

## Liberia media development program

### Governance and Rule of law

#### 1. Programme Justification

##### Background

A functional and professionally oriented media system must be a central factor in any programmes of peace building, social reconstruction and national reconciliation. 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 as well as a broker in the processes of social re-negotiation across divisions in the country. In light of this it is vital to recognize the responsibility of the international community to place importance on both making reliable information available during times of crisis and the necessity in strengthening local media and ensuring its independence throughout transition processes. In order to avoid a gap between humanitarian interventions to long terms development and democratization efforts commitment must be made to media and communication programmes throughout the transition period.

In December 2003 UNESCO together with international and regional NGOs and professional organizations undertook a media needs assessment in Liberia.<sup>1</sup> A summary of the results was incorporated into the governance section of the UNDG/WB Needs Assessment for Liberia.

Both short- to medium-term interventions and long term objectives were identified. It was also emphasized that any quick impact information interventions to meet the challenges of the needs assessment should be based on local media in order to correlate to an overall strategy, with the more long-term objectives of building a solid democratic media in Liberia.

In the light of the upcoming elections in October 2005, an immediate rehabilitation of the media sector must be seen as crucial to a positive course of action of this important milestone in the transition phase of Liberia. In this regard, 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 and capacity building of both journalists and managers of media in terms of election reporting will be required.

In a more long-term perspective, institution building will be in focus; including the transition of the state broadcaster into a truly independent public service broadcaster and the establishment of permanent capacity building and training institutions. Furthermore the development of an independent media industry should be stimulated. To lay the foundation for these developments and to secure their sustainability and adherence to basic human right such as freedom of expressions, a revision of the existing media law is already on its way and the implementation of the revised media law will be initiated in due course.

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<sup>1</sup> A number of international and regional NGOs and media organizations have come together with key UN agencies to form the 'Partnership for Media and Conflict Prevention in West Africa'. The objective of this Partnership is to facilitate the provision of rapid and collaborative support to the media to pre-empt and mitigate conflicts and their humanitarian consequences. The Partnership utilises the diverse expertise and resources available amongst national, regional and international stakeholders, thereby offering a unique approach for 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.

The access to objective, balanced media coverage before and during the elections is crucial to promote participation and possibilities for the Liberian citizens to make well-informed voting decisions. Furthermore, the media also plays a crucial role in ensuring transparency of the elections process and accountability on behalf of the main actors, which is essential for the eventual acceptance of the election results and following the whole transformation towards democratization. Hence the capacity building of the national broadcaster to assure nationwide transmission of public information and voter education programmes must be seen as a key priority as well as ensuring media outreach to all parts of the population through community media.

### General objectives

The overall programme objective is to promote transparency and accountability through out the transition process by supporting the capacity building and development of a professional and independent media sector in Liberia. The quick impact output is assisting the Liberian local media in meeting the challenges of the up coming elections and includes capacity building of journalists and editors as well as ensuring national coverage of radio broadcasting. The initiation of the revision of the legal framework in which the media operates is also seen as an important priority as to lay the foundation for actual reform during the post election period.

In the longer democratization and sustainability perspective, the goal is to establish a truly free and independent media through development and implementation of a revised legal framework based on the imitated consultative process with government repetitive and civil society. Long term capacity building programs, including training of trainers, institution and network building will be developed with relevant local, regional and international partners. To ensure economic viability and sustainability of independent media outlets, management and business aspects of the media industry will also be addressed through promotion of exchange networks between editors and managers in the region and internationally.

### Programme approach

The programme consists of two main focus areas, together laying the foundation of professional, sustainable and free press in Liberia, which is the pillar of any transformation ensuring the rule of law and adherence to democratic principles. The two focus areas are closely interconnected and activities outlined will support both categories simultaneously.

Media policy reform aims at promoting media regulation in line with internationally recognized standards to ensure respect for freedom of expression and the strengthening of an independent media. Capacity building among media professionals and civil society will promote professional reporting and access to public information.

