mission, the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission (JPC), which was formed in November 1991 by the Catholic Church, has provided legal aid to media practitioners over the past years. The JPC has a Legal Aid Department consisting of seven persons (2 lawyers, 4 pro-bono lawyers and one director) that defends journalists and issues press releases condemning abuses. The JPC works throughout the country based in the three Catholic dioceses of Monrovia, Gbarnga and Cape Palmas. The National Bar Association (NBA) has also provided legal aid for cases involving journalists.

Many cases defended over the past years have been based on habeas corpus petitions. In this regard, the presence of legal representation was often sufficient to ensure the release of a detainee. It seems that only a minority of cases were actually defended based upon the charges being pressed.

6.8.2. Assessment of Situation

Through both enhancing safety and providing legal aid when necessary, journalists in Liberia can be effectively assisted in fending off or avoiding harassment and intimidation.

Safety Issues
Safety orientated activities often take two forms. This is typically either safety awareness training for journalists or establishing safe havens if the dangers in a country are too great. The situation in Liberia, however, has been significantly stabilised with the signing of the peace agreement, although it does remain somewhat volatile with the real potential for instability to re-emerge, particularly in areas outside of Monrovia.

In consideration of Liberia's recent history, intimidation of journalists may also resume if and when sensitive issues relating to political and/or economic interests are addressed. In this regard, although a functioning judicial system may be in place to help defend the media, a basic knowledge of safety issues and access to advice and assistance for media practitioners will remain necessary.

Threats posed to the safety of local journalists should also be viewed in relation to the incentives being offered for undertaking 'risky' work. In particular, the use of national journalists by international media institutions for travelling to and reporting on unstable areas presents a danger for those involved.

Legal Aid
The provision of legal aid allows journalist to counter quasi-legal methods used to coerce or restrict their basic freedoms and rights. The use of legislation, whether specifically introduced to obstruct the media or manipulated to serve a specific purpose, is commonplace and countering such attacks can be prohibitively expensive and complicated. Many media institutions in Liberia therefore do not have the resources to effectively fight such cases and the provision of support in the form of legal aid could allow the media to access the required expertise. Furthermore, access to legal aid in the regional areas of Liberia has reportedly been lacking in the past, as there are insufficient lawyers practicing outside of the capital.

Since the signing of the peace agreement it appears that the legal environment and freedom of expression situation in Liberia has entered a period of flux. This new status quo was highlighted by the JPC when they organised a peaceful gathering on 10 December to celebrate Human Rights Day without permission or obstruction by the authorities.

However, at the time of writing, the Supreme Court Bench had not yet been inducted. The previous Justices in the Taylor government were removed under the peace agreement and their successors were yet to be formally agreed upon and appointed. With no functioning judiciary in place, it was premature to forecast how events will eventually unfold, although the outlook has promise.

6.9. Training and Media Content

6.9.1. Description of Landscape

Professional Standards
Journalistic standards in the Liberia media demand as radical an attention as the infrastructural, organisational and technical resource needs of the industry. Skills in content output, such as reporting, writing, editing and broadcast production, require improvements from the basics to higher levels of handling complex issues and situations by media.

While standards may vary somewhat from one newspaper or radio station to another, the general picture is one of low professional quality. These weaknesses affect all aspects of the profession including management and other technical aspects such as photography and design of publications, and production, presentation and editing on radio and TV.

One of the daily manifestations of poor quality practice is the publication of material with potential libel content, and speculative and opinionated news writing. Other such problems provide ammunition for undemocratic officials to attack the media and journalists. By far the most important concern for improving standards, however, is for the public to be better provided with reliable information, as well as a sensible and enlightening interpretation based upon factual information. In a post-conflict impoverished society like Liberia, the media's responsibilities are such that high professional standards assume an even greater imperative.

The state of media professional standards has everything to do with the country's political tragedies, particularly over the past three decades or more. In practice, Liberia has never had a state monopoly of the media as in most of the neighbouring countries. However, the reign of dictatorial and authoritarian regimes has curtailed press freedom, thereby constraining the potential for the development of high standards.

Political repression, including violent attacks, has hounded journalists into exile for decades. This trend only getting worse during the years of outright conflict. Professional traditions have had almost no space to develop and establish the ethos and values associated thereof. Most of the country's better trained and experienced broadcasters and journalists have either either to flee, change professions, or (in a minority of cases) join a government agency or service.

Training and Training Institutions
Formal training of journalists in Liberia is in its infancy. Moreover, what modest progress was made previously, has been destroyed by the conflict. According to approximate estimates provided to the mission team, around 30% of journalist have received formal training from journalism institutions, whilst 70% have learnt on the job.

Department of Mass Communication - University of Liberia
The Mass Communication Department of the University of Liberia, established in the 1980s, did not escape the destructive path of the conflict. The Department has bachelor (3 years) and master (4 years) programmes in the different areas of journalism and communication. However, due to the conflict, since the mid-1990's the Department has been restricted in carrying out its educational activities. Furthermore, under such difficult conditions, the programme has not sustained nor attracted enough qualified staff to provide high standard training or teaching to prepare professionals for the industry. Even at its best in the 1980s, the Department was limited in the scope and extent of the training it offered. It had limited

resources for practical training and staffing. Attempts are being made to revive the Department, which are part of the challenges of resuscitating the university.

Liberian Institute of Journalism (LIJ)
The Liberian Institute of Journalism is a private training institution founded in 1999 and managed by Mr. Vinicius Hodges. The Institute operates a newspaper called The Journalist and a radio named LIJ FM that were supposed to become operational in January 2004. LIJ offers a 6-month training to high school diploma holders, although obviously no training of working media personnel could take place during the conflict years. Moreover, the Institute has been a victim of the fighting in 2003 with its equipment, including computers, stationery, production facilities and even air-conditions, having been completely looted by armed groups.

A number of organisations, such as the Carter Center of Atlanta and the International Alert, London, have together with the PUL and CEDE organised training workshops and seminars for journalists. Occasional workshops have also been held by others, including Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA) and Panos Institute West Africa (PIWA). IRIN Radio has also provided training workshops and practical assistance in broadcast programme production[22].

