



Sierra Leone

SIERRA LEONE MEDIA AND CONFLICT ASSESSMENT

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The Cotton Tree, Freetown

1.0 BACKGROUND

1.1 Purpose of Assessment

Through a grant from the British Foreign Office, staff from Common Ground Productions (CGP) conducted an assessment of Sierra Leone's media for the purpose of determining a role for a media-based conflict reduction project. The CGP team conducted interviews and site visits of media and proposed media establishments in Freetown, Bo, and Makeni, from April 11 to April 24, 1998. Questions that guided the assessment included the following:

- What is the state of Sierra Leone's media? How many radio or TV stations are broadcasting, or intend to broadcast in the near future, and what is their broadcast content? What is the state of the print media? Does the Kabbah-Government have clear policies regarding the media?
- Is the conflict appropriate for a media-based intervention for conflict reduction?
- Would the Sierra Leone Government and civil society appreciate, understand, and encourage the entry of CGP into the media environment of Sierra Leone, and would they value the potential project's objectives and methods?
- What are the logistical, material, and human resource bases in Sierra Leone for establishing a media production studio?

Discussions with Sierra Leoneans in Guinea and Liberia in advance of the assessment indicated that the new government and civil society would be supportive of the work of CGP, and that a media-based conflict reduction project would be a highly appropriate intervention as Sierra Leone emerges from the civil conflict.

The following report endeavors to answer the above questions for the implementation of a media and conflict reduction intervention.

1.2 CGP Expertise for Conduct of the Assessment

Common Ground Productions (CGP) is the production arm of Search for Common Ground, a Washington, DC-based NGO. CGP specializes in the establishment of media projects in conflict areas to help reduce and resolve conflict. As of April, 1998, CGP maintains radio production projects in Liberia, Burundi, and Bosnia. In May, 1997, CGP officially opened a radio production facility in Monrovia, Liberia, called *Talking Drum Studio* (TDS). TDS programming initially supported the election process and has since expanded to include regular half-hour news magazine programs, roundtable forums, and radio dramas that are also performed as street theatre. TDS radio programs are played on six radio stations in Liberia, produced by a

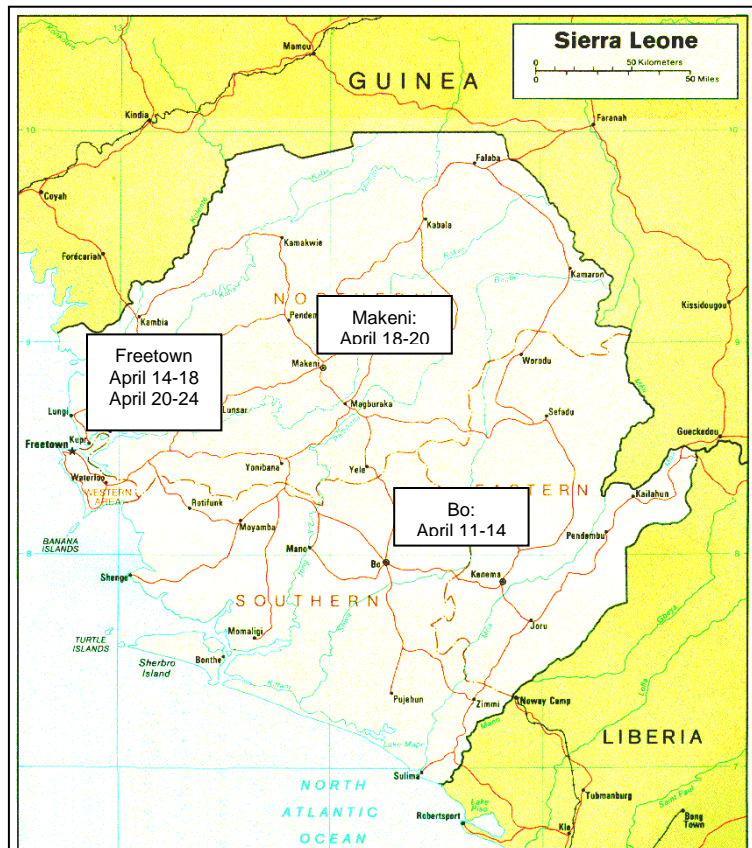
staff of more than 30 production professionals and support staff. Common Ground Productions personnel, both national and expatriate, have successfully produced and aired politically oriented radio programs in a hostile media environment in Liberia for more than one year. The ability of CGP projects to function successfully in an environment like Liberia is the result of CGP's "common ground" approach to program production and journalism, which departs from the adversarial way in which issues are usually presented by the media.

The assessment team included John Langlois, Project Director of Common Ground Productions' Talking Drum Studio project in Liberia, and Phil Hellmich, project administrator in CGP's Washington office. John Langlois has served more than seven years in Liberia, including two years as a radio advisor to the Liberian Rural Communications Network in the 1980s, and two years as an advisor and Liberia Country Director for former US President Carter's operations in Liberia. Phil Hellmich has supported Talking Drum Studio from CGP's Washington office since the inception of the project in 1997, and served for four years as a Peace Corps Volunteer in the Northern Province of Sierra Leone. Francis Fortune of Conciliation Resources provided additional support to the mission. Francis Fortune is a Canadian resident of Sierra Leone. Her expertise and advice was invaluable during the Bo and early Freetown portions of the trip.

1.3 Assessment Itinerary

The team conducted the assessment in three locations: Freetown and the "upline" towns of Bo, Southern Province, and Makeni, Northern Province. The team entered Sierra Leone by air at Lungi and based the mission from the capital Freetown, where the majority of meetings and work was done for the assessment. Bo and Makeni were chosen as strategic rural sites for visits as they are the second and third largest towns in the country and they are the only "upline" towns with radio stations.