### *Media Policy*

The first step towards revised media legislation was taken earlier this year through the organization of the National Conference on Media Law and Policy Reform in October 2004. Although the actual implementation of a new legal framework for the media sector will have to await an elected Liberian Government, the review of existing laws and preparation of policy documents should be initiated already during the transition period in order to benefit from the incentive created by the conference and also to accelerate the actual implementation of a revised media law in line with a democratic society governed by the rule of law and respect for human rights.

In undertaking the revision of the media legislation related legal and administrative institutions have to be revised in accordance, to ensure a successful implementation and execution of the new legislation.

Furthermore, in order to ensure access to non partisan information during the upcoming elections and throughout the transition period media will be a fundamental building block for facilitating 'public service' information. In this regard, an autonomous and reliable national broadcast media will form a central component in peace building, as well as social reconstruction and national reconciliation.

The revision of the media policy needs in the long term perspective to address the transformation of the state

broadcaster into an independent public service channel of national reach. However, during the transition period and the crucial phase leading up to the elections, the broadcaster needs to be capacitated to ensure the access to non partisan information throughout Liberia as well as take on a role as provider of a platform for political debate.

The latter would entail the rehabilitation of the transmission and distribution system as this is a basic, but indispensable premise in reaching the urgent aim of nationwide relevant information access during the election. Accordingly technical assistance and necessary equipment should be provided. Moreover guidelines for the election broadcast would be delivered, to assure a reliable coverage of the elections.

In the post-election phase, and with a continued political will to further democratic principles and transparency by recognizing the essential notion of independent media institutions the program is committed to the long term assistance entailed by the complete transformation of the state broadcaster into a truly independent public service. The existing state broadcaster, the Liberian Broadcast System, (LBS) has suffered loss of both human and material resources during the ongoing instability. It has also served as a state broadcaster whose main aim has been to voice the opinions of the government in question. To transform the LBS to an independent and professional public service broadcaster is a long term project that demands physical resources and capacity building as well as commitment from donors and the political will of the elected government. However, despite the present state of the broadcaster, there is willingness on behalf of both the media sector and the international partners to assist and contribute to this transformation process.

Parallel to the national broadcast, the local private and community radios outlets should be stimulated. As radio is by far the most widespread medium in Liberia and illiteracy rate is still high, it is vital to promote pluralism through creating an enabling environment for both commercial and community based radio stations in order to provide efficient channels to reach locals and distribute essential information about a variety of topics and strengthen the participatory mechanisms in the democratization process. This support would be linked up with the efforts to establish a national broadcaster through development of a network that facilitates the sharing of programmes of common public interest and exchanges of information as well as professional experience.

Hence the revision of the existing media regulation is also vital in terms of the creation of an independent regulator to ensure fair and transparent allocation of broadcast frequencies. The development of a media policy in line with international standards and the revision of the media law is essential to making the field equally accessible for all potential actors and opening up the media sector to both commercial and community broadcasters, which in its turn will secure a pluralistic media output.

### *Capacity Building*

Providing the legal framework for an independent and economically sustainable media environment only works if the human and institutional resources to develop and maintain the sector are available. Consequently, capacity building is of major importance if the overall aims are to be achieved.

To meet the immediate needs in terms of the upcoming elections the program aims to target working journalists for further vocational and skills training with focus on election reporting. The training component would also include safety issues as to raise awareness among working local journalists about the risks involved during a heightened tension situation as the elections. In the longer-term perspectives the capacity building activities will also develop programs addressing the sustainability of Liberian media through training of trainers' courses and institutions building, primarily through collaboration with the school of journalism at the University and the two newly established media and press centres.

Through the establishment of resource and learning centres and the organisation of seminars and workshops the professional exchange between media professionals will be encouraged and the further training assured for both media workers and public officials dealing with the media environment.

Capacity building activities targeting the actual management of media outlets, crucial for the economic

sustainability of media outlets would also be addressed throughout the program.