The UN Country team-working group on public information and advocacy is also planning a bimonthly series of training for journalists beginning in April 2004. Moreover, UNDP, together with the Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism (MICT), has organized a two-day seminar on promotion of good governance polices for Public Affair Officers and media practitioners.

6.9.2. Assessment of Situation

Opportunities for Improving Standards
In some practical regards, the media in Liberia virtually needs to start all over again. They require everything to operate media, including the development of a strategy for training.

Liberian journalists eloquently expressed at a public forum their desire for training. On a rough scale of needs, it is possible to propose that training takes second place only to the requirement for equipment and facilities. Moreover, the enthusiasm amongst local media practitioners for training is fertile ground to build upon.

International concerns and pledges of commitment provide important political support and potential resources to support training projects. In this regard, though the university programme and LIJ are in dire need of assistance, their presence is critically important for sustained medium and long-term training activities and programmes. It is therefore crucial to place the development of the two institutions in any strategic plan for training.

Obstacles to Training
The first and fundamental problem for training is human resources. At the moment the country lacks the qualified and experienced personnel needed to initiate, manage and

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[22] These IRIN Radio activities have included co-production work with state broadcaster, ELBC, commercial Monrovia station, DC-101 and Peace FM (formerly Stone FM) and the identification of several radio stations for training over the next six months. IRIN Radio has also produced a rough guide on reporting techniques was compiled based on lessons learned in both Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire and has been made available in both English and French.

promote a training programme that meets the urgent challenges of the immediate transitional period up to and after the 2005 elections. Of the prevailing media, few have staff capable of providing substantive on-the-job training. In several critical areas, such as management for example, it is impossible to find qualified trainers within the country. In terms of radio, expertise for training may be found in some stations. However, even then, they are too few in number and possibly limited in some advanced areas.

The academic preparation of most media personnel in Liberia is to the level of high school. This is a significant source of professional weakness as it constrains the levels of training the personnel may generally have the capacity to engage in. There is also an overall lack of computer literacy and use of Internet, as well as access to Internet and means to utilise the medium for information search and communication.

The economy of the media is another major obstacle to any kind of progress in the industry and profession. Over the years, international NGOs and donor agencies have traditionally borne all the costs of training activities, including meals, transportation and sometimes a stipend for trainees. As in other places in the region, such training is often appreciated as a source of supplementary income to the low wages of media personnel. Since such a perspective of training support is not sustainable for the long-term, it is important to encourage training based solely on expectations of capacity improvement, with a realisation of the long-term benefits to be gained thereof.

Realistically, some journalists are in the business for want of employment, political objects or lack of qualification and opportunity in other professions. Amongst such persons there may be low motivation for professional improvement. Mechanisms must be used to maximise resource application for the better-motivated and those who exhibit progress with basic support.

The heightened interest in media by organisations and agencies from all over may also pose challenges. With each international entity potentially pursuing its own agenda of training, avoidable and unnecessary competition could limit the full potential benefits of training. In an atmosphere of confusion amongst groups jockeying for space and vantage points to organise training, not only is there unnecessary duplication, but the quality and focus of training are likely to be undermined. In this regard, cooperation and flexibility of focus will be of paramount importance.

In connection to independent news reporting, in a situation as Liberia when the country is undergoing extensive transformation, gathering information and reporting on humanitarian and social issues is also a vital issue. Confusion has arising between the local media and the information sources in regards to the distinction between public diplomacy of the UN as separate from humanitarian information.

The complexity and urgency of the imperatives of post-conflict political and social reconstruction make the need for rapid improvements in media standards urgent. The demands for relevant, useful, reliable information, and consistent, educated or enlightening media to foster the processes of democratisation and unity, can be met only through media with high professional capacity and qualities that engender credibility.

The Liberian media and journalists have shown tremendous courage and fortitude throughout the long years of violent repression. Improvements in professional standards will strengthen their self-confidence, effects, social responsibility, and public trust, solidarity and patronage. However, whilst the opportunity and enthusiasm for training exists, success will

depend on the calibre of human resource present and the commitment of media practitioners to uphold professional standards.

Objectives of Training

Although training is an urgent need in all aspects of media organisation and operation, a strategy for a training programme must recognises the need to set a scale of priorities that tackles immediate requirements while proposing long-term benefits. In the circumstances, the objects of a training programme would need to address:

1. How to upgrade the overall standards of the media generally;

2. Training needs in response to particular and specific requirements of the transitional process, such as humanitarian issues and the 2005 elections;

3. How to develop or produce a critical mass of local trainers for medium and long-term purposes;

4. Training for particular public or state institutions, such as the regulatory agencies, the Ministry of Information, and so forth;

5. Training for particular public service media, such as the public service broadcaster, the LBS, and community radio stations;

6. Strengthening the organisational, business and management capacity of the media toward economic viability, sustainability and growth.

Upgrading Overall Standards

With regard to radio, training programmes for broadcast media ought to be able to involve all or most stations desirous of improving capacity. However, concerning the print media, there are so many newspapers that it is both impossible and unnecessary to attempt to train staff and personnel of them all. To make impact and provide effective training, the following criteria are proposed to guide participation, which must be made known to all media.

1. There ought to be a proven level of professionalism (to potentially be assessed by a team doing content analysis guided by a clearly defined table of objective marks);

2. Consistency in survivability, including newspapers that have shown some years of staying strength or consistency since the current transitional period started.

3. The existence of certain basic management and organisational structures and mechanisms, such as clear editorial division of labour; basic management structures; consistent record of circulation (for papers) or programme schedule and plan (for radio); a bank account and or budget and financial statements to indicate a sense of professionalism and seriousness;

4. Readiness and willingness to make some contribution – however minimal – to the costs of training.

To promote a general upgrading of standards overall, the structure of a training programme could be based around:

1. Basic skills training with participants from all media attending regular 2-or-3 times weekly classes designed to run over an extensive period;

2. This first one may be complemented by in-house schemes with trainers rotating from media to media;

3. Public forums discussing general issues of principles such as on ethics, responsibility and the media's role in the democratisation process.