In Freetown the team was able to meet with Government officials, UN



officials, and a wide array of media personnel. Political priority was given to meetings with the Minister of Information, Dr. Julius Spencer, along with officials of the British High Commission and UN agencies. Technical questions were answered by site visits and interviews of radio, TV, and newspaper management and production staffs. Bo and Makeni were sites to visit as each had functioning radio stations prior to the junta.

2.0 Security Assessment

The Sierra Leone war and the security environment are constantly changing. While it was thought that AFRC and RUF loyalists were effectively cornered in Kailahun and Kono back in April, guerrilla strikes outside of these districts have become common since then. While Freetown has been peaceful, large areas of Sierra Leone remain outside of the absolute control of ECOMOG and the Kabbah Government as evidenced by these guerrilla strikes. At this time, humanitarian NGOs in Sierra Leone are restricting the movements of expatriate and national staff in order to limit exposure to risky conditions, particularly with regard to road travel and overnight stays in the Eastern Province and areas bordering this province. Any project initiatives in Sierra Leone in the near future will need to be built around the immediate security conditions and have operations flexible enough to cope with potentially rapid changing security circumstances.

2.1 The Sierra Leone War and Security

Sierra Leone's civil crisis has changed dramatically since the beginning of the year. Nigeria, under the umbrella of ECOMOG, made an aggressive and decisive move in February to destroy the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC), which overthrew the democratically elected government of Ahmad Tejan Kabbah in May of 1997. The AFRC, an alliance of convenience between government military personnel and the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), was largely unpopular with the civilian population and has received little civilian support during ECOMOG's attempt to defeat it. ECOMOG, in alliance with traditional Mende fighters known as Kamajors under the leadership of Chief Hinga Norman, has fought the elements of the AFRC, attempting to corner them in southeast region of the country in the provinces of Kono and Kailahun, and by April, largely succeeded in the operation.

However, while the Kabbah led government has returned to Freetown and many international organizations including the UN and NGOs have reestablished a presence there, the crisis is not over. ECOMOG has secured most of the major towns around the country, but the RUF/Junta forces are entrenched in the east, particularly in Kailahun District. And by May, Junta fighters demonstrated an ability to wage a bush/guerrilla war of terror outside of Kailahun District, including



WBIG, the former radio station of Hilton Fyle, looted in anti-Junta protest in February, 1998



Makeni, Sunday, April 18: Vigilante crowd decapitates and burns alleged Junta collaborator.

districts once thought secured, like Koinadugu, Bombali, and Port Loko in the North. “*Operation No Living Thing*” has become a pattern of quick strike terror in rural areas, in which towns are burned and the population is mutilated or killed. The RUF has been responsible for a policy of human mutilation in the past; they have returned to this war tactic.

Similarly, particularly in February, March and April, civilians claiming to be in opposition to the Junta and AFRC have acted as vigilantes, often killing persons alleged to be Junta or Junta collaborators. Certain collaborators have had their houses and possessions targeted, such as Hilton Fyle, a radio station owner and former BBC radio personality.

ECOMOG’s current capacity is reportedly not sufficient to secure the entire countryside, and it is at a disadvantage fighting in the Sierra Leone bush. ECOMOG is understaffed, lacks much needed logistics, and has been commandeering humanitarian vehicles -- especially trucks. The local forces allied with ECOMOG, the Kamajors, are untrained and often ineffective in military operations against the AFRC/RUF.

2.2 Security and Implications for Projects

Delivery of Humanitarian Assistance: Security has been a major concern of the humanitarian community in Sierra Leone, especially given the terrible experiences of the NGOs at the hands of the Junta retreating from ECOMOG in February. Road travel has been restricted to ECOMOG-secured areas as ambushes have occurred along main roads. Most expatriate staff are currently based in Freetown with humanitarian activities upcountry carried out by local staff, who are considered to be less of a target than international staff. The RUF has a history of expatriate kidnappings. Different areas of the country are benefiting from different levels of assistance, depending on the security situation and access. Most organizations are moving forward with relief assistance, while keeping a close watch on security and maintaining options if the situation deteriorates.

Media and Security: Unlike the war in Liberia, Sierra Leone broadcast institutions have been left largely intact by rebel forces. During the occupation of Freetown by Junta forces, the state radio SLBS, Hilton Fyle’s WBIG, and Voice of the Handicapped, a private radio station, remained on the air. SKYY and KISS-FM were taken off the air by the owner, who fled Sierra Leone during the occupation of the Junta. Pro-Kabbah forces established a “clandestine” radio operation at Lungi under the protection of ECOMOG. This radio station broadcast primarily to Freetown a steady stream of pro-Kabbah Government messages during much of the occupation of the Junta. With the reinstatement of the Kabbah Government there is clear pressure

felt by broadcasters to run pro-Government stories and maintain a pro-Government line. Hilton Fyle, a prominent Sierra Leone journalist who supported the Junta and allowed the Junta's use of his radio station to support its activities, has been arrested and is to be tried for treason as a Junta collaborator. The radio station WBIG was thoroughly looted and destroyed by citizens targeting Fyle and the radio as pro-Junta enemies of the government.

Any new project designed by CGP for Sierra Leone will need to take into account the fluid nature of the security situation. Direct attacks against expatriate personnel have happened and may likely happen again without proper precautions. National staff may take on a higher risk profile due to their association with a internationally supported media project. While it may be technically advisable to consider portable production studios for upline towns like Bo and Makeni, such operations should only be established when operating conditions for NGOs are acceptable for full-time residence of expatriate staff. At this time, operations can be established and based in Freetown, where there is a critical mass of expatriate presence.