It is evidently equally crucial to assure that human rights as freedom of expression are respected. Therefore a network of monitors will be trained to counter repression of press freedom and also to further exchange on media development issues in Liberia. Additionally such a network will also be instrumental in awareness raising and exchanging information about basic human rights, the rule of law and democratic principles among Liberian people.

### Sustainability

The challenge but also the strength of the programme is its broad based approach. By covering the revision of the legal framework, material and structural needs as well as capacity building, the programme takes a holistic approach, which assures its sustainability as well as offering the benefit of addressing complementary issues simultaneously.

In the long term perspective the programme will need political support from the post-election government, not at least for the implementation of the revised media legislation. The NTGL has through the already implemented conference committed itself to the initiation of this process and the preparatory steps to be undertaken during the period leading up to the elections.

The Partnership for Media and Conflict Prevention in West Africa is instrumental both in terms of sharing of experiences and expertise but also in ensuring both quick impact implementations as well as a sustainable partnership with the Liberian counterparts.

## **2. Management arrangements**

UNESCO is part of The Partnership for Media and Conflict Prevention in West Africa set up to address media needs in West Africa. The objective of this Partnership is to facilitate the provision of rapid, broad-based and collaborative support to the media to pre-empt and mitigate conflicts and their humanitarian consequences as well as ensure the transition of these quick impact projects into sustainable efforts towards democratisation and development. In an effort to enhance coordination between different actors a variety of stakeholders are incorporated in the Partnership, which provide a wide spectrum of potential approaches, from UN agencies and donors active in Liberia to regional media associations and local civil society actors. This process will serve to enhance the success and impact of the present programme and create stronger sustainability options.

UNDP is acting as the main UN partner on the ground and ensures coordinated implementation of projects and programs in line with the Results Focused Transition Framework (RFTF).

UNESCO will contract a consultant to ensure coordination of the main follow up activities of the national conference on media policy development. The contractor will be hired to follow the progress of the various activities through out the transition period leading up to the elections. The contractor will also serve as a coordination body between UNESCO HQ and UNDP Liberia to ensure continued sharing of information and collaboration.

## **3. Analysis of risks and assumptions**

As one of the two main pillars of the present programme is the implementation of a new rule of law, to foster the right conditions for the further progress towards peace and democracy, the result of the planned election will be of major importance.

It is therefore vital to initiate an inclusive and participative process throughout the election period. Professional media can serve to assure a transparent and credible election and a civil society in favour of a democratic leadership. Moreover the evolution in other fields of concern, outlined in the Joint Needs Assessment, as e.g. security, DDDR,

education or infrastructure, will have an impact on the programme, as it influences working conditions for the media as well as the shape of the civil society.

#### **4. Programme Budget**

The total cost for the reconstruction of the media sector in Liberia is estimated to 9.5 million US\$ in line with the RFTF. This includes the transformation of the state broadcaster into a national public service and the capacity building of the journalism at university level. The outlined program also includes further vocational training initiatives targeting specific challenges during the upcoming elections as well as professionalization and independence of the sector through promotion of peer networking and management training.

Seed money from regular budget sources has already been provided to a number of activities such as the already implemented Media Policy Development Conference in Monrovia in October 2004 was provided partly through UNESCO regular program budget and partly through funding channelled via international NGO partners such as OSI, Ibis and IMS. The US Delegation to UNESCO has expressed interest in contributing to the funding needed to undertake the coordination of the follow up activities to the national conference.

See Excel Spreadsheet attachment for detailed outline of reconstruction costs for the transition period 2005-2006 2005 and 2006

#### **5. Reporting**

Reporting of the programme results will follow the structure of the logical framework, continuously evaluating the different elements of the programme as they are carried out.

Financial and narrative reports will be produced by the contracted partners at the end of each programme activity, based on the outlined expected output and an evaluation of the eventual achievements. Dependant on the actual programme element that is to be evaluated, the reports will be of qualitative and/or quantitative character, as to describe the results of the planning and implementation best possible and allow transparency. In each evaluation there will in addition be included recommendations for continuation of the programme.

Financial and narrative overall reports analysing the progress of the programme as a whole will be carried out throughout the programme period.