GOVERNMENT OF SIERRA LEONE
MINISTRY OF INFORMATION AND CIVIC EDUCATION

National Information & Media Policy

June 2025



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Acronyms And Abbreviations

CSO Civil Society Organisation
DTH Direct to Home
DSTV Direct Satellite Television
ICT Information Communication Technologies
IT Information Technology
IMC Independent Media Commission
M&E Monitoring and Evaluation
MDA Ministries, Departments and Agencies
MoICE Ministry of Information and Civic Education
MRCG Media Reform Coordinating Group
NaTCA National Communication Authority
RAIC Right to Access Information Commission
SLAJ Sierra Leone Association of Journalists
SLBC Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation
SLPP Sierra Leone People's Party
UNDP United Nations Development Programme

Acknowledgement

The development of the **Information and Media Policy** for Sierra Leone has been a collective endeavor, reflecting the shared commitment of diverse stakeholders toward a free, inclusive, and responsible media landscape. The Ministry of Information and Civic Education and agencies extend its deepest appreciation to all those who contributed their expertise, insights, and unwavering support throughout this process.

We are particularly grateful for the **formal concurrence and technical contributions** from k**ey Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs)**, including:

- Ministry of Communications, Technology, and Innovation
- Attorney General and Ministry of Justice
- Ministry of Finance
- Independent Media Commission (IMC)
- Right to Access Information Commission (RAIC)
- The Parliamentary Committee on Information and Civic Education

Their rigorous review and alignment with national development priorities ensured the policy's coherence with Sierra Leone's governance framework.

We also acknowledge the indispensable role of media practitioners, civil society organizations, and international partners, including:

- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)
- UNESCO
- UNFPA
- Plan International Sierra Leone
- Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ)
- Media Reform Coordinating Group (MRCG)

Their technical expertise, financial support, and participatory engagement during nationwide consultations were pivotal in shaping a policy that reflects the aspirations of all Sierra Leoneans.
Special recognition goes to citizens, community leaders, and marginalized groups who provided grassroots perspectives, ensuring the policy addresses issues of gender equity, disability inclusion, and local language accessibility.

This policy stands as a testament to what we can achieve through collaboration. Together, we will harness the transformative power of media and information to advance democratic governance, national development, and the well-being of every citizen.



H.E. Dr. Julius Maada Bio

President of the Republic of Sierra Leone

Preface / Foreword

By Hon. Chernor Bah, Minister of Information and Civic Education

This is a historic document.

For the first time in Sierra Leone's history, we now have a National Media and Information Policy that defines, affirms, and protects the role of media and information in building a democratic, peaceful, and prosperous society.
This policy is not just about the media—it is about all of us. It is about how we access truth, how we amplify local voices, how we hold power accountable, and how we ensure that the rights of every citizen—regardless of language, location, gender, or ability—are respected and represented in the national conversation.

It is also about trust. In an era of disinformation, information pollution, and rapid technological change, this policy helps rebuild public trust by promoting professional standards, protecting media independence, and supporting the responsible use of new tools, such as digital platforms and artificial intelligence.

Under the leadership of His Excellency President Dr. Julius Maada Bio—whose repeal of the criminal libel law in 2020 was itself a turning point—this government has taken bold steps to open up civic space, safeguard press freedom, and modernize our national media institutions. This policy builds on those reforms and goes further. It was developed through broad consultation, rooted in the lived realities of our media practitioners, inspired by global standards, and guided by the aspirations of the people of Sierra Leone. From community radio to national wire services, from social media to journalism training institutions, this policy provides a practical and principled framework for transformation.

As Minister, I view this policy as a commitment—a commitment to journalists, citizens, and future generations, who deserve a media landscape that is free, safe, inclusive, and empowering.

My thanks go to the many journalists, civil society advocates, regulators, media scholars, development partners, and public servants who helped shape this vision—and especially to my predecessor, Mohamed Rahman Swaray, whose groundwork made this progress possible.

Now, our task is implementation. Let this policy not sit on shelves, but shape the future.
Let it help us build a Sierra Leone where every citizen is informed, every voice matters, and every truth has a place.



Hon. Chernor Bah
Minister of Information and Civic Education

Executive Summary

The National Information and Media Policy applies to Print, Electronic (Broadcasting), Wire Services, Advertising, Public Relations, and Social media. It is central to consolidating the government's gains and ensuring an effective and efficient media and information society. The policy is also built on a firm foundation of fundamental principles such as the right to access information, freedom of expression and the press, human dignity and self-actualisation, and democratic good governance. It is also anchored on the various policy directives outlined by the government.