7. Recommendations for Short, Medium and Long-Term Actions

The following chapter outlines those actions as recommended by the Partnership for Media and Conflict in West Africa. These are listed per Focus Area as addressed in the previous chapter and are divided into short and medium/ long-term perspectives. These areas include:

- Media Policy and Legal Reform

- Print Media

- Independent Broadcast Media

- Public Service Broadcasting

- Humanitarian Information

- Associations and Networking

- Monitoring and Advocacy

- Safety and Legal Aid

- Training and Media Content

> The names of potential national and international implementing organisations have not been included in the recommendations. Although the Partnership for Media and Conflict in West Africa incorporates the majority of knowledge, resources and skills necessary to undertake the actions recommended, this report does not seek to exclude the involvement of others. However, exceptions have been made where an organisation's mandate or activities are considered unique and its involvement is therefore central for the success of an activity.

7.1. Media Policy and Institutional Reform

7.1.1 Recommendations (Short/ Medium-Term)

As noted above, it is clear that the existing legislation and structures in Liberia should be reviewed as part of a process of securing the necessary freedom of expression environment. In this regard, a detailed study of the legal, institutional, regulatory and policy framework needs to be conducted, leading to a programme of comprehensive reform and the emergence of a legal and institutional framework of the media, which takes local circumstances in Liberia into account, but nevertheless meets international standards for the protection of media freedom and freedom of expression. This would also include the introduction of an access to information law. Regional and international actors could be well placed to provide input and support in this process. In specific it is recommended that this include:

1. Encouraging the government to elaborate an effective and conducive media policy framework. This can only be effectively pursued, however, after it has clearly set out the goals and objectives it intends to pursue and achieve through media operations in consultation with the relevant stakeholders.

2. Organise an international roundtable on media law and policy reform in Liberia. The objective of the roundtable should be to bring together key local and international stakeholders to critically review laws and policies, which have implications for media practice in Liberia and agree on a comprehensive reform leading to the emergence of a legal and institutional framework for the media. A media policy framework promoting and guaranteeing freedom of expression is essential for the Liberian media to be free to report fairly on the upcoming elections and it will offer the framework for an independent public service broadcaster.

3. Providing an international team to assist the PUL and government in planning for the media policy reform process.

4. Assist to facilitate a meeting of key stakeholders and international experts through a roundtable to kick-start the drafting of new media policies.

5. Establishing a taskforce for drafting legislation and policies

6. Preparing a long-term lobbying and advocacy strategy for the adoption of the policies to be proposed and for their implementation at a later stage.

The policy framework must entail procedures that would enable active practical participation of media practitioners and other interested parties on media issues. Policy issues must substantially focus on how effectively the masses can enjoy the constitutional guarantees of freedom of expression, the press and the media It must adequately gear towards attaining universal access to information, independent media, level playing field, plurality of views, fair and equitable access to media facilities, development of the media industry in keeping with international standards and using the media to pursue democratic ideals, values, norms, including creating an enabling environment for the opposition to be heard.

In relation to the Ministry of Information, it is recommended that:

1. Expertise should be made available to the Ministry of Information and government to develop a media and communication policy that caters for the different administrative problems the media face, including licensing, legal reforms, statutory media commission/Ombudsman, a freedom of information Act, Public Service Broadcasting and so forth.

2. The authorities should consider the provision of a regular grant from the state to the media, either directly in terms of cash or indirectly through tax relief in accordance with the spirit of the UNESCO 'Florence Treaty' – the Agreement on the Importation of Educational, Scientific and Cultural Materials (see Print Media section).

3. State policy should also progressively revive and privatise the Liberian News Agency (LINA) and the New Liberia in order for them to properly function as public service media (see Public Service Broadcasting section).

7.2. Print Media

7.2.1. Recommendations (Short-Term)

Given the massive devastation that Liberian newspapers have suffered during the years of conflict, they require urgent short-term assistance to prevent complete collapse and initiate the process of rebuilding. The following short-term actions are recommended:

1. Individual newspaper houses should be provided with minor equipment, such as cameras, tape-recorders, and so forth, which will assist them in their newsgathering efforts.

2. Most of the newspapers require assistance is typesetting and laying out their stories and articles as many of them currently rent computer time or produce their materials at business centres. The PUL could be equipped with a number of computers with appropriate industry software to assist them in typesetting their materials for publication. In addition to acquiring the equipment, a number of PUL personnel will also need to be trained to operate the computers and do desktop publishing. The service should be provided to the newspapers by the PUL at an affordable cost aimed at reducing the present cost of production, but which will enable the PUL to sustain the service after an initial donation of the equipment and provision of training.

7.2.2. Recommendations (Medium/ Long-Term)

In terms of logistic support, the press should be provided with technical support to help them improve their abilities, acquire essential equipment and facilities and develop their newspapers into viable businesses. Specifically, it is recommended that technical assistance should include:

1. Business planning, development and management are essential to ensure that the newspapers become viable businesses, which can survive and contribute meaningfully to the democratisation processes. Technical support in this area might be in the form of on the job training that can be provided on-site by experts in the different areas.

2. The media community in Liberia should be encouraged to, and assisted in, entering into negotiations with the relevant government authorities to secure a waiver on tariffs and taxes on essential media materials, such as computers, newsprint, printing inks, computers, and other supplies, in accordance with the spirit of UNESCO's 'Florence Treaty' – the Agreement on the Importation of Educational, Scientific and Cultural Materials.

3. The feasibility of acquiring communal printing presses to service the entire newspaper industry in Liberia should be explored. Such printing presses could be managed as a joint project, but should nonetheless be operated on a commercial basis such that they are able to generate income for their maintenance and sustenance, as well as for some other joint media development efforts. Although the PUL has indicated that it has already received a donation of a printing press along these lines, it has also suggested that the single press that has been donated is unlikely to adequately redress the present situation. Additional resources could therefore be sought to complement on-going efforts.

4. Once those security concerns that hindered access outside of Monrovia are addressed, the feasibility of establishing a joint distribution system for newspapers in Liberia should be explored to enable them reach all parts of the country, thereby helping the newspapers increase their circulation and revenue from sales, whilst also ensuring that a greater proportion of the population has access to information through the newspapers.

