
Sierra Leone – Media Landscape Report

December 2018

BBC Media Action has created this media landscape report on Sierra Leone to support the IFRC & Kenya Red Cross in their *Community Epidemic and Pandemic Preparedness Program (CP3)*, funded by USAID.

BBC Media Action’s nationally representative survey conducted across Sierra Leone in late 2015 provides the main source of information for this report. Other key sources are listed in the appendix at the end of the report.

Contents

1. Media landscape
2. Media Access: Population access to media platforms (TV, radio, internet, mobile phones) at home & elsewhere
3. How frequently people access different media platforms
4. Radio Usage & stations most regularly listened to
5. TV Usage & stations most regularly listened to
6. Social Media
7. Language and literacy
8. Trusted sources of information
9. Case Studies - examples of how media has been used in Sierra Leone: national and local
10. Appendix

1. Media Landscape

Since the end of the civil war in 2002, Sierra Leone's media landscape has diversified with the proliferation of new radio and TV stations and the increased use of mobile phones and the internet. Radio continues to be the best way to reach wide audiences, with 81% of Sierra Leoneans having access in 2015 [1]. However, no single station is able to reach a national audience and it requires working with a large number of broadcast partners to gain a national coverage. BBC Media Action's current project in Sierra Leone uses a network of 20 partner radio stations to broadcast *Tawa Fo Welbodi*, (Determined for Health) a programme about malaria, nationwide.

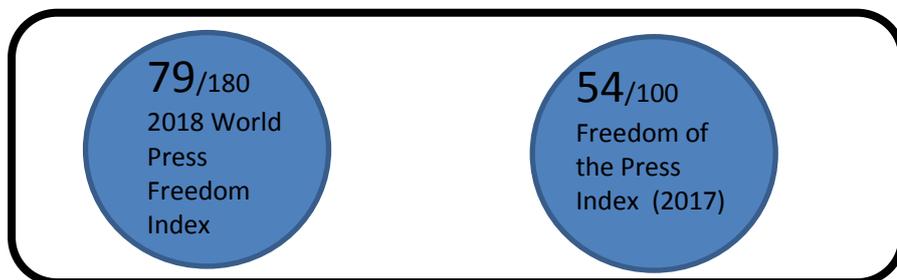
Mobile phone ownership continues to increase, with 65% of men and 45% of women owning their own mobile phone in 2017. [2] However, the BBC Media Action 2015 survey also captured in more detail that people mainly used their mobiles to make calls; only a third (33%) used it send text messages and just 13% used social messaging services such as Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp.[1] Only, 18% of households had a television according to the Statistics Sierra Leone MICS6 report, in 2017 [2], and this is likely to reflect the low level of access to electricity in the country.

Sierra Leone's press is considered 'partly free'.

Sierra Leone's press is considered 'partly free' according to The Freedom of the Press Index in 2017. [3] Its constitution guarantees freedom of speech and freedom of the press and, in 2013, the country drew praise from Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and its own Freedom of Information Coalition, when parliament passed the Right to Access Information Act – a "major step to ensure greater government transparency, the rule of law, and respect for human rights".

However, during the Ebola outbreak, there was criticism of the abuse of emergency powers granted to the president after several people were accused of publicly undermining the security of the state and arrested. These emergency powers were deemed, by some, to have "led to the widespread use of arrest and detention orders against journalists who were critical of the government".

Economic insecurity is also a major obstacle to press freedom. As journalists are often poorly paid and untrained, they are vulnerable to editorial pressure from owners, advertisers, and other businesses.



World Press Freedom Index [3], Freedom of the Press Index 0=Best, 100=Worst [4]

Elections 2018

Following a decade of civil war (1991-2002), Sierra Leone has enjoyed sustained political stability in recent years. 2014 marked the end of more than 15 years of international peacekeeping operations in the country. In March 2018, Julius Maada Bio of the opposition Sierra Leone People's Party won a run-off election to become president. The European Union Election Observation described the

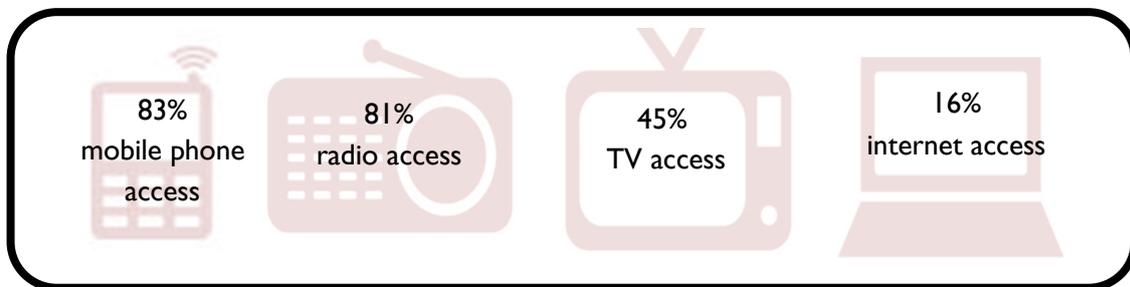
elections days as ‘generally peaceful and orderly’, and during the election, journalists were able to operate in an atmosphere of relative freedom; however, the legislation criminalising libel and sedition led to self-censorship. [5]

2. Media Access

Most Sierra Leoneans adults have access to a mobile phone and radio

In 2015, BBC Media Action’s nationally representative survey found that the majority of the Sierra Leone adult population had access to a mobile phone (83%) and radio (81%). Less than half the adult population had access to TV (45%) and around a sixth of the adult population had access to the internet (16%).