Sierra Leone has taken up the task of reconstituting the political order, maintaining peace and law and order, and building viable institutions as drivers of a transitional democratic state. Based on the prevailing atmosphere of political and economic debates in the country, Sierra Leoneans want a society characterised by political and economic stability geared toward sustainable development, sustainable democracy, and a peaceful society. They want a society with an enabling environment that allows all Sierra Leoneans to participate in the processes that will determine the nation's destiny.

> "To attain a media and information ecosystem that is proactive, progressive, and participatory and that can contribute to national transformation and development."

The policy's vision is "To attain a media and information ecosystem that is proactive, progressive, and participatory and that can contribute to national transformation and development." Its mission is "Promoting and ensuring a free, independent, progressive, and innovative media and information ecosystem that will provide timely and accurate information and feedback."

The policy broadly sketches the main national and global influences that have led to the present development of the media in Sierra Leone. It is inspired by certain fundamental principles considered vital to accessible, developed, and democratic societies regardless of culture or geography. It has evolved from best practices in international instruments, recommendations in various national studies, and other national media policies, including the Ghana National Media Policy.

The document includes policies specific to media and information, policy statements and implementation guidelines, financial implications, and monitoring and evaluation.

Policy Context

The National Information and Media Policy contextualises provisions in international human rights instruments, national laws, and codes that promote rights to information and freedom of information. It considers the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the Sustainable Development Goals (Goal 16, Target 16). A), which seeks to ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms through national legislation and international agreements.

Section 25 (1) of the Constitution of Sierra Leone (Act. No. 6) of 1991 provides for freedom of expression and of the press. The Right to Access Information Act, 2013, provides for the disclosure of information held by public authorities or by persons providing services for them and to provide for other related matters. **The Independent Media Commission Act 2020** provides that the Commission shall promote a free and pluralistic media industry throughout Sierra Leone and protect the public's interest against exploitation or abuse by media institutions. In 2020, the Government of Sierra Leone repealed **Part 5 of the Public Order, 1965**, which contained provisions on seditious and criminal libel under Section 1 of the **Public Order (Amendment) Act 2020.** In 2021, Parliament passed the 'Cyber Security and Crime Act 2021' to, among other things, prevent the abusive use of computer systems and to investigate and prosecute cybercrime. **The National Communications Authority Act of 2022** provides for the issuance of licenses to broadcast media institutions that meet specified requirements. Three regulations were passed in 2023 regarding the right to information and media freedom. They are the R**ight to Access Information Regulations 2022 (Statutory Instrument No. 9 of 2022).** Independent Media Commission **(Print and Electronic Media) Regulations, 2022** (Statutory Instrument No. 11 of 2022) and Independent Media Commission Elections (Coverage and Reporting) Regulations, 2022 (**Statutory Instrument No. 17 of 2022)**

The President of Sierra Leone, H.E. Brig. Rtd. Dr Julius Maada Bio signed the Global Pledge on Media Freedom on 22 November 2021; the Government to improve media freedom domestically and work with the Media Freedom Coalition international.

The Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ) has developed and adopted a Code of Ethics to address the ethical issues facing Sierra Leone's journalism. Its purpose is to ensure its members adhere to the highest ethical standards, professional competence, and good behaviour in performing their duties. A SLAJ Media Manifesto 2023 was developed ahead of the country's elections. The document 'Media We Want' presents eight key priorities: Media Freedom, Safety and Security of Journalists, access to Information, Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, Media Professionalism and Capacity Building, Media Sustainability and Viability, the Welfare of Journalists, and Media Literacy. In November 2021, SLAJ signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Security Sector to ensure the safety of journalists. The signing of the MoU climaxed a Roundtable Dialogue between SLAJ and the Security Sector on November 2nd, marking the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists.

In its Manifesto, 'The New Direction: Consolidating Gains and Accelerating Development,' the Sierra Leone People's Party commitments (2023- 2028) commits to advancing the values of a free and open society under 'Improving Governance' (Promoting Press Freedom and Strengthening Civil Society Organisations). These commitments include advancing the values of a free and open society, supporting all citizens' full enjoyment of the freedoms enshrined in the constitution and inherent in the best democratic practice, sustaining support for the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ), and developing capacity and support for Community Radio Stations.

In April 2022, the first-ever National Media Viability and Investment Conference was convened. This was a wide-scale, joint initiative from the Ministry of Information and Communications and the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ), supported by BBC Media Action's PRIMED programme for media development in Sierra Leone. At the end of the conference, a Roadmap/National Action Plan was developed comprising seven key recommendations, including establishing a national media fund.
This policy, therefore, provides a framework and direction for media freedom and development. It has developed from best practices in international instruments, recommendations in various national studies, and other national media policies, including the Ghana National Media Policy. The goal is not to reinvent what already exists but to extract relevant information from these sources and develop narratives around proposed policy initiatives and actions.