7.3. Independent Broadcast Media

A pluralistic broadcasting system, with a commercial/private radio sector and community-based radio sector coexisting with a public service broadcaster (and UNMIL radio) should be actively developed in Liberia. As previously outlined, since other national and international sources are already providing equipment, training and programming to either individual or groups of stations, it is recommended that the focus be placed on:

- Facilitating the coordinated production of programmes relevant for the transition period;
- Coordinated professional training for journalists;
- Development of long term financial viability;
- Development of the advocacy and lobbying capacities of the private/commercial and community based broadcasters.

7.3.1 Recommendations (Short-Term)

In addressing the abovementioned areas, it is recommended that primary focus be placed on the commercial/private sector and a community-based sector. In this regard, the following activities are recommended:

1. Whilst avoiding duplication with existing activities that support community based and private/ commercial radios, assistance could be provided in the form of funding, equipment and power supplies to allow those broadcast media that produce reliable and objective information to continue work in the immediate term.

2. Convene a forum among all stakeholders to discuss the definition of a national broadcasting policy framework that recognizes the three sectors of independent broadcasting (religious, private/commercial and community based) alongside the public service broadcaster, each with their own mission, duties, needs and rights. Such a policy will concern all issues common to the broadcast media, including funding, training, programming, long term viability, and so forth[23].

3. Any comprehensive training scheme should reinforce existing structures, such as the LIJ, and use facilities (equipments, studios and personnel) that might potentially be provided by those stations in the country with greater access to resources. Such a scheme should seek to provide not only journalism training, but to develop sustainability of the community radios through training in management, maintenance, computers and so forth.

7.3.2. Recommendations (Medium/ Long-Term)

1. A 'sound bank' of programmes could be established through a local organisation with an international organisation providing a coordinated support unit to facilitate the (co-) production on a regular basis of good quality programmes on various issues of general concern (peace building, gender, human rights, HIV/AIDS). The content

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[23] In preparation for such a conference, a meeting of the private/commercial, religious and community based radio stations could be organised to formulate a common platform regarding specific issues such as access to frequencies, licensing procedures and costs, access to advertisements and announcements, definition of mandates, training needs, production of programs, maintenance of equipments, and so forth.

of programmes should be relevant to the specific situation in the country and the specific needs and concerns of specific targeted audiences.

2. Building upon existing structures, activities could be undertaken to further facilitate networking amongst community radio stations, as well as launch a national network of community radios that could advocate on the behalf of all community radios.

3. A feasibility study should be undertaken to assess the potential for a fund to be established in coordination with a specialised international actor for supporting the development of the long term viability of private/commercial and community based radios. Such support would be allocated in combination with the relevant national and international expertise and oversight and according to clearly stated criteria and procedures.

7.4. Public Service Broadcasting

To achieve the short-term goals in a systemic way that best serves the interests and needs of the Liberian Broadcasting System (LBS), a long-term commitment (of two years or more) and fund-raising efforts of a number of organization will be necessary. Furthermore, having a lead coordinating organisation would ensure that each stage of the project builds upon the previous.

7.4.1. Recommendations (Short-Term)

1. A follow-up mission should be conducted to serve two immediate goals:

    i. To develop a comprehensive plan to address the needs of LBS over the next two years, including assessing the cost of re-establishing the short wave services of LBS.

    ii. To initiate a training programme and deliver urgently needed equipment, such as tape recorders. This training could take the form of a week-long workshop in basics for the news department, or could simply be in-house on-the-job training (basic skills training is urgently needed by the news staff)[24]. It should be noted that discussions on public broadcasting must be seen as going hand-in-hand with any training or delivery of equipment[25].

2. A range of public service broadcasting Acts should be compiled for the LBS management and the Ministry of Information to consider. Moreover, if applicable, a partnership should be initiated to assist LBS and the government develop relevant legislation (see Media Policy and Institutional Reform section).

3. Computers facilities providing internet access should be purchased and installed. This should be combined with basic computer and internet training[26].

4. A backup generator should be provided so that LBS has a reserve source of power and can remain on the air.

5. The studio and control room needs to be refurbished and equipped. A technical expert should analyse and advise on the best way to proceed and what new equipment is needed immediately.

7.4.2. Recommendations (Medium/Long Term)

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[24] The week-long workshop during the first return visit should cover basic radio skills, including story selection and development, story structure, writing, interviewing and on-air presentation. It should use two trainers. This should be followed up with a week of on-the-job coaching by at least one trainer.

[25] At the same time, a session on public service broadcasting could be held for the management and staff of LBS. It could start from the premise that public broadcasting serves all the people of the country and the whole range of opinion and cultural diversity. The public service broadcasting approach to programming differs dramatically from that of a state broadcaster. We can facilitate the development of that approach to programming. In addition, the broader community needs to understand the distinction between state and public broadcasting. Following the fist two initiatives a public meeting should be held as both an explanatory session and to invite input.

[26] It is estimated that 90% of journalists in Monrovia do not have access to the internet. The cafes are simply too expensive and broadcasters need immediate, on-site access.

1. An advisory committee of local, regional and international players could be established to monitor the progress of the development of public service broadcasting.

2. The reestablishment of the short-wave radio station, including training and equipment, should be supported to serve areas outside of Monrovia.

3. While radio is the key medium for most Liberians, television can play an important role both in terms of an information vehicle and culturally. As the country re-builds and more people have access to television it will be important for them to have the option to see their own people and cultures portrayed as an alternative to foreign programming from satellite television. Building a public service television will be both costly and complex, and therefore should be viewed as a long-term goal. Rebuilding television in Liberia will require everything from television cameras to remote broadcast vehicles to technical training to training in the principles of television journalism.

7.5. Humanitarian Information

7.5.1. Recommendations (Short-Term)

The provision of humanitarian information in Liberia is predominantly centred around the UN. UNMIL Radio was established to cater for the UN communication needs, with a specific focus on providing information about the disarmament and demobilization processes. Some of the local broadcasters expressed concern that it could reduce the standing of the existing media and drain available resources. However, the role of the UN in fulfilling its mandate vis-à-vis the local media community could be reinforced through some of the recommendations outlined below.