3.0 Media Capacity in Sierra Leone

There is an active media and journalist community in Sierra Leone. Prior to the takeover of the AFRC, a private radio station was established in Bo, and at least three private FM radio stations operated in Freetown, including SKYY, Voice of the Handicapped, and WBIG. Newspaper publishing became the business of the low-rent entrepreneur, with many newspapers of little substance or credibility in circulation. Since the return of Ahmad Tejan-Kabbah to power, multiple newspapers have returned to circulation, many again with questionable credibility.

The assessment team found local media conditions favorable for a CGP project. The large number of radio stations and newspapers with positive editorial and management attitudes about the work of a project like Talking Drum Studio indicates that any future project would have ready and willing collaborators.

3.1 Radio Stations

As of April 1998, three FM radio stations were regularly operating in Freetown. The Sierra Leone Broadcasting System (SLBS) has the only short-wave facilities in the country. A fourth FM station in Freetown, SKYY-FM, is expected to reopen in the next few months. One non-Freetown radio station, a small AM station in Makeni, was operating. The Bishop of Makeni has a license and the equipment to open an FM station in the Northern Province while Solarcom has the intention of reopening KISS-FM broadcasting station in Bo very soon.

Programming on Sierra Leone radio stations is very limited. Most programming consists of music and dedications, though SLBS provides multiple daily news bulletins

and both SLBS and Radio Democracy produce public affairs programs like discussion programs. In general, however, production capacity at all functioning stations is very limited.

The assessment team met with the owners, operators, or staff of the above mentioned radio stations. The team found everyone at these stations to be interested in cooperation and encouraging of an external project that might help build and provide conflict reduction oriented programming for their program schedules.

These stations are as follows:

Freetown: Sierra Leone Broadcasting Service (SLBS): SLBS has been the government's official radio station since 1958. It has traditionally played pro-government programs. During the Junta, station staff were forced to broadcast pro-Junta programs. The present government intends to establish an independent board of directors to govern the station's operations. The station's FM transmitter is located at the top of Leicester Peak, providing a height advantage for its line of sight FM transmission that could reach much of Sierra Leone with a transmitter of sufficient power. At this time, the FM transmitter is working at only low power, but its signals can be picked up as far as Makeni. SLBS also transmits in shortwave, but the equipment is old and fairly unreliable.

The station is in serious need of equipment, staff training and basic operating resources. The Minister of Information has ambitions for opening SLBS stations or relay stations in upcountry towns such as Makeni and Bo. The resources for such expansion have not been identified.

Freetown: Radio Democracy - FM 98.1: This station was opened during the Junta's occupation of Freetown. It has been alleged that the station was supported through British assistance to a group of Sierra Leonean supporters of the Kabbah government, including the current Minister of Information Dr. Julius Spencer and the Head of the Campaign for Good Governance, Zainab Bangura. During the Junta occupation of Freetown the station was located at Lungi. The station has now been moved to Signal Hill near the US Ambassador's residence.

During the Junta's occupation, Radio Democracy was used to promote the Kabbah government and to counter Junta broadcasts. The station is now being set up independently from the government with its own board of directors. The station is shifting away from pro-government propaganda, moving towards looking at the needs of the country and attitudes of people and addressing the wounds from the war.

The station Programming Director, Hanna Foulah, expressed a need for training of staff in reporting and interview techniques, programming ideas around old issues in a new way and developing news programs. The staff is also in need of technical production training. The station is also in need of basic equipment, especially for production of radio programs.

Both Foulah and Dr. Julius Spencer were supportive of the idea of broadcasting potential CGP project programming.

Freetown: Voice of the Handicapped - FM 93: Voice of the Handicapped (VOH) is owned and operated by a former employee of SLBS, James Cullen. Both Cullen and M.B. Attila, VOH's most popular broadcast personality, are blind. VOH's programming schedule consists mostly of locally-produced entertainment programming, including music and dedication shows. VOH has a relay agreement with the BBC and when all the BBC relay equipment is in place, more than half of its broadcast day may be made up of BBC signals.

VOH remained on the air during the period of Junta occupation of Freetown. They have been accused of doing some favors for the Junta; however, they have been able to continue their broadcasts as they could not fairly be considered to have been "Junta collaborators."

The assessment team met with both Cullen and Attila. Cullen was very interested in a collaborative agreement with a potential CGP project and would be interested in broadcasting conflict reduction programs.

Freetown: SKYY – FM 106: SKYY-FM is the sister station to KISS-FM located in Bo. Both stations are privately owned and operated by Andrew Kromah and his organization Solarcom. Andrew Kromah and Station Manager Olive Sawyer were not in Freetown during the visit of the assessment team.



Solarcom's Freetown business office on Pademba Road. Still closed in April, 1998.

SKYY went off the air during the Junta and may return to the air in the coming months by rebroadcasting KISS-FM transmissions, according to Anita Kromah, Andrew's sister, and Steve Roy, a consultant to Solarcom. Management stated that the station is in need of some equipment. However, when the transmitter is returned to the air, its signal is expected to reach just short of Makeni and Bo. Its programs will be a mix of music, talk shows, and advertisements.

Both Kromah and Roy expressed an interest in collaboration with a CGP project, and thought that such programs might help to strengthen their broadcast schedule.

Upcountry Radio: Prior to the war, there were only two radio stations operating upcountry, one in Bo and the other in Makeni. Currently, only the station in Makeni is operating, but two other FM stations are expected to open in the next months -- and possibly even more.