Media Access among Sierra Leone’s adult population



(Figures includes access at home or elsewhere)

Base=2,499 Note: figures exclude those who answered ‘don’t know’ and those who did not answer

Radio is the most widely accessed broadcast platform

Radio remains the most widely accessed broadcast platform in Sierra Leone. In 2017, 55% of 15-49 year olds had a radio in their household, according to the MICS6, Statistics Sierra Leone survey. [2]

People are able access a radio (their neighbours or friends) without necessary owning a radio. In 2015, BBC Media Action’s survey found that eight out of 10 (81%) Sierra Leoneans had access to radio (within the home or any other place), and 47% reported listening to it daily.

The BBC Media Action survey found that whilst most of the population lived in rural areas 65% compared to 35% urban, radio access was higher amongst urban respondents (89%) compared to rural respondents (77%). Radio access was also slightly higher amongst males (84%), than females (78%), but was high amongst all age groups.

Access to mobile phones is high

In 2017, 65% of men and 45% of women owned a mobile phone, according to the MICS6, Statistics Sierra Leone survey [2].

The BBC Media Action survey of 2015, also showed that mobile phone access was high, achieving a similar high reach as radio: 83% of people reported having access to a mobile phone. More than half of mobile phone owners (52%) had a basic feature phone. This shows that there is significant potential for leveraging this reach and humanitarian and non-profit organisations (including IFRC),

have used mobile phone platforms to distribute content and information to Sierra Leone audiences, and to feedback information to agencies. (More details of these projects are listed in the case studies section at the end of the report).

TV viewing is more widespread in urban areas

In 2017, 18% of households had a television according to the Statistics Sierra Leone MICS6, survey. [2]. This low level of television ownership is likely to be related to the poor level of access to electricity in Sierra Leone, as tracked by the [World Bank](#) [6]. BBC Media Action’s qualitative research during the 2018 election also found that respondents said a lack of electricity was the reason for not being able to watch TV.

“I prefer listening to radio, because I was staying in a community that does not have electricity supply. That is the major reason why I was unable to follow the election process on television”. Female, 18 years +, Bo, Urban

BBC Media Action’s survey in 2015 showed that 45% of the population had access to TV in the home or any other place. More urban respondents (74%) had access to TV compared to rural respondents (31%). Access to a TV was also higher amongst younger people. In addition, men were slightly more likely to have access than women to a TV, 50% of men compared to 42% of women.

Social media and internet access is still at a low rate

The Internet World Stats shows that Internet users grew rapidly from only 5000 internet users in Dec 2000, to 902,462 in Dec 2017. However, the stats showed that internet penetration rate was still low at 12% in 2017. [7]

Country	Population (2018 Est.)	Internet Users 31/12/2000	Internet Users 31/12/2017	Penetration (% Population)	Internet Growth % 2000 - 2017	Facebook subscribers 31/12/2017
Sierra Leone	7,719,729	5,000	902,462	11.70%	17949%	450,000

The BBC Media Action’s own survey in 2015, found a slightly higher rate - 16% of adult Sierra Leonean’s could access the internet. Young male, urban respondents were more likely to have access to the internet. (For example 36% of urban respondents had access compared to 4% of rural respondents).

Location	Urban	Rural
Has access to the internet	36%	4%

Gender	Male	Female
Has access to the internet	21%	10%

Age group	15-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
Has access to the internet	23%	17%	10%	10%	7%	6%

Base: 2319

In IFRC’s pilot areas - radio access is universal in Kambia, but in Kailahun there are lower levels of access to all media platforms.

The 2015 survey found that in Kambia mobile phone, radio and TV penetration was higher than the national population. Almost everyone had access to a mobile phone and radio.

In Kailahun there was lower access to all platforms compared to the national population, and nearly all people did not have access to the internet. In 2015, only 2% of respondents from Kailahun said they had access to the internet.

Media Access among Sierra Leone’s adult population in selected pilot areas

Media Platform	Kailahun	Kambia	Total Sample
Mobile	51%	98%	79%
Radio	71%	92%	81%
TV	14%	55%	46%
Internet	2%	9%	16%

Base= Kailahun n= 181, Kambia n=135

3. How frequently people access different media platforms

In 2015, almost half (47%) of adult Sierra Leoneans reported that they usually listen to the radio each day. The Afrobarometer Sierra Leone round 7 report (July 2018), also found that 39% of respondents get their news from the radio every day, whereas 11% got their news from the TV every day. [8]

Frequency in access radio

Platform	Every day	AT LEAST 2-3 times a week	AT LEAST once a week	Less frequently than once a week
Radio	47%	26%	11%	6%

Base: 2499

Similarly, in the pilot areas, around three quarters of the population for both locations reported listening to the radio every day *or* at least 2-3 times a week.

How often do you usually listen to radio?

Frequency	Kailahun	Kambia	Total sample
Every day	47%	56%	47%
AT LEAST 2-3 times a week	28%	20%	26%
AT LEAST once a week	15%	13%	10%
Less frequently than once a week	3%	3%	6%

Does not currently listen to the radio	8%	7%	10%
--	----	----	-----

Base: 2023

4. Radio Usage

There is greater diversification of radio stations and listenership in Sierra Leone

The number of radio stations, have dramatically increased. From eight in 2000, to around 50 radio stations broadcasting in 2015, with many of these having limited, local broadcast reach.

This is reflected in patterns of listenership, with different stations popular in different parts of the country. Overall in the country, no station reaches more than one-third of adult Sierra Leoneans. Reaching a national audience through radio, therefore, requires working with a large number of broadcast partners. (A current BBC Media Action radio project broadcasts on 20 partner radio stations).

Radio Station	% who listen in sample
African Young Voices Radio	22%
SLBC, Freetown	15%
Star Radio	14%
Kiss FM	13%
Radio Democracy	11%
Eastern Radio, Kenema	7%
SLBC, Kenema	6%
SLBC, Bo	5%
Starline Radio	4%

The transmitter footprint maps are available from the following website - for each station there is a link to a transmitter map: <https://fmscan.org/net3.php?r=f&m=s&itu=SRL>

The national broadcaster, Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC), and African Young Voices (AYV) radio are the stations that are most popular cross-regionally, although stations such as Star Radio and Africa Independent Radio were also mentioned by participants in many districts.