1. The UN country team working group on public information and advocacy could play coordinating roles in developing strategies for humanitarian information/ content-based assistance. This could be combined with initiatives addressing the challenges of information and transparency vis-à-vis the upcoming elections. However, such strategies need to be properly explained and UNMIL should be in a good position to organise radio discussions on the importance of the elections, independent media, balanced reporting, and so forth. Training workshops could be organised to provide opportunity for local journalists to obtain capacity to report on humanitarian and social issues.

2. In the short-term emergency phase, OCHA/IRIN together with partners could form a so-called clearinghouse or information providing facility for humanitarian/ UN/ public information. In this regard, they would make information freely accessible for local media to distribute, thereby ensuring that information is both accurate and timely, both of which are essential for humanitarian operations.

3. Building upon what is already being done, the capacity of community radios, LBS and local independent stations could be strengthened to broadcast humanitarian information. This could include strengthening UN public information strategy links with existing initiatives, such as Star Radio and Talking Drum Studio. Although such activities could be problematic, it is vital to work with community radios to develop their sustainability and any initiatives should neither encroach on independent journalistic professionalism nor develop local media as simple 'mouthpieces' for UN information.

4. UN personnel and others in the humanitarian community should be encouraged to deal directly with local radio stations, offering themselves for interviews and taking part in discussions. Training could also be provided to UN personnel in providing humanitarian information.

7.5.2. Recommendations (Medium/ Long-Term)

1. Based upon capacity building provided to the local media, they should be encouraged to develop their own professional programming on humanitarian themes.

2. In this regard, lessons learned could be used to develop frameworks for assistance to media in early interventions in conflict zones. UNESCO, as the UN agency with the mandate for communication, should develop capacities to provide input into UN operational information strategy planning and implementation. However, any UN organization involved should be working on the ground, or in collaboration with

agencies on the ground. If it is not implementing projects in the field, UNESCO could play a useful role in generating ideas, providing lessons from past experience elsewhere.

7.6. Associations and Networking

7.6.1. Recommendations (Short-Term)

The following actions are recommended in relation to supporting the role and resources of the Press Union of Liberia (PUL):

1. In cooperation with the PUL, there is an urgent need to develop a well-resourced and functional Press Centre that will cater for all of the media community. In this regard, there a number of examples in West Africa on which this can be based. The Press Center would provide a place for journalists in Monrovia and surrounding areas to have access to information and working facilities. This support should include capacity building for the administration, management and sustainability of the Center.

2. In collaboration with the PUL, media owners and civil society, a self-regulatory body should be supported in order to monitor the media in support of the democratisation process, with a specific orientation towards the elections. The PUL should therefore be supported to initiate a process of establishing a monitoring and disciplinary system through which it can attempt to discourage unethical and corrupt practices among its members in order to begin re-building confidence in the Liberian media.

The following recommendations are made vis-à-vis the Newspapers Publishers Association of Liberia:

3. The Publishers Associations should be assisted through having access to office resources (possibly through the Press Centre). In addition, their role vis-à-vis the PUL printing press should be clearly defined.

The following recommendations are made vis-à-vis the Female Journalists Association:

4. The Female Journalists Association requires basic assistance to reassert its role and activities. In this regard, the PUL should be encouraged to provide FEJA with office resources from which to operate. Access to facilitates of a Press Centre and basic operational equipment might also be provided to the Association.

5. The association should be provide with technical support to write project proposals and point it to international sources of donor support for some of its proposed activities.

7.6.2. Recommendations (Medium/ Long-Term)

The following recommendations are made vis-à-vis the Press Union of Liberia:

1. It is also necessary to support the role of the female members of PUL. In this regard, seminars on gender issues for the PUL members and Executive Committee might be beneficial. This may help give visibility to female journalists in the management of the union. This would also require a more precise survey to know the exact number of male and female journalists in Liberia.

2. Even if the present situation of the media does not allow for the debate on setting up a collective agreement, because the economy of the media is still too weak, it is advised that discussions should take place on how the issues of low wages and bad working conditions can be addressed. This should also entail a clear perspective for follow-up and enactment in the longer-term.

The following recommendations are made vis-à-vis the Newspapers Publishers Association of Liberia:

3. Linkages between the Publishers Association and international partners, such as the World Association of Newspapers (WAN), should also be facilitated in order to strengthen the media houses in terms of management and networking.

4. The role of the Publishers Association should be supported in strengthening the media houses in terms of accessing equipment, loan programmes, minimising costs through cooperative activities, and so forth.

The following recommendations are made vis-à-vis the Female Journalists Association:

5. The Association should be assisted in developing its structures, reviewing and developing its by-laws or regulations and organizing its members so that they are more involved in the activities of the association.

6. Given that all the officials and members of the female journalists association are working full-time on their jobs, the possibility of developing a programme for women journalists, or engaging a full-time or part-time staff for the association should be explored. Such staff would be responsible for following up on the decisions of the association's officers, serving as primary contact in the office and carrying out other day to day activities that the elected officers might not have the time to conduct.

7. With the assistance of the partnership, the association should make contacts with other national and international media women's groups to share their experiences in organizing and developing project ideas. Notably with the IFJ Women's programme, African Women's Media Centre (AWMC)/ International Women's Media Foundation (IWMF), and others[27].

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[27] Other organisations with which linkages could be developed include the West African Media Network for Gender and Development (WAMNET), African Women in Media Communication and Development Network (FEMNET), Federation of Women in the Media (FAWM), and Association des Professionalles Africaines de la Communication (APAC).

7.7. Monitoring and Advocacy

7.7.1 Recommendations (Short-Term)

1. The network of monitors need be reactivated, and expanded to include monitors of other rights (as children and women were particular targets during the war, the rights of the two social groups shall require special attention);

2. A series of training programmes should be conducted to enhance the monitors skills in investigating abuses;

3. Steps must be taken to include women in the network of monitors, and special attention shall be paid to monitoring in rural communities where such abuses could be rampant and yet less exposed.

7.7.2 Recommendations (Medium/ Long-Term)

1. The monitoring process should be provided skills and facilities that give it capacity to investigate and document cases to support proposed legal cases;

2. Orientation and training programmes should be organised for the judicial service and security agencies on human rights, with an emphasis freedom of expression.