Vision

The vision of the policy is:

"To attain a media and information ecosystem that is free, safe, proactive, progressive, and participatory and that can contribute to national transformation and development."

Mission

The mission is:

"Promoting and ensuring a free, independent, progressive, and innovative media and information ecosystem providing timely and accurate information and feedback." The Government seeks to ensure the following:

01	02	03	04	05
Right to Freedom of Expression, Access to Information, and Responsible Citizenry.	Media freedom, safety, and responsibility align with international instruments and commitments.	Media regulation aligns with democratic standards and ideals as enshrined in the Constitution of Sierra Leone.	Political Socialization, Socio-Cultural Development, and Citizen Self-Actualization are for everyone, but they are mainly for Women, Youth, Children, Persons with Disabilities, and Senior Citizens.	Democratize Public Communication and create opportunities for people and alternative voices in conversations about democratic social change.

Policy Scope And Definitions

This policy covers the media and other related services in Sierra Leone. Specifically, it pertains to the following:

- Print media
- Electronic media
- Wire Services
- Advertising
- Public Relations
- Digital/Social media
- Media Development/Support Organisations

The policy provides the following definitions of the terms below:

01

Advertising
is the activity or profession of producing advertisements for commercial (sometimes non-commercial) products or services. It includes presenting and promoting ideas, goods, and services paid for by an identified sponsor.

02

Commercial radio or television station
means a station that broadcasts for profit but is not exempt from public service responsibility.

03

Community radio or television station
means a station that is for and about the community, whose ownership, governance, and management are representative of the community, follows a social development agenda, and is not for profit.

04

Electronic media
means radio, television, and direct-to-home services.

05

Direct-to-home broadcast
service means a registered business entity in Sierra Leone that provides direct-to-home broadcast services.

06

Information
means any material regardless of its physical form or characteristics, such as a book, plan, map, drawing, film, microfiche, diagram, pictorial or graphic work, data, photograph, recording, audio or video tape, machine-readable material, or any other information held in electronic form, and also includes any sample, work, model or copy thereof.

07

A magazine
means a registered institution that is responsible for producing a particular publication, at least one publication per quarter, has a single point of editorial control, and is aimed at a general audience- regardless of whether it covers a wide range of subject matter, including news and comment or more specialised interest

08 **Media**
means any channel or process, whether in print, audiovisual, auditory, signs, or the Internet, to disseminate, broadcast, and make known to the general public facts, opinions, and any other expression of thought, particularly to inform, educate, train, and promote leisure and entertainment.

09 **Media Development/Support Organization**
means any organisation that provides or supports media content production or capacity building to the media and practitioners.

10 **Media Institution**
means an institution disseminating information through print or electronic media services, including newspapers, newsletters, magazines, radio, television, online publications, direct-to-home and digital satellite television, satellite broadcasting, public relations, advertising, media production, and other similar services.

11 **Media practitioner**
means a person who writes, edits or transmits news and information from a registered or recognised media, including freelancers.

12 **Media self-regulation**
means that journalists and media practitioners enforce the principles governing good journalism and the ethical conduct of journalists to ensure professionalism, media responsibility, and the protection of media consumers against abuse in the media.

13 **Media Self-Regulatory Body**
means an organ set up by journalists responsible for ensuring compliance with the principles governing media and defending the public interest.

14 **Newspaper**
means a registered outlet that is published at least once a week. It is a single point of editorial control that covers a wide range of subject matter, including news, articles, editorials, and commentaries aimed at a general audience.

15 **Personal information**
means information about an identifiable individual that contains private details regarding the individual's reasonable expectation of privacy.

16 **Print media**
means communication-based on printed materials with a physical presence, such as newspapers and magazines.

17 **Public relations**
means the activity or profession that engages in a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organisations and their publics.

18 **Public service broadcast radio or television station**
means a station with nationwide coverage set up by legislation, accountable to the public through an independent board, protected against interference of a political or economic nature, with editorial independence, and adequately funded in a manner that ensures objective and balanced reporting and protects it from arbitrary interference.

19 **Rebroadcast station**
means a station that is set up by international radio and television stations or national, public broadcasting service to rebroadcast their programs in Sierra Leone;

20 **Religious radio or television station**
means a broadcasting or television station set up purposely for religious broadcasting is not exempt from public service responsibility and is not for profit.