Description of top radio stations:

- **African Young Voices (AYV)** (22% of the adult population listened in 2015) – media broadcasting in Radio, TV, Print and Media Production with the aim to redefine media in Sierra Leone and beyond. <http://ayvnews.com/about-us/>
- **Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC)** – (15% listened to SLBC, Freetown in 2015) radio and TV broadcaster, owned by the government. Its regional radio stations provide FM radio services in Freetown, Bo, Kenema, Kailahun, Makeni, Magburaka and Koidu. <https://slbcnews.com/about-us>
- **Star Network** (14% listenership 2015) provides a commercial television and radio services and broadcasts from Freetown <https://www.facebook.com/StarRadioSierraLeone/>

- **Radio Democracy** (commonly known as 98.1 FM) (11% listenership in 2015) is a non-profit organisation that operates as an independent news media corporation and broadcasts from Freetown as well. <http://radiodemocracy.sl/about-us/>

Most popular radio stations in each region

Western Region	%
African Young Voices (AYV)	33%
Radio Democracy	29%
SLBC Freetown	23%
Star Radio	22%
Citizen FM	16%

Eastern Region	%
Eastern Radio, Kenema	28%
SLBC Kenema	24%
Radio Moa	20%
Starline Radio	17%
SLBC Kono	13%

Northern Region	%
African Young Voices (AYV)	38%
SLBC Freetown	25%
Radio Mankneh	21%
African Independent Radio	19%
Star Radio	18%

Western Region	%
African Young Voices (AYV)	33%
Radio Democracy	29%
SLBC Freetown	23%
Star Radio	22%
Citizen FM	16%

Percentages refer to the proportion of respondents within each region who report that they listen to this station so percentages add up to more than 100.

There are also international radio stations including: BBC World Service which is broadcast on FM in Freetown (94.3), Bo (94.5) and Kenema (95.3). Voice of America and Radio France Internationale broadcast on FM in Freetown. [9]

Pilot Areas

In Kailahun - Radio MOA and SLBC Kailahun are popular, and in Kambia – African Young Voices Radio and Radio Kolenten are most popular.

Kailahun

Radio Stations	%
Radio MOA	37%
SLBC, Kailahun	36%
Eastern Radio, Kenema	22%
SLBC, Kenema	21%

Kambia

Radio Stations	%
African Young Voices Radio	68%
Radio Kolenten	62%
SLBC, Freetown	34%
Radio Democracy	33%
Radio Barming	32%
Culture FM	23%

5. TV Usage

In 2017, 18.2% of households had a television according to Statistics Sierra Leone, MICS6. [2] Households with televisions, are more likely to be in an urban areas (38.7%) compared to rural (1.5%).

The main state broadcaster is Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC). Private television channels include- African Young Voices (AYV), and Star TV.

There are also online television channels including KTV: <https://ktvsl.com/about-ktv-sierra-leone/> International satellite channels are available on a subscription basis through Digital Satellite Television Service (DSTV), although the costs associated with this are high. <https://dstvsage.herokuapp.com/dstv-sierra-leone-packages-channels>

Description of largest broadcasters:

- **Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC)** – radio and TV broadcaster, owned by the government. It has two television channels for Freetown, one channel also broadcasts to Bo, Kenema and Makeni. The other TV channel is a general entertainment channel. <http://slbc.sl/>
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/slbcnews.sl/>
- **AYV TV** – describes itself as a television station aimed young people (ages 16-45). It offers a mix of news, sports, entertainment, music, reality TV and talk shows. <http://ayvnews.com/services/>
- **Star TV** - <https://www.facebook.com/STAR-TV-Sierra-Leone-845830512157553/>

The Afrobarometer Sierra Leone round 7 report (July 2018), found that 11% got their news from the TV every day. [6]

How often do you get news from the following sources? Television

Category	%/Total
Never	71.6%
Less than once a month	4.4%
A few times a month	4.5%
A few times a week	7.8%
Every day	11.2%
Don't know	0.5%

Base: 1200

Qualitative research was conducted for a UNDP funded BBC Media Action project to enhance the participation of women and people with disabilities during the 2018 elections. Participants’ main source of information about the elections was from the radio, but some did watch TV and used social media. Participants reported watching television stations such as SLBC TV, Star TV and AYV Television for information about the election.

“AYV television, especially AYV on Sunday when they bring commentators and analyst who are brought together to analyze issues and talk on them, so this was how I followed the trend of the elections and by the time the elections came, we understood that IRN will connect all the radio stations to give information on how the results go, this was how I was getting information”
Male 18+ Makeni, Urban