7.8. Safety and Legal Aid

7.8.1 Recommendations (Short-Term)

During the transition period developments in the safety environment need to be followed closely in order to react to circumstances as they develop. In this regard, it is recommended that:

1. Monitoring of safety related issues in the Liberia, as is already being undertaken by national and international monitoring and advocacy organisations and networks, should be continued.

2. The PUL should act as a focal point on safety issues in order to develop awareness amongst national media practitioners and provide them with a 'point of contact' for accessing further knowledge and assistance on safety related issues.

3. Safety training should be organised for journalists, as post conflict situation can be a dangerous place and the upcoming elections will further fuel any tension. Due to the media's central role during elections they will become targets of not only economic and social pressure, but may also be harassed or even physically attacked.

In relation to legal aid activities, it is recommended that:

4. The work of national, regional and international freedom of expression organisations on following how the law is applied by the newly constituted judiciary in media related cases be facilitated.

7.8.2. Recommendations (Medium/ Long-Term)

1. Possibilities for a coordinated legal aid fund under the auspices of the PUL be assessed, potentially based upon the existing model used by the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA).

2. National legal aid mechanisms and organisations should be supported to overcome the obstacles that exist in the provision of assistance to media practitioners in regional areas outside of Monrovia.

7.9. Training and Media Content

Training and media content should be considered as a cross-cutting theme. In this regard, the recommendations outlined below apply to both the print and broadcast media, and cover professional standards, management and technical skills. It is also clearly noted that any internationally funded training should focus on developing professional and technical skills that allow local media to objectively and reliably report on topics they choose and not solely on those identified by international actors. Moreover, a number of actors, such as IRIN Radio, are already engaged in co-production and training activities with broadcast media and any future programmes should seek to complement and learn from what has been done.

7.9.1. Recommendations (Short-Term)

The immediate general tasks of the media ought to include a contribution to peace-building and consolidation of the peace process. Specific programmes in this process would occupy the media's time and attention, and will serve as landmarks for assessing the media's performance and sense of responsibility.

Journalism Skills

1. Training initiatives should be undertaken to meet immediate challenges. These initiatives should cover journalistic and writing skills, as well as be geared towards improving the competence of reporters and editors in specific areas relevant to the transition period, such as:

   - Election reporting for the 2005 elections;
   - Humanitarian issues and concerns, including disarmament and reintegration;
   - Conflict resolution, peace-building and reconstruction;
   - Transitional justice processes and issues, including truth and reconciliation programmes, justice tribunals;
   - Human rights monitoring and promotion;
   - Safety issues;
   - Activities should be devised that address the specific needs of female journalists.

2. Editors and managers should be engaged in forums to discuss the importance of training and participate in the design of activities, as well as to provide a good grounding on ethical issues and editorial balance.

3. A discussion forum should be convened for government ministers and UN agency heads with their Public Affairs Officers to explain the value of public information in the transition period, for the DDRR process and the upcoming elections.

Technical Skills

4. Production and other technical personnel should be provided with training on the use of equipment provided and modern information and communication technologies such as computers, digital cameras, and so forth.

7.2.2. Recommendations (Medium/ Long-Term)

The development of a training programme in the medium and long-term must be carefully coordinated. A meeting (or roundtable) of national and international organisations should therefore be held to produce a comprehensive multi-year training document. The meeting should address questions of content – including curricula – programme plans and schemes, as well as overall implementation.

Training Institutions

The training programme should aim to support and develop the capacity of the Mass Communications Department and LIJ in order to sustain long-term needs in the country. While the University will be producing long-term advanced level human resource, the LIJ's courses will produce post-high school cadre for the immediate requirements of the industry. Both, however, must be utilised and supported to participate in the various training schemes to acquire the experience and expertise for the future. Such support may include:

1. Promoting secondment or attachment of external experts to the institutions and scholarships for Liberian trainers on courses outside to return to the institutions.

2. Infrastructure and facility assistance to equip training institutions and make them more efficient.

Cadre of Local Trainers

3. A training of trainers programme should be created to strengthen and increase the numbers of staff available to LIJ and Department of Mass Communication. The programme should also aim at developing in-house trainees at LBS, and from some other broadcasting organisations, both of whom may be utilised in continued training programmes for community radio stations.

Public and Governmental Institutions

4. The Ministry of Information generally supplies other government agencies, and for public information needs, information officers and public relations officers. A special programme should assist these officers and possibly support the organisation and functioning of the Ministry's structures.

5. A similar programme will be necessary to orient and train personnel, directors and staff of new regulatory bodies for media pluralism and freedom.

6. Training could also be provided for UN agencies in media relations in order to constructively disseminate information on humanitarian issues.

Journalism Skills

7. A programme providing mid-career, refresher, up-grading training projects should take place at the two training institutions. Other international stakeholders will of course continue to provide their own training services.

8. Journalists should be provided with training in specialised areas, such as investigative journalism, agriculture and rural issues, public health, business reporting and so forth.

9. Thematic workshops should be held on critical social and political questions;

10. Training workshops should be run for community-based stations to develop awareness on community radio as referred to by the African Charter on Broadcasting.

Management Skills

11. A process should be initiated for assisting media proprietors and managers to develop their skills in business planning and management. This would entail media managers being provided with business training, including financial management, marketing strategy, and so forth.

12. Regular forums for editors/managers should be held to reflect on policy issues, new technologies or new professional challenges.

13. Specialised management training is needed for public service broadcasters, as managing LBS and maintaining editorial independence requires a particular approach and skills.

14. A specific training programme is required to address the management and business capacity needs of the professional media associations and the organisational and management needs of training institutions.

8. Partnership Activities and Funding

8.1. Benefits of Collaborative Funding Approach

A primary function of the Partnership is to facilitate joint approaches to potential multi- and bilateral donors. In this manner, it is foreseen that collaborative and holistic funding proposals create better options for donor agencies in terms of ensuring that funds are being properly utilised by credible actors and avoiding wasteful and potentially harmful duplication. Through the Partnership, coordination can be guaranteed prior to the commitment of funds and the added benefits of linkage between activities in similar fields can be ensured from the outset.

8.2. Funding Structures for Partnership Activities

Short-term small-scale funding for the development of strategic approaches will often be sourced from within the Partnership. In regards to longer-term funds, activities may be identified either in response to funding already being available or to address specific needs, with an approach to donors coming subsequently.