Bo: KISS – FM 104: KISS-FM is the privately owned and operated sister station of SKYY-FM in Freetown. The station had been broadcasting since 1993, though it was taken off the air by the owners during the occupation of the Junta. KISS-FM's facilities are largely intact, though the transmitter and much of the broadcasting equipment was packed up and moved from the original broadcasting site during the Junta period.

KISS-FM's signal was strong and able to broadcast to much of the Southern Province, though distant Kailahun proved difficult to reach because of the hills. Management is planning to reopen soon and has intentions to increase its broadcasting capacity. The station's chief programming consultant expressed a desire to be able to broadcast into most of the Southern and Eastern Provinces including possibly Kailahun and Kono districts. This will, however, require both additional equipment and tower height.

As with SKYY-FM, management would be interested in collaborative arrangements with a potential CGP project.

Makeni: Radio Romankneh AM: This low-powered AM station is owned and operated by the Wesleyan Mission in Sierra Leone. It has a broadcasting radius of about ten miles, so that its reach is limited to the population of "greater" Makeni. Its broadcasting times are limited due to limited funds for generator operation and its programs are largely evangelical and local news oriented. The station manager, Said Nixon Bangura, is very interested in a collaboration with a CGP project and thought that Radio Romankneh would make a good broadcast partner for conflict reduction radio programming.

The station is in dire need of new equipment; much of the studio equipment was looted by the AFRC. However, Bangura was able to secure the station's transmitter and the station remains on the air. Programming collaboration should involve some minimal assistance to help the station improve its studio equipment.

Makeni: Proposed FM station, Catholic Mission: The Catholic Bishop of Makeni is actively working to open a FM station in Makeni. Bishop Biguzzi secured a broadcasting license from the government prior to the war and arranged for three people to attend broadcasting training in Nigeria. Equipment is expected to arrive in the next few months, and a local technical team has been contacted for installation. The Bishop is considering placing a tower on one of the nearby hills surrounding Makeni. The tower height and an expected transmitting power of 1 kilowatt could enable the station to reach most of the Northern Province well beyond Kabala and possibly into some of the Eastern Province, such as Kono district.

The Bishop is open to a collaboration with a CGP project. CGP has a strong relationship with the Catholic Archdiocese in Liberia and the assessment team believes that a similar relationship could be built in Makeni. Access to such a strong transmitter

and station in the Northern Province would be very important to disseminating CGP programs to towns in the far north like Kabala.

3.2 Newspapers

Prior to the war there were an estimated 40 to 50 newspapers. This number is now anywhere between 21 and 40 papers, with each of them having just four pages of print. All newspapers were and still are printed in Freetown and then distributed to major towns upcountry, including Bo, Kenema, and Makeni. These distributions upcountry have resumed with exception of places in Kailahun and Kono districts.

Each journalist interviewed agreed that the plethora of papers and lack of quality reflects serious problems in the country's newspaper industry. As one said, "Anyone with the money can create a newspaper and become its editor." One editor described operating a newspaper as a means for some people to just make their "bread and butter" as opposed to reporting responsible news. In some cases, newspapers are being used to extort money by threatening to print damaging stories about individuals.

The Sierra Leone Association of Journalist (SLAJ) is very concerned about the lack of credibility of the newspaper industry and the resulting general public disgust. SLAJ was working with the Kabbah government prior to the coup to establish national standards. A bill had passed parliament and was awaiting the President's signature when the coup occurred in 1997.

SLAJ, which is composed of 160 print, 25 radio and 15 television journalists, is currently working with the new government on a revised bill. SLAJ is calling for a Press Council to regulate the media, standard educational qualifications for journalists, and another set of educational and experience standards for editors. The bill is expected to pass in the next few months.

SLAJ sees the current government as being the most responsive and tolerant of the press community. It also sees itself playing a key role in building a positive relationship with the government and reshaping its own thinking to that of "development journalism." SLAJ would like to help create an environment for journalism to be both credible and lucrative in Sierra Leone.

Several journalists did note that most papers are being "sensitive" to stories on "national security" and especially ECOMOG. The Minister of Information did request that all journalists pass stories pertaining to ECOMOG through their information person. The journalists interviewed seemed willing to comply with a level of self-censorship until the situation in Sierra Leone plays itself out.

It is worth noting that there is absolutely no pro-Junta presence in the newspapers. The three or four pro-Junta papers that existed prior to ECOMOG's liberation of Freetown have since disbanded. There is also a climate of retribution against any former Junta supporters. Any newspapers, or other media outlets,

demonstrating the slightest favor for the Junta will not be tolerated by the government, ECOMOG, or the general public.

3.4 Television

The Sierra Leone Broadcasting Service operates a limited television station that broadcasts largely to the Freetown area. Currently, SLBS TV is suffering from a lack of resources and would appreciate any assistance. For instance, they are airing a weekly half-hour series called “Inside Trouble” which looks at “the trauma caused by the Junta.” Since the show has primarily focused on stories from people around Freetown, some government officials suggested they look upcountry for other stories. The lack of resources has prevented them from expanding their programming beyond the Western area.

3.4 Radio Sets and Televisions

There are approximately one million radio sets in Sierra Leone according to the World Radio TV Handbook (WRTH – Volume 52, 1998). With a population of just over 5 million people, one in every five Sierra Leoneans has a radio. However, this total is likely too high given the destruction of the war and the relative level of poverty that has made radio acquisition difficult. But radios are often shared, as a typical radio may be listened to by people beyond the owner, including neighbors, friends or customers.