6. Social Media Usage

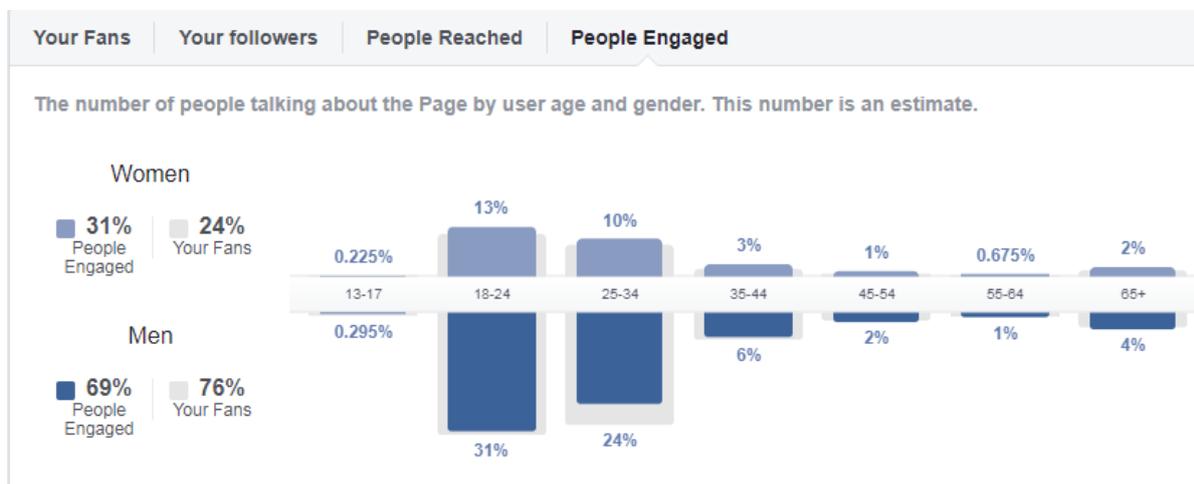
There were 450,000 Facebook users according to the Internet World Stats, December 2017.

The BBC Media Action Sierra Leone Facebook page has become the largest in the country. As of 4th January 2019, the Total Page Likes were: 522,687 and Total Page followers: 523,452 (These figures include users not only in Sierra Leone, but across the world).

<https://www.facebook.com/bbcmediaactionSL/>

The BBC Media Action, Sierra Leone Facebook page, posts content from radio programmes, and also quizzes and a range of other content that appeal to audiences. For instance, a series of videos featuring women in non-traditional jobs that was unrelated to the radio shows drove traffic to the page.

The majority of users who have engaged or liked the BBC Media Action, Sierra Leone Facebook page are young males, aged between 18-34 years old. (For example, 76% of fans are male).



Data extracted 04.01.2019

People from around the world access the BBC Media Action Facebook page, including what is likely to be Sierra Leone’s diaspora. People who have liked the page are mainly from the capital, Freetown.

Country	Your Fans
Sierra Leone	113,086
Guinea	77,158
Nigeria	47,278
Somalia	40,991
Ghana	34,550

Data extracted 04.01.2019

City	Your Fans
Freetown, Western Area	97,105
Bo, Southern Province	5,067
Kenema, Eastern Province	3,492
Makeni, Northern Province	3,389

Data extracted 04.01.2019

Reaching a different audience with social media

The users of the Facebook page may not be the main target audience for some of the BBC Media Action projects, but the users are young and influential so may be likely to discuss issues and topics with others in the community.

A small online survey in July 2016, found that users who completed the survey reported that they were educated - over half of those who responded to the Facebook online survey said they had some college/university education or completed college/university level education 26/39

Focus groups with users of the Sierra Leone Facebook page in the same year, found that most participants described themselves as active, involved in decision making, and bringing change to their community. Most said they belonged to youth organisations and undertook volunteer roles to: clean drain, roads and their community, train youths on business ideas, sensitise their community on malaria, and work as social mobilisers.

“In Bo I engaged in decision making because I have been trained as a social mobilizer. I lead a youth group of five to fifteen people in my area concerning issues within the community, for instance we were in the city hall were we talked about the high rate of youth employment” Focus group (18 – 24 year olds), mixed gender, Bo

From the online survey, the majority of users wanted: to find out about issues affecting Sierra Leone 31/43. They also want to join the discussion and debate online (16/43).

Focus groups participants also reported that they used the Facebook page to get information about the country, and catch up on the radio programmes.

“As my colleague said I use the Facebook page to know what is happening in my country especially things that has to do with governance, most of their posts have to do with the development of our country. If I don’t see any news I sometimes worried about what is happening”. 18–24, Bo, social media study, 2016

Overall, Facebook users liked the BBC Media Action Sierra Leone page because it was informative, educational and helped users to learn about what was going on in the country. Users expressed a preference for topics related to access to services, such as health, water and education, and they were more likely to view photos than other formats (e.g. videos). Generally, FGD participants said that they accessed the page daily.

“I log on to Facebook every day and I always ensure that I look up [the] BBC Media Action [Sierra Leone] page to read its posts, make comments and share ideas.”
18–24 year old, Bo, social media study, 2016

WhatsApp

As the Ebola crisis hit the country, the BBC launched an Ebola WhatsApp broadcast channel in English and French for audiences in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea. Although not initially planned as a Global Grant governance project activity, in March 2015 BBC Media Action created a service targeted specifically at Sierra Leoneans. This reached about 15,000 users and contributed to the project’s objectives.

7. Languages spoken

Krio is the best language for broadcasting

English is the official language of Sierra Leone, however only 30% of the population speaks it. Krio is an English-based Creole, spoken by the majority of the population. Mende is the principal vernacular language in the south, and Temne in the north. In 2015, 83% of the population said they spoke Krio, 41% said they spoke Mende and 33% spoke Temne.

Which languages do you speak?

Languages	%
Krio	83%
Mende	41%
Temne	33%
English	30%

Base: 2499

However, it should be noted that 18% of adult Sierra Leoneans speak one of 15 local languages, but neither Krio nor English. Local languages include: Fullah, Mandigo, Limba, Susu, Kono, Yalunka, Kissi, Kuranko, Loko. These languages are each spoken by less than 10% of the population.

In Kailahun and Kambia, a high proportion of respondents speak Krio.

- In Kambia - 84% speak Krio, and 77% speak Temne.
- In Kailahun - 77% speak Krio, and 82% of respondents speak Mende.

Which languages do you speak?

Languages	Kailahun	Kambia
Krio	77%	84%
Mende	82%	1%
Temne	2%	77%
English	15%	26%

Base: Kailahun n=182, Kambia n=135

English should be used for written communication (eg social media, mobile text message campaigns)

Aid agencies should be aware that illiteracy rates are still high, although literacy is improving) and although languages can be spoken, many people cannot read or write the language they speak.