As a set of basic funding considerations, the Partnership members have agreed to the following:

1. Funding secured for project activities under the auspices of the Partnership will be held by one or a number of the individual organisations responsible for the implementation of those activities;

2. The Partnership will not apply for core funds and financial responsibilities will be carried by the individual organisations implementing activities together in groups in the Partnership's name;

3. Disbursement and accounting will be the responsibility of the individual Partnership organisations that have entered into the funding agreements with donors.

8.3. Contacting the Partnership

As the structure of the Partnership is flexible, all members will pursue the development of project concepts and funding without restriction. In this regard, the Partnership is designed to be a forum for the mutual coordination of activities and not the collection and distribution of financial resources.

However, if third parties wish to approach the Partnership as a single entity, the Media Foundation West Africa (MFWA) and Media Rights Agenda (MRA) are currently acting as the focal organisation in the region, whilst International Media Support (IMS) is providing international assistance and support. UNESCO together with OCHA and UNDP form the UN links to the country team and UNMIL.

9. Concluding Remarks

These final remarks do not seek to repeat the findings and conclusions of the report (which can be found in a summarised version in the Executive Summary), but rather sum up the objectives and benefits of the Partnership approach and overall activity objectives.

As outlined in this document, support to the media and freedom of expression community in Liberia is imperative in the post-conflict transition period. The success of such support will almost certainly have significant repercussions on the long-term development of peace, stability and democracy in the country.

The Partnership approach being jointly pursued by the authors of this document offers a new and innovative method for the provision of media development and freedom of expression assistance. In this regard, the benefits of coordination, collaboration and mutual linkage between projects within the same fields could be substantial. Those organisations involved in the Partnership bring together a variety of expertise in their specialised areas. In addition, all have experience of working in situations where poor coordination and funding competition have resulted in the execution of ill-conceived overlapping activities, thereby squandering opportunities.

Although it is clear that not all the activities outlined in the document can be undertaken simultaneously, it is nevertheless hoped that the majority will be implemented within a reasonable timeframe. This will significantly enhance their mutual impact and set an important precedent for future coordination of assistance in this and other fields.

Annexes

Annex 1: Meetings with Persons/ Institutions in Liberia

Print Media	
1. National Chronicle	Agnes Abena Browne
2. National Forum	Augustus B. Fallah
3. The Analyst	Stanley Seakor
4. The Heritage	Mohammed M. Kanneh
5. The Inquirer	Philip N. Wesseh
6. The News	Jerome Dalieh
7. The Telegraph	Adolphus D. Karmuah II

Broadcast Media	
8. Liberia Broadcasting Service	Singbe Johnson
9. Liberia Broadcasting Service	Moses K. Dorbor
10. Radio DC-101	Martin Brown
11. Radio Veritas	Frank Sainworla
12. Stone FM	Emmanuel Johnson

Media Associations/ Organisations	
13. Female Lawyers Association	Izetta Wesley
14. Female Journalists Association	Janet Johnson,
15. Female Journalists Association	Kadiatu Konteh
16. Female Journalists Association	Margaret Morris
17. Liberia Institute for Journalism	Vinicius Hodges
18. Press Union of Liberia	Terrence Sesay
19. Press Union of Liberia	Malcolm Joseph
20. Press Union of Liberia	Winston Monboe

National NGOs	
21. Centre for Democratic Empowerment	Thomas Brimah
22. Centre for Democratic Empowerment	Ezekiel Pajebo
23. Justice and Peace Commission	Frances Johnson Morris
24. National Bar Association	Ishmael Campbell
25. National Human Rights Centre	Aloysius Toe
26. National Human Rights Centre	A. Blamo Sieh

Government Ministries/ Institutions	
27. Chairperson of NTG	Gyude Byrant
28. Minister of Justice	Kabineh Ja'neh
29. Deputy Minister of Information	Bernard Waritay
30. Deputy Minister of Information	Richmond Anderson
31. Executive Mansion (Communications)	Lamini Warity

International Organisations and Donors	
32. European Commission	Jeffrey Rudd
33. Mercy Corps	Brian Barber
34. Talking Drum Studios	Elizabeth Hoff
35. US Embassy	Christiana Porche
36. US State Department (USAID)	David Foley

United Nations	
37. UNMIL - SGSR	Jacques Klein
38. OCHA - Communications Office	Rosemary Musumba
39. UNDP - DDRR	Elizabeth Odour Noah
40. UNDP - Democratisation/ Governance	Jean Nicolas Marchal
41. UNDP - Human Rights	Maaruit Kohonen
42. UNICEF	
43. UNMIL - Human Rights	Martin Ejidike
44. UNMIL - Public Information	Margaret Novicki
45. UNMIL - Radio	Judy Leasing

Annex 2: Mission Members

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Christina Dahlman	UNESCO	c.dahlman@unesco.org

Annex 3: Specialised Regional and International Stakeholders

The following annex provides an overview of the specialised regional and international actors engaged in the fields of freedom of expression and media development in West Africa during the past years. The list is not exhaustive, but rather a cross-section of some of the main trends and activities. National organisations in Liberia have not been included as they are covered in more detail in the relevant sections of the report.

Article 19
Article 19 has focused activities on the truth commissions in Sierra Leone and media law reform in Nigeria. In addition, it has collaborated with the Media Foundation West Africa (MFWA) on regional-level programmes dealing with public service broadcasting reform and press freedom advocacy.

Canadian Journalists for Free Expression
Canadian Journalists for Free Expression (CJFE) have engaged in a project to help rebuild key parts of the print media in Sierra Leone, through purchasing a printing press and the creation of a local co-operative to run it. In addition, all papers that use the press abide by a code of ethics with the aim of improving the quality of news coverage.

Freedom House
Amongst other activities, Freedom House has supported a project to strengthen Nigeria's independent media by building the ability of select journalists to report on sensitive issues such as corruption, ethnic and religious conflict, and political and economic reform.

International Federation of Journalists
The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) has focused on strengthening independent journalists trade unions, raising the professional status of journalists, reinforcing capacities for professional training, addressing democratic change, public accountability and globalisation issues, and advancing the respect for international standards of press freedom. Since 1994, IFJ has been pursuing these objectives through the Media for Democracy in Africa Programme (MFD), which incorporates a range of activities.