The SLBS Deputy Director estimated there were 250,000 television sets in the Western area prior to the war. Prior to the war, a basic black and white set was selling for around \$100. Like radios, most TV sets were and are viewed by audiences that go beyond the immediate household. As the Deputy Director described, it is typical for neighbors and friends to join in watching programs or for a TV set to be placed in an open environment for general viewing.

4.0 Conflict Assessment: Need For Media Intervention

The Sierra Leone conflict is well suited to a media intervention for conflict reduction and prevention. Nearly everyone interviewed by the assessment team about the causes of the conflict in Sierra Leone believed that the lack of communication with the majority of Sierra Leoneans and the lack of transparency of the government and those with power and money have been major factors in causing and exacerbating the war. Sierra Leoneans need to be informed about what is happening in their country, and they need to be presented with credible alternatives to conflict. In this section, roots and causes of the conflict are discussed that would need to be treated systematically by a media and conflict project.

4.1 Power & Wealth

The Sierra Leone conflict is complex and has longstanding roots involving the use and misuse of power and wealth. Sierra Leone has some of the richest diamond mines in Africa; it has gold, rutile, bauxite, and great agricultural potential, including fertile lands and an abundance of fish. It has beautiful beaches for tourism and a ready supply of fresh water. Still, Sierra Leone is rated the poorest and most underdeveloped country in the world. Why?

An excerpt from a Caritas training manual on reconciliation and healing (April 1996) states that, "The conflict which has devastated the lives of so many of our brothers and sisters in Sierra Leone over the past ... years is, in so many ways, unique in the African context.... Since the war lacks any kind of religious or ethnic dimension, reasons have to be found elsewhere for the causes of violence, many acts of which have been perpetrated by young people. Young people in particular point to past political failures, corruption, nepotism, mismanagement of the country's vast resources as causes of this war."

Over the past three decades, a small minority of Sierra Leoneans became extremely rich, often at the expense of the rest of the country. The government of Siaka Stevens set an example of corruption that slowly dismantled the effectiveness of government services and the civil society. The Sierra Leonean infrastructure slowly collapsed while "big men" still paraded around in expensive cars. The current conflict may be viewed with a Marxist interpretation, assigning blame to the juxtaposition of poverty and corrupt wealth.

Liberia's and Charles Taylor's involvement in the Sierra Leone war has been seen as an attempt for Taylor to take advantage of Sierra Leone's natural resources, particularly the diamond mines of the Eastern Province. In return, he offered Foday Sankor and the RUF means and training to begin a rebellion against the Sierra Leonean government. The RUF had no discernable political philosophy or reason to exist, other than control of resources and wealth.

While the Kabbah government tried to address Sierra Leone's longstanding problems during its brief tenure before the AFRC, changes did not come quickly enough for the RUF and rogue soldiers of the Sierra Leone Armed Forces. The violence and looting inflicted by the AFRC and RUF on innocent people reduced their credibility. They lost any sympathy and support they had from the general populace. While most Sierra Leoneans were, and still are, tired of corruption, the AFRC and RUF simply became another group vying for power to exploit the country's riches. In the process, they drew upon the dissatisfied youth of the country by presenting them with immediate means to power and material gain.

4.2 Youth

One of the most dramatic aspects of the Sierra Leonean war, and potentially one of the most long-term destabilizing factors, is the role of youth in the fighting. Much of the RUF forces are composed of young men, recruited for a wide range of reasons.

The RUF lured many young men early on by an ideology against corruption that obviously went astray. Some were seduced by the power of the gun and money, while others were forcibly taken by gunpoint. Many eventually became addicted to drugs and their new status in society.

The Kamajors, like the Capras of the North, are also composed largely of young men. They, however, responded to the call of a traditional hunter-warrior society that has defended its homeland for generations. The Kamajors are rooted in their traditional ways but many are now armed with deadly modern weapons.

Other Sierra Leonean young men simply seized opportunities for looting in the midst of general chaos. Several people interviewed commented that the people who committed some of the atrocities were neighbors who are still walking the streets.

Sierra Leone now has a generation of young men whose formal education has been interrupted and replaced by participation in committing horrific acts of violence. They have tasted power and experienced the immediate gratification of material gain at the cost of traditional community life. The RUF and AFRC simply cannot return home because they were largely responsible for destroying and terrorizing communities, often times their own. As seen in Makeni and Bo, retribution killings against RUF and AFRC members are now taking place by vigilante mobs that come across former combatants.

The Kamajors, RUF and AFRC are still fighting in the East. When the fighting stops, Sierra Leone will be faced with the incredible task of convincing its young men to put down their arms and to reintegrate into society. If the root causes that led to the conflicts are not addressed, and if the youth do not have positive directions to channel their energies, the prospect of a return to violence is quite high.

4.3 Ethnicity

There is traditionally ethnic tension between various groups in Sierra Leone. While these tensions played a role in events leading up to violence, the recent conflicts cannot be simplified to just ethnic in origins.



Limba Village in Bombali District

There are 17 ethnic groups in Sierra Leone with the largest two being Mende in the South and Temne in the North. Limbas are the third largest group and also live primarily in the North. There is long-standing tension between the Mendes and Temnes, while the Limbas have been perceived as more rural and humble in nature. Siaka Stevens, the former long-time President of Sierra Leone, played off the Temne-Mende dynamics by claiming to be Limba, thereby offsetting any political preference on his part. He also placed Limbas in the key military positions so that neither the Mendes nor Temnes would have an advantage or would be tempted to take power.

The major players in the AFRC junta were Limba military officers, including Johnny Paul Koroma. Since the Limbas have a strong allegiance to their male leaders, many prominent Limba figures were drawn into the Junta government, even some that many believed “should have known better.” However, the AFRC was not solely Limbas, but was also composed of people from various ethnic backgrounds who were simply seizing an opportunity for power and economic gain.