In 2017, according to the Statistics Sierra Leone, Sierra Leone Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2017 (MICS6) report [2].

- 58.3% of men and 41.5% of women were reported as literate
- 62.3% of women in urban areas compared to 20.9% of women in rural areas were literate

If using social media, or text message campaigns, then English may be the preferred language as around a third of adults in 2015 could read or write English, a higher proportion than other languages. Most newspapers in Sierra Leone are also printed in English.

Please tell me languages you can read?	%
Cannot Read	62%
English	34%
Krio	5%

Please tell me languages you can write?	%
Cannot Write	62%
English	35%
Krio	4%

Mende	1%
Temne	0%

Base: 2499

Mende	1%
Temne	0%

Base: 2499

8. How people use information

Case study: ACAPS Ebola project: December 2015. Ebola Outbreak, Sierra Leone: Communication: Challenges and good practices. [10]

ACAPS produced a report with the aim of identifying lessons learned and good practice in community-led communication processes during the Ebola outbreak.

Background:

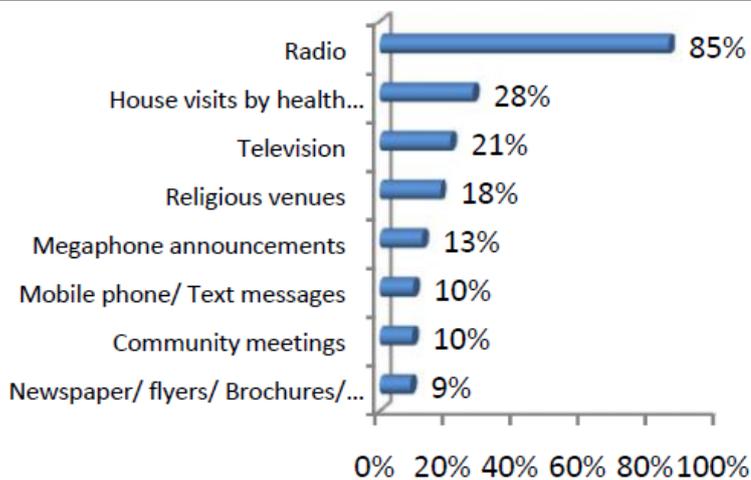
During the Ebola outbreak messages were blasted from speakers on cars, disseminated on billboards, posters, leaflets, newspapers, radio, TV and via SMS and call-in hotlines (Internews, 26/03/2016). As the epidemic progressed, more targeted and informed messages were put through these channels.

The Social Mobilisation Action Consortium (SMAC) which was created in October 2014 was the largest and most comprehensive social mobilisation intervention in Sierra Leone (GOAL, 2015). Its network included staff from the five SMAC agencies, over 36 radio stations, 4000 religious Leaders and thousands of community mobilisers on-the-ground, and Ebola Survivors (humanitarianresponse, 25/10/2015).

Main Sources of Information

Radio was the preferred means for receiving information about Ebola for 85% of the population, followed by house-to-house visits, televisions and religious venues. (Focus 1000, Survey Aug

Radio by far the preferred means for receiving information about Ebola



2014)

(Base: 1413)

Radio Programmes:

In July 2014, BBC Media Action created a radio programme called Kick Ebola Nar Salone (Kick Ebola out of Sierra Leone), to provide information, counter stigma and misinformation, and promote working together in the Ebola response (BBC Media Action, 17/11/2014). Other long-running question and answer shows, such as Tok Bot Salone (Talk About Sierra Leone), brought people face-to-face with their leaders, recording episodes in town and village halls, schools and market places (BBC Media action, 29/07/2014).

House visits:

Interpersonal communication, in particular house visits, was the second most preferred channel by KAP study respondents (Focus1000, 03/2015). Surveyed community members identified the need for a platform to interact, ask questions, and get clear answers – especially around preventive actions they could take to reduce the risk of transmission and understanding the medical care and treatment options available for infection persons. The communication channel most likely to reach caregivers and individuals were one-on-one communication channels, such as counselling from community health volunteers and interactions with health workers at the health facility or during their outreach visits.

Religious venues were also a main source of information on Ebola, with Churches and Mosques having an even wider reach in the Epicenters – Kailahun, Kenema, P. Loko. The opinion of faith leaders was held in high regards. Mosques and churches became critical channels for the dissemination of Ebola messages. (Focus 1000, Survey Aug 2014). The support of and Imams was key as they were uniquely positioned to reshape religious burial norms and discourage practices that involved touching and washing of deceased victims.

These findings have been extracted from the [CDAC report, Dec 2015](#)

9. Overall Trust

Health professionals are the most trusted source of information on health

Respondents reported that they trust nurses, doctors and community health workers most as sources of information on health issues. Therefore, including health professionals on radio programmes can help build audiences trust in information that is broadcast.

What type of source would you trust the MOST to give you information on health?

Trust	%
Nurse	30%
Doctor	24%
Community Health Worker	20%
Radio	14%
NGO worker	5%
TV	2%
Government	1%
Family	1%
Other: Specify	1%
No preference	1%

Base: 2137

A BBC Media Action survey in 2013 found that trust in religious institutions was high, with 46% of participants saying they trust religious institutions ‘a lot’ and 36% ‘a bit’.

The Afrobarometer, Sierra Leone, Round 7 report (July 2018) also found that trust in religious leaders was high [8]

- 88% trust religious leaders ‘somewhat’ (31%) or ‘a lot’ (57%).
- 69% trust traditional leaders ‘somewhat’ (36%) or ‘a lot’ (33%).