21 **Social media**
means digital technology that allows creating, sharing, and exchanging ideas and information, including text and visuals, through virtual networks and communities.

22 **Teaching radio or television station**
means a station set up by an accredited academic institution or agency for training. It is not exempt from public service responsibility and is not for profit.

23 **Wire services**
means a news agency that supplies syndicated news by wire to newspapers, radio, television stations, and other media.



Policy Objectives

Policy Objectives

The objectives of the policy are divided into strategic and specific ones.

5.1 Strategic Objectives

Enhance the national development agenda (s) through policy initiatives, dialogues, and actions supported by a robust, vibrant, free, and independent information and media ecosystem.

Promote and enhance a collective national consciousness among all Sierra Leone citizens as a critical variable in the development equation. It presupposes meaningful national development can only occur with an effective and efficient media and information ecosystem.

5.2 Specific Objectives

- ☑ To ensure a free, safe, secure, and responsible media and ecosystem.
- ☑ To develop a robust media ecosystem that contributes to democratic ideals and standards and promotes a sustainable national development agenda.
- ☑ To support the development and operations of national media institutions, organisations, and academic institutions providing media training.
- ☑ To promote the government's national development agenda through media engagements by the Ministry of Information and Civic Education and other line Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs).
- ☑ To provide a coordinated dissemination of government information through the Ministry of Information and Civic Education
- ☑ To promote access to information and create platforms for discourse on national issues that citizens can appreciate and utilise.
- ☑ To promote radical inclusion, including ensuring adequate gender representation, disability inclusion, ethnic, regional, political, religious and other forms of equitable representation in the media



Issues, Principles And Interventions

Issues, Principles And Interventions

6.1 Issues

The key issues are:

6.1.1 Media Freedom, Safety and Independence

While the country has made significant progress, this policy will further support the full implementation of the spirit and letter of the law, ensuring that journalists can continue to work freely and safely without undue pressure or intimidation.

6.1.2 Access to and timely Dissemination of Information

Ministries, Departments, Agencies, and other institutions handling public information still need to fully adhere to the proactive disclosure and timely release of information provided by the Right to Access Information Commission. This is important to ensure an effective and robust information and media ecosystem.

6.1.3 Information Pollution and Artificial Intelligence

One of the biggest challenges facing the media and information ecosystem is information pollution/disorder. Misinformation and disinformation are being disseminated more frequently. While individuals and institutions deliberately attempt to disseminate misinformation/disinformation, the lack of access to information also contributes to rumour-mongering and spreading false information.

Concerns exist about thoroughly understanding artificial intelligence and its effects on society. While it is helpful for several purposes, national policies should be established. Artificial intelligence (AI), "computer systems capable of performing complex tasks that historically only a human could do, such as reasoning, making decisions, or solving problems," will positively and negatively affect the media ecosystem. As reliance on Artificial Intelligence ("AI") grows in today's information environment, addressing its impact on exercising freedom of expression and related human rights is critical. On one hand, AI may enable broader, quicker, and more targeted means of sharing information and ideas globally. On the other hand, the opacity of AI systems deployed by state and non-state actors may also interfere with the formation and development of opinions, access to information, and other fundamental aspects of individual autonomy and agency (The Special Rapporteur, 2018).

6.1.4 Media Trust and Responsibility

There are concerns about a trust deficit in the media. While many media institutions are spread across the country, ownership issues and the partisan nature of the media's work, as evident in its broadcasting and publication, are occasioned by concerns about trust in the media.

6.1.5 The Marginalization of Local Languages

English dominates the media, especially print media. Radio stations use other languages, but television primarily uses English. Sierra Leone does not have one local-language newspaper; the national news agency, SLENA, produces its content in English. The marginalisation of local languages excludes most of the population from participating in the national discourse.

6.1.6 Technological Challenges

Media organisations in Sierra Leone still need to update their equipment. Only a few broadcast media institutions have state-of-the-art technology, and newspapers need help with printing presses.

6.1.7 Institutional Capacity

The MoICE, the regulators (IMC and RAIC), media institutions, and media houses all need help with institutional capacity. The ability of the media to perform their demanding and multi faceted roles is undercut by the weak capacity of media and media-related institutions. The Ministry and regulators do not have the requisite resources to perform their duties.

6.1. 8 Gender Representation and Disability Issues

The media must ensure gender representation at all levels in line with national policies. An MRCG study on the welfare of journalists shows low representation in management positions and various challenges facing female journalists. The Sierra Leone Association of Journalists has developed a 'Media Gender Equality Policy' to demonstrate its commitment to take proactive steps to integrate gender equality and women's empowerment in line with the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act 2022. The media have not made enough efforts to report on disability issues.