The RUF, on the other hand, is largely composed of Mendes along with a smaller percentage of opportunists from other ethnic groups. Its leader, Foday Sanko, however, is a Temne. Their chief Sierra Leonean rival, the Kamajors, are from a traditional Mende hunter-warrior society.

The other major ethnic tension worth mentioning is between the Krios of the Western area and all other groups up-country. The Krios are descendents from returned slaves, live primarily in the Freetown area, and tend to be better educated. They also consider themselves superior to the people living upcountry. This dynamic, which has generally not resulted in violence, has lent itself to a sense of separation between Freetown, where the government seat is located, and the rest of the country. It has also ensured that a Krio could not be elected President since he or she could not carry the upcountry vote.

4.4 Traditional Ways and Modernization

One of the more subtle conditions leading to violence, and an aspect that is difficult to understand, let alone address, is the modernization of traditional African ways. The director of a Sierra Leonean NGO who was interviewed put it quite succinctly, “Traditional Africa is not democratic.... In the old ways, the elder in the family or village was the person who made decisions and everyone listened to him. Now, that’s not the case. Everybody wants a voice, especially the young people.”

He went on to say, “We run into this all the time in villages where we work. People do not know how to resolve their conflicts anymore, whether by the old ways or some other.... The fruits of traditional African life -- the nice community life and the nice family life -- are being lost because of the confusion. People just want the fruits without accepting the roots. There are no longer the roots in the old ways to support the tree.”

There are positive aspects to traditional African village life that are being lost in the modernization of the country, just as there are many benefits to be gained from becoming more modern and democratic. There are also many traditional conflict resolution mechanisms that have worked for generations that suddenly collapsed under the demands of youth on drugs carrying guns. There are no easy answers to the merging together of traditional African life and the strains of modernization.

4.5 Illiteracy

Interviews indicate that there is an 80 to 85% illiteracy rate in Sierra Leone. The most literate part of the population lives in the Western area around Freetown. The major towns up-country, such as Bo and Makeni, also have higher rates of literacy, but the rural areas are far behind. The number of people speaking Krio also drops off in more remote rural communities.

With the collapse of government services, including school systems, this rate is not expected to change for the better any time soon. In fact, with the recent fighting, schools have been interrupted for the past few years. This is compounded by the fact that teachers have begun to lose their status as “highly respected” members of communities.

Since newspapers are one of the major channels for news, many Sierra Leoneans do not have access to information about events affecting their lives.

4.6 Rural Isolation

The rural areas of Sierra Leone have been largely isolated from reliable news and information from Freetown and other parts of the country. Likewise, the Freetown area does not receive reliable news from upcountry.

The major newspapers are sold in larger towns up country, but the high illiteracy rates and cost of the papers make them ineffective for reaching rural areas. While newspapers do have reporters in some upcountry towns, news from more remote rural areas is not always covered.

Sierra Leonean radio stations also do not transmit to all parts of the country. The Northern, Southern and Eastern Provinces all have large areas that cannot receive any local stations. This is compounded by the fact that most radio stations and newspapers also have a predominantly Freetown focus, leaving a void of reliable upcountry information.

The disconnect between Freetown and upcountry was seen by many people interviewed as one problem leading to the recent coup. The government was perceived to be out of touch with the realities and needs of upcountry people.

Likewise, people upcountry were largely oblivious to the workings and decisions of their national and regional governments.

4.6 National Identity

Several people interviewed believed Sierra Leone lacks a national identity. Sierra Leoneans simply do not think of themselves as Sierra Leoneans. Most people will first identify themselves according to their ethnic group, whether Mende, Temne, Limba, Krio or other. There is nothing that pulls people together.

One reason given for this lack of national identity is that Sierra Leoneans are largely cut off from their past history, heroes, and icons. Likewise, there is perceived to be a lack of vision on where the country is going.

The national identity that does exist is believed to be mostly negative – there is no future in Sierra Leone, so talented people must leave if given the chance. Also, the perception encountered is that Sierra Leoneans are critical of themselves and are quick to point out their “bad” natures.

5.0 Existing Conflict Resolution Mechanisms and Interventions

While not highly developed or coordinated, there are some existing efforts at reconciliation and conflict reduction. Actual activities and plans for such activities are being carried out by the government agency NCRRR, NGOs, and the United Nations.

5.1 Government Mechanisms: NCRRR

The Sierra Leone National Commission for Reconstruction, Resettlement and Rehabilitation (NCRRR) is the chief government body in charge of the post-war transitional phase. As its name suggests, this body will be responsible for some of the most critical aspects for laying the foundation for future peace, including disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of the combatants. (Refer to Appendix A – NCRRR Sponsored Coordination Mechanisms)

The NCRRR is just beginning to identify and hire its staff. At the time of this assessment, only the two upper positions had been filled. The Deputy Commissioner did comment that he thought media, particularly radio, would play a significant role in the success of a lasting peace. He was particularly interested in seeing how the information dissemination component of the NCRRR could learn from Common Ground Productions’ experience in Liberia.

5.2 CARITAS/CRS

Prior to the recent Junta, Caritas had invested a significant amount of time and resources to developing a Community-Based Reconciliation and Trauma Healing

program. They conducted extensive research into the root causes of the war and held “brainstorming sessions” in Freetown, Makeni, Kenema, Bo, and Guinea with community leaders. They received assistance from Conciliation Resources (U.K.) and various international Catholic groups, including Caritas Germany and Holland.