How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say? Religious leaders

Trust	%
Not at all	3%
Just a little	7%
Somewhat	31%
A lot	57%
Refused	0%
Don't Know	1%

Base: 1200

How much do you trust each of the following, or haven't you heard enough about them to say?

Traditional leaders

Trust	%
Not at all	10%
Just a little	18%
Somewhat	36%
A lot	33%
Refused	0%
Don't Know	3%

Base: 1200

Case study: Findings around trust from the ACAPS report on the Ebola outbreak.(Dec 2015) [10]

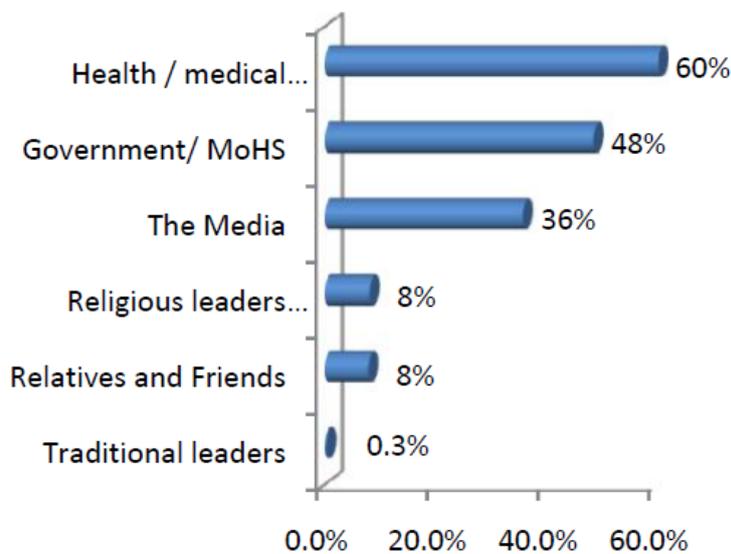
Challenges to trust

- After the Ebola outbreak was declared in Sierra Leone, in June 2014, early messages about the high mortality rate of Ebola were met with fear and denial by many communities (BBC, 14/06/2015).
- At the peak of the outbreak, the government's order to place more than one million people under quarantine further damaged trust between affected communities and responders (ACAPS, 10/2015)

Most trusted source:

Health professionals were found to be the most trusted source - especially in epicenters -Kailahun, Kenema, Port Loko (67 – 86%)

Health professionals and Government/MOHS are the most trusted source of information



(Base: 1413)

10. Case Study examples of how media has been used in Sierra Leone

Case Study 1: National Media: The magazine programme *Fo Rod* and the debate show *Tok Bot Salone* [11]



BBC Media Action producer and presenter Edward Kargbo moderates a *Tok Bot Salone* debate on education at the Prince of Wales Secondary School

Funded by DFID, under the Global Grant project, BBC Media Action produced a fortnightly radio debate programme called *Tok Bot Salone* (Talk about Sierra Leone) and a weekly radio magazine show *Fo Rod* (Crossroads).

***Fo Rod* (Crossroads) (2012-2016)**

Fo Rod was an hour-long weekly radio magazine show, broadcast across the country in Krio. By 2016 it aired on 42 partner radio stations across the country.

The programme aimed to address governance challenges around service delivery and corruption by informing the audience of their rights. Two or three government officials, service providers, community organisations and leaders discussed wide-ranging issues such as youth unemployment, the Freedom of Information Bill, Ebola and how the police responded to protests.

The show was moderated by a BBC Media Action presenter and interwoven with pre-recorded interviews, vox pops and packages. Listeners could participate by sending text messages and making comments on the Facebook page. Selected comments were read out during the programme and often questions from listeners were put to the studio guests.

***Tok Bot Salone* (Talk about Sierra Leone) (2012-2016)**

Tok Bot Salone was an hour-long fortnightly radio debate programme, with a live audience. The show roved throughout the country – featuring a broad spectrum of Sierra Leonean citizens and government officials, service providers, community officials and leaders – to debate issues of national and local importance, including peaceful elections, education in crisis, the effect of Ebola on agriculture, and the Abortion Bill. These live debates were broadcast across the country through a network of partner radio stations.

By providing a platform for people to directly question power holders and facilitating dialogue between these individuals, it brought local issues to a national stage. The programme was moderated by usually one, but on occasions, two BBC Media Action presenters, who ensured it role-modelled good political dialogue around issues, rather than personalities.

Inclusive dialogue

In accordance with the project objective to create an inclusive and constructive conversation across regional, political and other divides, the programmes aimed to reach and engage an audience representative of the country's diverse population. BBC Media Action developed working relationships with a range of CSOs in order to access groups that tended to be under-represented in the media. These relationships were helpful in securing women as panellists and in the live audience. They also regularly included women as the main, or guest, *Fo Rod* and *Tok Bot Salone* presenters. The programmes almost always had at least one female panellist (*Tok Bot Salone*) or guest (*Fo Rod*). The production team aimed for 50% female representation, but this was challenging in a patriarchal society in which the duty-bearers – such as government leaders, service providers and civil society leaders – are predominantly male.

Reach of the radio programmes

In total, over the course of the five-year-long project, an estimated **2.4 million** adult Sierra Leoneans cumulatively listened to the two radio programmes. The highest reach was at endline (2015), when 1.1 million people (29% of the population aged 15 and above) had listened to either one or both programmes.

Improving political knowledge and understanding

In Sierra Leone, the project specifically aimed to increase people's knowledge of their rights to services and how to access them, and of the democratic and electoral processes. The midline (2013) survey found that, on average, 87% of people who tuned into either one or both programmes reported having increased their knowledge on key governance issues 'a bit' or 'a lot' as a result of listening. By endline (2015), this proportion had increased to 94%, with the proportion being slightly higher for *Fo Rod*, when looking at the programmes individually.

