



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE



LIBERIA MEDIA DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY

September 2015-September 2020 / Implementer: Internews

The goal of Liberia Media Development (LMD) Activity is to increase citizens' access to independent and reliable information, and empower them to engage in well-informed public discussions on issues of national importance. The Activity focuses on supporting media owners and managers, media development agencies, commercial media outlets, community radio stations, and government's information services to provide a more balanced and accurate information to the public. Specifically, the LMD Activity is leading to:

- Increased sustainability of media houses;
- A plurality of voices represented in Liberian media and improved overall quality of the media;
- Improved professional standards of journalism;
- Strengthened normative-legal enabling environment for freer media; and,
- Freedom Of Information Laws - Strengthened Independent Information Commission to respond to requests from citizens and media establishments.

CURRENT ACTIVITIES

- Journalism training and in-house mentoring to improve the quality of reporting on national issues (i.e. elections), public financing, government transparency, and accountability;
- Business management mentoring and training to media outlets to develop alternative revenue streams and sustainable business models;
- Media Market Forum supported to stimulate advertising income from businesses, thereby improving the financial sustainability of local media outlets;

- Technical support and ongoing training to 21 community radio stations throughout the country to improve citizens' access to independent and reliable information;
- Media law reform advocacy through conferences, training, professional mentoring, technical advice, meetings, and high level engagement; and
- Independent Information Commission, government information offices, and reporters strengthened in implementation of Liberia's Freedom of Information (FOI) Act.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS TO DATE

- Conducted 126 lower house candidate debates in partnership with 50 media agencies in all 73 electoral districts with 584 candidates attending. A quarter of eligible voters listened to the debates, which increased voter engagement, trust, and turnout on Election Day.
- Twenty-one community radio stations in all 15 counties of Liberia received capacity-building interventions, business management training, and station upgrades enabling them to support effective and balanced coverage of the 2017 elections and other important local and national issues.
- Trained over 50 journalists to report on County Social Development Fund (CSDF) stories and corresponding legislative reform. Over 35 stories have been published to date.
- Over 5,263 days of training delivered to media professionals across all counties of Liberia, which is resulting in higher quality reporting.
- Launched the Center for Transparency and Accountability in Liberia (CENTAL) online budget portal to enable journalists and citizens access to government budget information.
- Established the Ganta Media Resource Center (MRC) to offer computer and internet access and training to journalists and young people from rural Liberia. Total visits to the MRC since opening in February 2018 are 646 (F 145; M 501).
- Established Local Voices Liberia online platform to increase content sharing between rural journalists and rural media outlets across the nation, enhancing the representation of rural citizens and communities in national dialogue.
- Strengthened FOI Act by training government information officers and leading journalists to use the legislation as a central tool in their investigative reporting, resulting in 133 FOI requests and over 40 published stories to date.
- Journalist Code of Conduct revised by Press Union of Liberia (PUL) with LMD support, which includes special conduct requirements for the press during the elections, and outlines the actions journalists need to take to conduct themselves in an ethical manner.
- Established National Media Council through technical advice and training of PUL to enforce the PUL Code of Conduct and mitigate disputes.
- Annual Media Ratings Surveys conducted by GeoPoll for the first time in Liberia to enable media and business to better understand the audience reach of local media for the purposes of client base enhancement.
- Established Media Market Forum to circulate the audience ratings data and equip stakeholders with an improved understanding of media audiences and market trends to increase advertising income from businesses.

PLANNED OUTCOMES

- Support greater media professionalism in promoting greater transparency and accountability during the upcoming election cycle through media forums, candidate debates, and a candidate "promise tracker"

- Work closely with the Press Union of Liberia and young lawyers to enhance understanding of media laws while addressing needed reforms in the libel and definition laws
- Enhance the capacity of 21 community radio stations to provide uninterrupted, professional media coverage during the upcoming elections cycle and political transition
- Improve access to and analysis of Government of Liberia budget processes and expenditures at the national level
- Provide training education and training of journalists, editors, and researchers to conduct critical in-depth reporting on the planning and use of County Social Development Funds
- Market data available and routinely shared within the Media Market Forum, media owners, and advertisers
- Business plans finalized for partner media outlets with an eye toward increased financial sustainability
- Key recommendations on UNMIL radio transition made available to stakeholders and Government