The result of this effort was the development of a comprehensive training manual for trainers. As the manual states, “the effects of the war are evident for all to see. Violence and violent death, destruction of houses and villages, widespread looting and loss of property, massive displacement of people, the breakdown of traditional values and institutions, the demoralization and traumatization of people are some of the most obvious effects of this war.” The manual was developed “to help people cope with some of the challenges that will confront them when they return to their communities.”

From this manual, Caritas conducted a series of training sessions for trainers. They then in turn trained community animators who were to begin working with communities on the slow process of healing. All of this work, plus a radio version of the program, were interrupted by the most recent coup and outbreak of fighting.

5.3 World Vision

World Vision has a large operation in Sierra Leone with over \$10 million dollars of programming taking place in food aid, agriculture, child protection, and health sectors. It also had a “Support of Permanent Peace” component prior to the war that was funded by USAID’s Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) and is currently being reprogrammed.

Prior to the war: The Support for Permanent Peace program had two components:

District-level workshops: Animators worked with community leaders in three districts – Bo, Pujehun, and Bonthe – in two day workshops that examined the root causes of war. Most major groups – religious, government, paramount chiefs, and women – were represented with the exception of the RUF.

The first day was a general discussion that looked at the historical causes of the war. These tended to go further and further back into history, even to the British colonial days, until finally people would begin to acknowledge having some responsibility for conditions leading to the war. The second day focused on what each group – religious, women, and chiefs – could do to improve conditions, resulting in a list of objectives.

World Vision wanted to take these discussions to a chiefdom, and eventually village level. Most documents from this initiative were lost in the fighting.

Support for national NGOs – World Vision was in the process of identifying local NGOs that would focus on peace building and civil society building activities. A number of groups had been identified and activities planned just prior to the coup. Theatre productions and radio spots were part of the activities.

Post-War Programs: OTI and World Vision are in the process of reprogramming allocated funds into a new program that may include:

Non-formal education: OTI is interested in working with World Vision and possibly UNICEF in a non-formal education project. This program will have a long-term focus unlike the usual OTI “transitional” projects. One idea behind the project is to provide an opportunity for young people to get involved in a positive activity that encourages taking personal responsibility for a better future. UNICEF has educational packages that may be available for distribution.

Civil society forums (unnamed): The idea is to conduct a series of forums starting at the village level, moving up through sections, chiefdoms, districts and then culminating at the national level. The forums will focus on what should be on the agenda for the development of national policies. Ideally, the process will also encourage civil society leaders to take responsibility for anything that falls within their domain and to move away from looking to the government for all answers. It is recognized that the forums need to be handled with great sensitivity in order to achieve the desired outcomes.

5.4 Conciliation Resources (U.K.)

Conciliation Resources has a program in Sierra Leone working with indigenous efforts at peace and reconciliation in Bo District and other districts of the Southern Province. Conciliation Resources also is engaged in working with the media to conduct journalist training.

5.5 UNDP “Awareness Raising” Project

The assessment team met with the Deputy Resident Representative of UNDP in Sierra Leone, Macleod Nyirongo, concerning their upcoming “Awareness Raising Project.” The United Nations Development Program has developed a project designed to raise awareness levels of the population of Sierra Leone. According to their project description, the project will raise awareness levels of:

“...certain mindsets and predispositions like tribalism, corruption, and lack of patriotism and nationalism among many others, which are innately divisive and which to a large extent have been the causation of the six year old rebel war and the coup of May 1997.”

The project intends to support the use of mass and traditional media and communication channels to transform these mindsets.

The intent of the UNDP project is similar to CGP media projects in that it intends to use media as a channel for reaching the mass population with pro-peace and conflict reducing messages. During the meeting with Mr. Nyirongo, and an earlier meeting with Elizabeth Lwanga, the Resident Representative, when in Guinea in February, UNDP expressed interest in hiring CGP as a subcontractor to the project to conduct some of the activities expressed in the project document.

6.0 Political Environment for Positive Change

The existence of a democratically elected and internationally supported government in Freetown provides the basic structure for building a free and open society capable of working through conflicts peacefully. Military action against the AFRC/RUF is likely to need to continue throughout the year, however. Government firmness against the Junta and its collaborators should be expected to continue. Despite the government's commitment to support the war against the Junta, there appears to be an openness and acceptance of the concept of projects that might assist and provide programming to Sierra Leone media. The assessment team believes that the Kabbah government will be very supportive of the type of project that CGP might design for Sierra Leone.

The Minister of Information, Dr. Julius Spencer, expressed an interest in endorsing a Common Ground Productions designed project. Government policy at the Ministerial level appears to be supportive of a project like Talking Drum Studio in Liberia for Sierra Leone. If CGP designs a project, it will be done with the involvement of Dr. Spencer and the Ministry of Information.

The implications of the death of Sani Abacha of Nigeria on the conflict in Sierra Leone are unclear at this time. The Abacha regime was clearly opposed to the AFRC and committed to its ouster and defeat. It is likely that the new Nigerian regime under its new President, the former Chief of Defense Staff, will continue to pursue its pro-Kabbah government objectives in Sierra Leone. Many of the Generals in the Nigerian military spent more than 5 years fighting Charles Taylor in Liberia.

7.0 Recommendations

The CGP assessment team believes that Sierra Leone could benefit greatly from a radio production and mass-media project designed to promote the reduction of conflict.