Qualitative research conducted throughout the project highlighted that the programmes provided information that was relevant to listeners' lives, addressed the challenges audiences faced on a daily basis and increased listeners' awareness of their rights. For example, several young people said that they had not heard about the ongoing constitutional review before listening to the special *Fo Rod* episode covering this, while other *Fo Rod* listeners reported learning about the importance of being counted in censuses.

"The programme has made me aware that Sierra Leoneans have a right to education. We even have the right to free education because, during this programme, we learned that government will be paying school fees for students".

Youth, Western Area, audience research, 2015

Qualitative research also found that listeners gained an understanding of power holders' roles and responsibilities from tuning into the shows. For example, research participants described learning of the president's plans to empower women and create job opportunities for youths during his second term from listening to the *Fo Rod* episode about the president's speech. It also revealed that the programmes alerted listeners to the successes and failures of government service provision. For a number of listeners this had been a positive experience as it had highlighted the progress the government had made on matters that affected them.

“[After listening]... we now know that we have a right to good roads, electricity, water supply and other government services”.
Female, Moyamba, audience research, 2015

Case Study 2: Local Media: strengthening the capacity of local radio stations during Ebola [12]}

During the 2014/15 Ebola outbreak in Sierra Leone BBC Media Action supported staff at 42 local or community-based radio stations to improve communication about the disease.

Sierra Leone was initially declared Ebola free in November 2015. By then the 2014/5 outbreak had claimed the lives of 3,955 people in the country. During the Ebola outbreak, BBC Media Action worked closely with local radio stations as part of the Social Mobilisation Action Consortium (SMAC) to provide platforms for discussions and give listeners timely, relevant and practical information. The SMAC project began in October 2014, just before the outbreak reached its peak when there was still widespread misinformation about the disease.

BBC Media Action’s support to local stations involved training sessions, on-the-job mentoring and providing production equipment and financial support. This work was funded with UK aid from the UK government.

Key findings

- Radio was seen as a key source of information during the outbreak, helping to raise awareness about the disease and reinforce behaviour change communication carried out by social mobilisers, health professionals and local leaders.
- Radio stations were seen to have helped to change attitudes among listeners at different points during the outbreak. Examples included helping to increase sympathy for and reduce fear of Ebola survivors and helping to reduce listeners’ fears about attending hospitals or treatment centres
- The stations provided a platform for those involved in the Ebola response locally to update their communities on the response. They also provided a channel for two-way communication with those involved in the Ebola response, as listeners could text or call in with questions. Examples were given of how local shows helped to promote accountability—audiences in one area mentioned that they could call into the station and highlight places which did not have hand-washing facilities.

“The programme “Satellite” really helped expose many things; anything that was not going on well was brought to light, so I liked the programme.”

Adult Female, Focus Group, Bo (Listener of Radio New Song)

“...there are places without hand washing buckets we just call the radio and report that. The radio station will inform those who are responsible to take action. They have been very effective in doing that”.

Local Responder, Kailahan (Listener of SLBC Kailahun).

- Mentoring helped stress to some journalists the importance of providing positive, actionable information to communities.
- Training and mentoring also helped journalists to produce engaging content about the disease – particularly later in the outbreak when listeners were felt to be tiring of hearing Ebola coverage.

- In some cases, the provision of equipment and training helped journalists' to report safely from affected communities. Listeners highlighted this 'on-the-scene' reporting as helping to bolster the credibility of a station's Ebola coverage.

"The partnership [with BBC Media Action] was very pivotal. It was timely and they were able to capacitate partner stations to provide lifesaving messages."

Manager of a partner radio station

Learnings from the capacity strengthening

When considering how to communicate in response to a crisis – particularly if the response has significant behaviour change communication challenges - responders should consider the potential role that local and community radio can play in producing content. Local radio stations are well placed to support these efforts in a number of ways:

- They are an established and often already well-trusted source of information for people in affected communities.
- They can broadcast in local languages or dialects. BBC Media Action research indicates that 18% of audiences understand neither Krio nor English
- Local stations can produce content which speaks directly to localised issues and concerns, and features trusted local figures

Case Study: Social Media Training

With funding from UNDP, BBC Media Action designed and delivered a seven-month project around the 2018 elections. Its aim was to increase the responsible use of social media during the electoral cycle with social media training. It also aimed to enhance the participation of women and people with disabilities in the democratic and electoral process with a national radio programme and supporting social media.

Three training courses on responsible use of social media were developed for different audiences with specific needs: a course for broadcast and print journalists; a course for young people, including administrators of popular Facebook pages and WhatsApp groups; and a course for Electoral Management Body (EMB) representatives, including the National Elections Commission (NEC), the Political Parties Registration Commission (PPRC), the 17 registered political parties, and security services. A total of 779 people were trained through 19 workshops delivered across the country.

The training was successful in building awareness around the consequences of not using social media responsibly and providing the skills to assess fake news. Trainees gained confidence and knowledge.

Key Findings:

Identifying fake news: 96% trainees agreed with the statement '*I can identify untrue news stories or fake news*' compared to 71% before the training. Qualitative research showed that the 'zebra crossing technique' which compared checking several times that the road is clear from danger before crossing, to double checking a story before posting or sharing it on social media, was especially helpful in reminding participants to cross-check and verify information and the source of stories, before sharing them. Participants talked about how they had applied learning from the training in their day to day work. For example, they now verified stories before sharing them on social media.

"The aspect of the training that has helped me to make these changes is the verification of

information using the zebra crossing technique. I now know that one could be indicted for saying wrong things on social media. It could be a criminal offence or libel. I lacked such knowledge before now". Electoral Management Body trainee

The consequences of sharing fake news: Trainees understood that people can get into trouble for sharing stories that turn out to be untrue. 60% of journalists disagreed with the statement: *'Journalists or broadcasters cannot get in trouble with the law for sharing stories on social media that turn out to be untrue'*, before, compared to 94% at the end of training. Trainees, particularly young people trained, were also more aware that irresponsible use of social media could contribute to violence.