6.2 Principles and Interventions

This policy draws inspiration from fundamental issues outlined in critical documents and statements, such as presidential addresses, constitutional provisions and other existing pieces of legislation, and studies on the media ecosystem, including the Media Reform Coordinating Group's publications on the State of the Media and Media Freedom reports. To address the problems identified and the policy mission, the following policy interventions shall be made and led by the Government, media regulatory bodies, and media organisations:

- Ensure a free and responsible media ecosystem, access to information, and the safety and security of media practitioners in line with international conventions and Goal 16 of the Sustainable Development Goals.
- The government shall support the development and use of new media and artificial intelligence to enhance the country's media ecosystem. It shall also support rights-oriented approaches to AI in the private sector to promote freedom of expression, including measures to ensure a diverse, pluralistic, and competitive information environment.
- Ensure that MoICE takes the lead in disseminating all government information to ensure proper coordination and timely and effective delivery to the populace with the expertise of different Ministries, Departments, and Agencies.
- Equip, strengthen, and professionalise the government information infrastructure to ensure it is well-resourced, prepared to provide information to journalists and the public, and articulates government positions and policies.
- Support the development and operations of national media institutions and organisations.
- Support, nurture, and encourage close working relationships among Ministries, Departments, Agencies, and Commissions that deal with media and information-related issues.
- •Make provisions for specific subventions to SLAJ and other financial support to advance public interest media in Sierra Leone.
- Coordinate development partners wishing to participate in media capacity building and training to avoid duplication and wastage.
- Create the infrastructure to ensure the country moves toward a media and information-literate society.
- Address the need to Democratize Public Communication by creating more opportunities for people and alternative voices in conversations about democratic social change.
- Promote the National Development Plan that addresses poverty alleviation as a pre-condition for wealth creation.
- Promote the National Civic Education Strategy to advance patriotism and responsible citizenship.
- Focus on Women, Youth, Children, Persons with Disabilities, and Senior Citizens by creating awareness about their rights, privileges, and entitlements.
- Ensure transparent and competitive access to advertising by media outlets (including from the Government).
- Ensure that all legislation and legislative instruments are harmonised with the relevant constitutional provisions, guaranteeing the freedom and independence of the media.
- Promote the provision of media training and content in local languages.



+ Policy Guidelines Common To All Media

7. Policy Guidelines Common To All Media

The following policy guidelines shall apply to all media and information services.

7. 1. The freedom and independence of all media shall be upheld and protected in full measure by the letter and spirit of the Constitution and all statutory documents.

7.1.1 The freedom and independence of the media shall be the condition for the people to exercise their democratic right to information based on international conventions, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the Sustainable Development Goals. It shall also be the environment for media professionals to conduct their work with integrity, credibility, innovation, creativity, accountability, and transparency.

7.1.2 The freedom shall be exercised responsibly, ethically, and within the confines of the law.

7.1.3 The safety and security of journalists and media practitioners shall always be protected.

7.1.4 The public shall be active media partners in safeguarding and promoting freedom of thought and expression.

7.1.5 The media shall fully comply with national labour laws, including paying social security contributions for staff.

7.2 All media institutions in Sierra Leone shall be registered or licensed with the Independent Media Commission (IMC) as required by law.

7.3. All media and information services shall be regarded as public trust. Therefore, the public interest shall be paramount in operating all media—public, commercial, and community institutions providing information services.

7.3.1 All media and institutions providing information must provide for the population's interests.

7.3.2 The public's capacity to demand media accountability shall be encouraged and actively developed.

7.3.3 For the maximum discharge of the public trust, there shall be at least one public institution of national scope in the broadcast, print, and wire services.

7.3.4 All media and national information institutions seek to inform, educate, and entertain to pursue national cooperation, unity, peace, and development.

7.3.5 A wide range of media representing a diverse plurality of social, cultural, and economic interests and perspectives shall be encouraged and promoted. These interests shall be carefully balanced to preclude dominance by or neglect of any one sector.

7.3.6 The public shall hold the media responsible for misusing freedom and effectively discharging their trust.

7.4 Local languages shall be used prominently in the media, particularly the broadcast media, and shall be modified based on community media.

7.5. Ownership and control of the media shall be transparent to show a beneficial owner and accountable with independent oversight. It shall include clear communication between media owners and managers, access to information, ethical standards, and independence.

7.5.1 The media regulator, the Independent Media Commission, shall determine and encourage a point-based system on media ownership and cross-media ownership.