International Freedom of Expression eXchange
Working with a number of local and regional partners, the International Freedom of Expression eXchange (IFEX) issues regular news and alerts about the media situation in West Africa.

International Media Support
International Media Support (IMS) has implemented activities in Liberia, Cote d'Ivoire and Sierra Leone. In Liberia this has included setting up an information and monitoring mechanism and network, running a legal defence project, and assisting the creation of a temporary safe haven in Ghana intended to keep exiled journalists professionally active and prepare them to return to Liberia. In Sierra Leone IMS has run a training programme for journalists on reporting the TRC and in Cote d'Ivoire IMS implemented safety training and conflict conscious reporting activities.

Internews
Since starting operations in West Africa, Internews has conducted research and established websites in support of independent media in Nigeria and currently maintains an extensive website on Nigerian civil society and media development. Internews is also developing plans for an emergency response programme that will assist television and radio reports from crisis

zones. Other Internews projects include a programme for media professionals to cover specialised issues, such as HIV/AIDS.

Media Foundation for West Africa
The Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA), based in Ghana, aims to defend and promote the rights and freedoms of the media and help expand the boundaries of freedom of speech in West Africa. It monitors press freedom attacks and issues alerts. MFWA has an ongoing monitoring and study of the state of the media in Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea and other countries regarding press freedom and media and conflict.

Media Rights Agenda
Media Rights Agenda (MRA), based in Nigeria, is a press freedom and advocacy organization. It works for media law reform and defence of journalists, and has also developed competencies on conflicts and their effects on media.

Mercy Corps
Mercy Corps is implementing the Liberia Community Peacebuilding and Development Program (CPBD), funded by USAID. Mercy Corps and its partners, the Academy for Educational Development (AED) and Search for Common Ground, are working with local non-governmental organizations, community leaders and civic groups to increase the role of civil society in democratic governance. In addition, together with partners, Mercy Corp has initiated an extensive community radio programme, which reportedly entails the provision of self-sustaining solar electrical power, digital equipment, and computers for editing and broadcasting, for a network of local community stations. It is foreseen that this network will include around 20 stations countrywide.

National Endowment for Democracy
The National Endowment for Democracy (NED) aims to strengthen democratic institutions by making grants to support pro-democracy groups. As examples, in Liberia NED has provided funds to the Center for Law and Human Rights Education, Justice and Peace Commission (JPC), Liberia Institute of Journalism and Press Union of Liberia.

Open Society Initiative for West Africa
The Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA) is part of the global network of autonomous Soros foundations. OSIWA disburses USD 10 million in grants per year to organizations working in the areas of human rights, democracy and governance, media and technology, legal reform and transitional justice, and HIV/AIDS. In the field of media, OSIWA aims to helps communities gain access to independent information and uncensored media, and promotes diversity in media ownership.

PANOS Institute West Africa
PANOS has provided expertise and advocacy with regard to legal matters, production and training, and capacity building in the area of communication. The PANOS programme from 2001 to 2005 has a focus on strengthening media to contribute to democracy in West Africa. In Cote d'Ivoire, PANOS works with the Media Ethics Observatory (OLPED) for the improvement of professional standards and ethics in the media. PANOS is also engaged in programmes to strengthen the media ability to contribute to national reconciliation.

Search for Common Ground
Search for Common Ground and Common Ground Productions opened the Talking Drum Studio - Liberia (TDS-L) in 1997, which includes a radio production facility in Monrovia that focuses on producing programming related to mediation, reconciliation and empowerment.

They also use the media as a tool to help find solutions to conflict in Sierra Leone, in part by promoting local, national and sub-regional dialogue.

UN OCHA
The focus of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has been on Liberia, Sierra Leone, Cote d'Ivoire and Guinea, where there have been large-scale displacements of people as a result of conflict. In general OCHA has been most active where social and economic systems and services have failed resulting in a need for protection, such as in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Cote d'Ivoire.

As a part of OCHA, the Integrated Regional Information Networks' (IRIN) information products on West Africa include analytical reports, chronologies, interviews, daily summaries and weekly digests and are available in English and French. IRIN text is reposted extensively throughout the web and reprinted in local papers across Africa. In Liberia, IRIN Radio it has focused on training and co-production, working with local stations. While the aim is to produce humanitarian programming, the main task is to build the capacity of local broadcasters. IRIN Radio sees its work as complementing that of UNMIL and Talking Drum Studios. IRIN Radio is also working in partnership with Mercy Corps, providing equipment and specialist training in the framework of Mercy Corps' own community radio programme. IRIN Radio also organises training sessions, providing digital recording and editing equipment and identifying programmes for co-production

UNDP
The United Nations Development Programme is often engaged in a country before, during and after conflict, and therefore brings much-needed long-term perspective to emergency reconstruction work. UNDP provides assistance that helps countries progress along a continuum from emergency to recovery to development. In Liberia, UNDP is providing technical support in the coordination of the disarmament and demobilization of former combatants. At the same time UNDP is giving vital assistance to the new transitional government in the form of help with the establishment of a comprehensive national reconstruction plan, including technical assistance to bolster the capacity of key government ministries.

UNESCO
The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) has sought to initiate joint strategies in West Africa together with partner organisations concerning the role of international actors in extending capacity-building to the media. The Organization participated in the UNDG/WB Needs Assessment in Liberia and contributed with the media section in the Governance cluster of the final UN report. UNESCO's contribution was based on the background assessment to this report and was the result of the collaboration of the Partnership. UNESCO is also developing close links with a number of donors to establish a common understanding of the importance of rapid reaction to assist media open and post conflict situations and of the concrete approach applied. The 2004 World Press Freedom Day theme is focussed on "Support to media in violent conflict and in countries in transition" and brings together a wide selection of NGOs, UN agencies, donors and media professionals to discuss lessons learned from earlier experiences and emphasize the need to recognize as an essential part of any humanitarian intervention.

West African Journalists Association
The West African Journalists Association (WAJA) represents journalists' organisations from sixteen countries in the sub-region and is active in addressing press freedom issues and media related concerns.