Training engaged all audiences. The quantitative data showed that all three groups – print journalists, young people, and electoral management bodies - showed greater confidence in advising their colleagues, friends or family about the risks of social media. The qualitative data shows that participants shared the knowledge that they had gained from the course with friends, family and colleagues.

"I shared the knowledge that I gained from the training to my colleague journalists in the radio so that we will all be safe from getting into trouble. Regarding my students in school, I shared the knowledge with them in order to stop them from spreading fake news. ..."

Case Study: Humanitarian actors are using mobile text messages to save lives in Sierra Leone

Non-profit organisations are using mobile phone technology in a variety of ways in Sierra Leone.

During the Ebola response - mobile phones were leveraged in different ways, in combination with other channels.

- Mobiles were used to collect data and send it to response coordination structures, as health workers were equipped with mobile phones provided through a partnership between agencies and private phone companies (Focus1000, 2015, UNFPA, 11/08/2014). Through SMS, social mobilisers could send alerts for specific events such as death, suspected case, quarantine issues, survivors, and orphans (Focus 1000, 2015, PI, 11/12/2015).
- By making use of its Trilogy Emergency Relief Application, the IFRC sent messages to people all over the country, advising them how to avoid getting infected, and to seek immediate treatment if they do (Reuters, 11/05/2014).
- People called radio lines to give their opinion, and to provide feedback using SMS.
- The BBC used WhatsApp as a breaking news service for its 20,000 regional subscribers. Users received push alerts 1-2 times a day, with valuable information compiled from local sources (BBC, 15/10/2015).
- The World Food Programme (WFP) sent text surveys to monitor food security
- UNICEF's uses open source RapidPro system to help health staff to track medical supplies with (basic) mobile phones. https://www.unicef.org/health/sierraleone_93345.html



© UNICEF Sierra Leone/2016/Mason

Appendix

[1] BBC Media Action: Communication in Sierra Leone: An analysis of Media and Mobile Audiences, Research Report (May 2016)

<http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/rmhttp/mediaaction/pdf/research/mobile-media-landscape-sierra-leone-report.pdf>

[2] Statistics Sierra Leone, Sierra Leone Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2017 (MICS), Survey Findings Report. The Sixth round of the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) for Sierra Leone was carried out in 2017 by Statistics Sierra Leone (Stats SL) with technical support from United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) as part of the Global MICS Programme. The Government of Sierra Leone, UNICEF, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), World Health Organization (WHO), World Food Programme (WFP) and European Union (EU) provided financial support for the survey.

Report (online) Available from:

https://www.statistics.sl/images/StatisticsSL/Documents/sierra_leone_mics6_2017_report.pdf

[3] Reporters Without Borders, 2018 World Press Freedom Index, Sierra Leone Report (online) available from: <https://rsf.org/en/sierra-leone>

[4] Freedom House (2017) *Freedom of the Press 2017: Sierra Leone* [online]. Available from:

<https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2017/sierra-leone>

[5] EU Election Observation Mission – SIERRA LEONE 2018, Final Report [online]. Available from:

https://cdn5-eas.fpfis.tech.ec.europa.eu/cdn/farfuture/C88YwC3SbvEJfdzKMbVigmQRFYKC5CwZhQ3zRZ6vkso/mtime:1528931180/sites/eas/files/eu_eom_sl_2018_final_report_4.pdf

[6] World Bank, The Energy Progress Report website

<https://trackingsdg7.esmap.org/time?country=Sierra%20Leone>

[7] Internet World Stats Usage and Population Statistics, Internet Penetration in Africa December 31, 2017 <https://internetworldstats.com/stats1.htm>

[8] Afrobarometer, Round 7 Survey in Sierra Leone, 2016/2018. Online Data analysis/analysis online/Participation-civic engagement. Data available (online) from:

<http://afrobarometer.org/countries/sierra-leone-0>

[9] BBC Sierra Leone profile – Media [online]. Available from

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-14094381>

[10] ACAPS Ebola project: December 2015. Ebola Outbreak, Sierra Leone: Communication: Challenges and good practices. [online]. Available from:

<http://www.cdacnetwork.org/contentAsset/raw-data/9705e231-1d53-4b02-92c8-fc4514f443b2/attachedFile>

[11] BBC Media Action, Sierra Leone Country Report 2017, *Strengthening accountability through media in Sierra Leone, Final Evaluation* (Published June 2017)
 Report (online) Available from: <http://dataportal.bbcmediaaction.org/site/countries/sierra-leone/>

[12] Capacity strengthening schemes through the Global Grant

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2015
Mentored radio stations						
Voice of the Peninsula	✓					
Voices of Women	✓					
Radio Moa	✓					
Radio Bontico	✓					
Premier Tok Radio	✓					
Radio Bankasoka – Port Loko Town	✓	✓				
Radio New Song – Bo	✓	✓				
Choice FM – Freetown	✓	✓				
Radio Kolenten	✓	✓	✓			
SLBC Kono		✓				✓
Voice of Peace and Development		✓				
Galaxy Radio		✓				
SLBC Kailahun		✓	✓			
Radio Kunike		✓	✓			
Radio Wanjei			✓	✓		
SLBC Makeni			✓	✓	✓	
Culture Radio			✓	✓	✓	
Cotton Tree News/Fourah Bay College			✓	✓		
Eastern Radio Kono			✓	✓		
Eastern Radio Kenema				✓		
Tumac Radio				✓		
SLBC Bo				✓	✓	
SLBC Magburaka				✓		
Starline Radio					✓	
African Independent Radio					✓	
Lion Mountain Radio						✓
Voice of Faith						✓