7.5.2 Ownership of media shall exclude political parties.

7.6. The operations and development of the media and informational ecosystem shall reflect technological advancement, including artificial intelligence and the new media.

7.6.1. There is a need for continued training for all media professionals to attain the highest calibre.

7.7. Access to information and the media shall be ensured and promoted at all levels and in various forms. Access shall mean not only consumption of the media but also participation in its ownership, management, production, and distribution.

7.8. Media institutions shall ensure gender representation in management, operations, and programming. This shall mean adequate female representation in managing and administrating media houses and fully complying with the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Act 2022 and the SLAJ Gender Media Policy.

7.8.1 SLAJ and its constituent bodies shall ensure that gender issues are addressed equitably, transparently, and professionally.

7.8.2 Media institutions should promote disability issues in their programming. The Sierra Leone Association of Journalists and its constituent bodies will encourage forming a group comprising persons with disabilities or journalists working on disability issues.



+ Policy Implementation Guidelines

8. Policy Implementation Guidelines

The Print Media | Broadcast Media | The Advertising | Public Relations | Access to information | Digital/ Social Media

8.1. The Print Media

The print media for this policy comprised newspapers and magazines; therefore, policies relating to the print media apply to newspapers and magazines.

8.1.1. Overall Policy Statement

The policy seeks to encourage and support the development of print media, sustaining the growth of a diversity of publications that represent the aspirations and meet the needs of all population sectors.

8.1.2 Policies for the types of print media

The print media may be private, commercial, or community-based.

- All types of print media shall seek to support the growth of the reading public, promote functional literacy, and enrich formal education.
- Local-language newspapers or magazines shall be actively promoted at the regional, district, or community level.
- They shall be required to undergo an annual circulation audit. ·
- Private/commercial newspapers shall establish national distribution networks and agencies for local publication.
- The state-owned media newspaper shall operate as a nationwide public service publication.
- Small-scale village, community, or neighbourhood newspapers shall be promoted. These shall include small-format periodic news sheets, wall newspapers, blackboard newspapers, and other accessible media that small groups with limited resources can more easily manage and sustain.
- Communities and local authorities shall be encouraged to start their local-language newspapers or other publications, which shall be operated as non-profit enterprises free from editorial interference by the regional councils.

8.2 The Broadcast Media

The broadcast media for this policy shall comprise radio, television, direct-to-home services and online broadcasts.

8.2.1. Overall Policy Statement

The policy seeks to encourage and support the development of broadcast media to sustain the growth of a diversity of broadcasts that represent the aspirations and meet the needs of all population sectors.

8.2.2 Policies for the types of broadcast media

All types of broadcast media shall seek to support national conversations, promote functional literacy, and enrich formal education.

- They shall actively promote and celebrate local-language broadcasting at the regional, district, or community level.
- Public media shall establish national distribution networks and agencies for local broadcasts and operate as a nationwide public broadcasting service.
- Community broadcasting shall be promoted, managed, and sustained by various communities. The Independent Media Commission shall regulate the governance structure of community media, explicitly overseeing the election, appointment, and renewal of Board members' tenure.
- Communities shall be encouraged to start their local-language broadcasting independently and operate as a non-profit enterprise.

8.2.3. Frequencies

• In consultation with appropriate bodies, the National Communications Authority and the Independent Media Commission will develop a comprehensive national frequency allocation plan for all broadcasting institutions.

• The national frequency allocation plan shall clearly define the geographical coverage areas of stations to maximise the spectrum.

• Frequency assignment shall be transparent, adequately documented, and regularly monitored. The records shall be accessible to the public, ensuring trust and confidence.

• Criteria for frequency allocation shall be unambiguous and shall include technical requirements and comprehensive guidelines on programming.

• Fees for frequency assignment shall vary between profit and non-profit operations.

• The relevant regulatory institutions shall deal with violations of frequency allocation conditions.

8.3 The Wire Services

The wire services for this policy shall comprise the national news agency and any other institution that may be established

8.3.1 Overall Policy Statement

The efficient and effective collection and distribution of news and information shall be considered crucial to the essential ingredients of national development efforts. The Government shall ensure that the wire services are functional.

8.3.2 Policies for Wire Services

- The wire services shall provide a news service dedicated to supporting national development and sustaining the country's information ecosystem.
- The wire services shall distribute news both locally and abroad.
- The primary source of revenue for wire services shall be government subvention. To supplement this income, wire services shall strengthen the commercialisation of their services. Such commercialisation shall not in any way compromise their independence and professionalism.
- The public news agency, SLENA, shall be retained as a national public news collection and dissemination service. It shall operate as a modern, professional, and competitive service.
- The public news agency, SLENA, shall be owned by a mix of Government and private interests and 100% Sierra Leonean.
- The public news agency shall provide nationwide coverage and mainly collect and disseminate news from the country's remote areas.
- It shall set up well-established regional offices.
- Commercial news agencies shall be encouraged to operate freely as business enterprises. They shall be required to register with the Independent Media Commission.

8.4 Advertising

8.4.1 Overall Policy Statement

This policy aims to strengthen the advertising industry and contribute to national development.

The Independent Media Commission, as the key regulatory body, shall play a pivotal role in coordinating and organizing the advertising sector. It shall ensure strict adherence to the following Specific Policy Implementation Guidelines:

- The IMC shall ensure the full implementation of its advertising regulations.
- The policy shall vigorously promote the local production of culturally appropriate advertisements using local talent. This initiative not only supports local talent but also aligns with the policy's focus on promoting national values.
- The· production of infomercials that provide consumers with sufficient product information shall also be actively promoted.
- Advertising shall assist ordinary Sierra Leoneans in making informed choices based on local values.
- It shall insist on standards that promote high ethical values, including observance of the principle of truth in advertising.
- Development of a code of ethics and standards that shall be binding on all advertising institutions and practitioners. It shall also include sanctions, provisions, and mechanisms for enforcement.
- Foreign advertising agencies shall only be allowed to operate and place advertisements if registered as members of the Advertising Association of Sierra Leone.
- All media houses shall adopt in-house advertising rules that reflect this policy's spirit and direction.
- An audit bureau for circulation and audience ratings shall be established to address the need for more credible research to measure newspaper circulation and audience ratings.
- The government shall, through the MoICE, adopt policies to ensure that public sector advertising is regulated and fairly distributed.
- Government Ministries, Departments, and Agencies shall promptly honour their financial commitments to media houses.
- Advertising agencies shall register with the IMC and form an umbrella body.
- The Advertising Association of Sierra Leone shall work with IMC and MoICE to develop the advertising sector.

8.5 Public Relations

The policy recognizes the significant role of public relations in contributing to the national development effort. As such, it seeks to encourage the development of public relations practices.

8.5.1 Overall Policy Statement

The overall purpose of this policy is to strengthen public relations' capacity and capability to contribute to the national development effort.

The Independent Media Commission shall coordinate and organise the public relations sector and ensure the following Specific Policy Implementation Guidelines are adhered to:

- The IMC shall develop codes of practice to regulate public relations practitioners and associations. The regulatory mechanism will enable the public to identify and distinguish between the professionally qualified practitioners who can help resolve problems and distinguish them from the non-professionals. Practitioners should be expected to have adequately undergone formal field training.
- The IMC shall work with public relations practitioners and institutions to establish a national public relations society/association.
- Public relations practitioners shall be encouraged to practice professionally, maintaining mutually beneficial relationships between an organisation or group and its public based on truth, complete information, and responsible performance.
- An examination/accreditation body should be established alongside the regulatory body to test and accredit public relations professionals.
- The Department of Communication and Public Relations at the Public Relations Faculty of the Communication, Media, and Information Studies, FBC, and other nationally recognised institution(s) shall be supported to play a leading role in defining the field of public relations and accrediting public relations professionals.
- IMC shall accredit public relation officials.
- Foreign Public Relations professionals shall only be allowed to practice if accredited by the IMC.

8.6 Access to information

- The Government shall ensure access to timely and accurate public information, except classified/exempt information.
- The Government, through the national institution, the Right to Access Information Commission, shall ensure proactive disclosure of public information.
- The government shall support the RAIC in fully implementing the provisions in the Act and Regulations.
- Citizens shall be encouraged to make RAI requests and desist from disseminating wrong/false information.
- Ministries, Departments, and Agencies shall be encouraged to respond to RAI requests promptly and adequately.
- The Government shall include compliance with proactive information disclosure as a performance indicator for Ministries, Departments, and Agencies.

8.7 Digital/Social Media

- The Government shall support media and information literacy campaigns and improve digital literacy to address information pollution (misinformation, disinformation, and mal-information). This shall be done with SLAJ and other national media institutions that provide media training nationwide.
- The Cyber Security and Crime Act 2021 shall help sanitise the digital and online spaces, which would be done within democratic ideals and standards.
- Citizens are encouraged to engage in the meaningful use of new media/social media platforms.
- The government shall encourage a national approach, bringing together various stakeholders to address issues of information pollution.
- The MoICE and IMC shall encourage responsible blogging. This shall include establishing a national organisation and codes for bloggers nationwide.
- Digital/online media platforms based in and broadcasting in Sierra Leone shall be registered with IMC and subject to its Regulations.



8. Policies For Specific Categories Of Media

9. Policies For Specific Categories Of Media

Public Service Media

Community Media

Private/ Commercial Media

Support training & capacity building

9.1 Public Service Media

The public service media shall comprise print, broadcast, and wire services.

9.1.1. The public media shall operate as independent, transparent, competitive, professional establishments like private enterprises but shall be not-for profit.

9.1.2 The following shall operate nationwide as public media:
- The Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC)
- The Sierra Leone News Agency (SLENA)

9.1.3 The public media shall have a unique mandate to meet the nation's information, education, and communication needs, especially those of the rural majority, the urban poor, and marginalised groups such as women, children, the youth, and persons with disabilities.

9.1.4 The public media shall be primarily responsible for preserving and promoting the nation's cultural heritage.

9.1.5 The Public media shall operate at the national, regional, and district levels. '

9.1.6 Public media shall operate and produce content in various local languages.

9.1.7 The Government shall provide public media with any necessary subvention and indirect assistance, such as tax breaks, concessions, and lower utility rates. Strict performance or output standards shall be applied for subvention and other aid. The level of government subsidy for public media organisations can differ from institution to institution.

9.1.7 The Boards and management of the public media shall be appointed through an independent and transparent process that aligns with national laws.

9.1.8 The operational ethos of public media shall be open, accountable, transparent, and based on the right to information.

9.1.9 The Government shall not influence the operations or censor the content of the public service media. When there is a conflict, the public media should be protected by law.

9.1.10 All public media shall abide by the rules and regulations of the national regulatory institutions, the Independent Media Commission, and the National Telecommunications Authority (NatCA).

9.2 Community Media

Community media shall comprise broadcast and print media. It shall also include folklore, theatre, public address systems, community meetings, comedy and songs.

9.2.1. The Government, through the national media regulator, the Independent Media Commission, shall facilitate the ownership and operation of community media and media services by communities. Communities, not individuals, local councils, or chiefdom administration, shall own and manage community media with the sole objective of community empowerment and providing access to all community members. However, local councils and chiefdom administration will be required to support community media operations.

9.2.2. The media regulator, the Independent Media Commission, shall allow the operation of one of each type of community media. Different groups shall not be permitted to operate various community media in the same community.

9.2.3. Local councils shall be encouraged to establish community media centres that provide training and reading, listening, and viewing facilities based on the community media's content.

9.2.3 All community media shall abide by the rules and regulations of the national regulatory institutions, the Independent Media Commission and the National Telecommunications Authority (NatCA).

9.3. Private/Commercial Media

Private/Commercial media shall comprise broadcast and print media.

9.3.1 The commercial media shall be expected to allocate a demonstrable portion of their output to publishing and broadcasting public service content as part of their undertaking to serve the public interest.

9.3.2 Ownership of commercial media organisations shall be spread to discourage monopolies and serve the interest of pluralism.

9.3.3 All private/commercial media shall abide by the rules and regulations of the national regulatory institutions, the Independent Media Commission and the National Telecommunications Authority (NatCA).

9.4 Support training and capacity building

9.4.1 Allocations from the national budget shall support efforts to upgrade the national media and information ecosystem and media and journalism training institutions and provide subvention to the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ).

9.4.2 The Government and other partners shall commit to providing financial and other support to the National Fund for Public Interest Media.

9.4.3 National media and regulatory institutions shall be strengthened. In particular, regulatory bodies shall be given the necessary resources to support the democratisation of the media and ensure their orderly regulation.

9.4.4 Transparency shall be required in managing and operating all media organisations and media-related services.

9.4.5 Professional associations shall establish their internal registration/accreditation systems for their members. Such systems shall consider professional standards, ethical behaviour, the media's developmental role, and the unique needs of community media.

9.5.6 Media training shall take three primary forms: from national media training institutions, media institutions, and individual media practitioners.



+ Monitoring, Evaluation And Conclusion

Monitoring, Evaluation And Conclusion

10.1 Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanism (M&E)

When the Cabinet has approved the policy, the Ministry of Information shall develop a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation mechanism.

10.2 Conclusion

The policy consolidates the government's gains in ensuring an effective and efficient media and information society.
Broadly, the policy is also anchored on the various policy directives outlined by the government and built on a firm foundation of fundamental principles such as the rights to access information, freedom of expression and the press, human dignity and self-actualisation, and democratic good governance.