7.1 Radio Program Production

An independent radio programming production operation should be established in Sierra Leone to complement existing radio stations. With numerous proposed and existing radio stations in Sierra Leone, broadcast capability is not an immediate

problem in the media sector. Targeted, quality radio program production is the greatest need, as the vast majority of radio programs in Sierra Leone consist of request and music programming. As radio is the most accessible form of media for the mass of the population in Sierra Leone, it can have a rapid impact on the population if resources are targeted at the production of programs designed to inform and educate the population. As such, it is recommended that a radio program production operation be created to increase the capacity of all stations to broadcast coherent and targeted news, information, and drama programming that promotes stability, peace, and progress. Such an operation should include a fully staffed and equipped production studio able to produce up to 3 hours of original programming per day.

7.2 Journalist, Conflict Resolution, and Production Training

There are many able journalists and dramatic artists in Sierra Leone, who, if provided training in non-adversarial and conflict reduction, techniques, could help produce programs that could help reduce overall tension in Sierra Leone. There are still many more less-able individuals practicing as journalists who may be trainable in such techniques to be able to produce similar programs.



7.3 Radio and Listening Groups

Radios should be distributed to communities in the rural areas of Sierra Leone and listening groups should be formed to use those radios to tune in to news, government updates, and programs produced by an independent production operation. Distribution of the radios and the formation of listening groups should be facilitated in collaboration with non-governmental organizations that currently have projects in rural areas and in radio target communities.

The purpose of the formation of listening groups and the distribution of radios is to insure that rural areas begin to benefit from the availability of information dissemination through radio. This is particularly important given the lack of reliable information in the rural areas in recent years.

It is recommended that the *Baygen Freeplay* radio be considered for distribution. This radio, as its name suggests, requires no batteries or outside source of power, but is wound like a watch by the user. A sixty-second wind provides radio play for approximately 45 minutes.

7.4 Radio Station Support and Development

Any radio production project would depend on its radio broadcast partners. In order to build strong relationships between such a project and the radio stations, and in order to improve station personnel and logistical capabilities, a project component should be created to provide resources and training to local broadcasters.

7.5 Internet Site

The Minister of Information, Dr. Julius Spencer, specifically requested assistance in the establishment of an internet web-site for the Sierra Leone Government. It is also recommended that CGP create and operate a pro-peace web-site to propagate news and information that might be generated by the project in order to make it more widely available outside of Sierra Leone.

ANNEX 1: List of Contacts**Government of Sierra Leone**

Dr. Julius Spencer	Minister of Information
Kanja Sesay	Deputy Commissioner, National Reconstruction, Rehabilitation, and Resettlement Commission

Embassies

Colin Glass	British High Commission
Ambassador John Hirsch	US Ambassador to Sierra Leone
Anne Wright	US Deputy Chief of Mission
Emilio Peres-Poras	EU Delegate

Sierra Leone Civil Society

Zainab Bangura	Campaign for Good Governance
Falla Ensa-N'Dayma	Assistant Secretary General, Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ)
Michael Butcher	SLAJ, Liberia
Jibril Foday Musa	SLAJ, Liberia
John Minah	SLPP, Bo, Southern Province

UN Agencies

Francis Okello	Special Envoy of the Secretary General
Modem Lawson	Political Officer, Office of the SESG
Elizabeth Lwanga	UNDP Resident Representative
Macleod Nyirongo	UNDP Deputy Resident Representative
Omaru Sesay	UNDP Program Officer
Tony Bloomberg	UNICEF Resident Representative
Robert Painter	Chief, Humanitarian Assistance Coordination Unit

Media and Related Institutions

Adum Wilson	Deputy Director General, SLBS
Anita Kromah	Administrative Director, KISS-FM and SKYY-FM
Roy Stevens	Consultant, KISS-FM and SKYY-FM
Anna Foulah	Programming Director, Radio Democracy
James Cullen	Managing Director, Voice of the Handicapped
M.B. Attila	Presenter, D.J., Voice of the Handicapped
Said Nixon Bangura	Radio Romankneh, Makeni
Kotey Conteh	Acting Editor, The Weekend Spark Newspaper

Siaka Massaquoi
Desmond Finney
Justina Davis

Managing Editor, Sierra Leone Daily Mail Newspaper
Artistic Director, Spence Productions
Administrative Director, Freetong Players

Other Agencies

Bishop George Biguzzi
Father Rocco Puopolo
Theresa Songo
Tim Andrews
Francis Fortune

Bishop of Makeni
Kenema/CARITAS
CRS/CARITAS
Country Director, World Vision
Conciliation Resources

ANNEX 2: Sierra Leone Radio Station Fact Sheets

- | | |
|--|---------------------------------|
| 1. Radio Democracy, FM | Freetown |
| 2. SLBS FM, and Shortwave | Freetown |
| 3. Voice of the Handicapped, FM | Freetown |
| 4. SKYY-FM | Freetown |
| 5. KISS-FM | Bo, Bo District |
| 6. Romankneh | Makeni, Bombali District |

Radio Democracy – FM, Freetown

Contact Information:

Owner/Operator: In transition to independent board; formerly Dr. Julius Spencer & others .

Station Manager: Anna Fullah

Location/Address: Signal Hill, Behind US Ambassador’s Residence, Freetown

Phone: 230-456

Operations:

In Operation? Currently broadcasting.

Broadcast Times: As of 18 April: 6:00 AM to 11:00 AM; 5:00 PM to 11:00 PM

Began Broadcasting: 7 July 1997 as ‘clandestine’ station at Lungi.

Station Frequency and Range:

Frequency: 98.1 FM

Power Output: 1000 Watts

Estimated Broadcast Radius: Full coverage of the Freetown Peninsula, good coverage of Port Loko, Kambia, and Moyamba Districts. Limited reach to Bo and Makeni.

Type of Programming (Estimated):

Limited news programming, discussion and public affairs programs, Music programming. Aggressive anti-Junta broadcasting during Junta period.

Interest in CGP Programming:

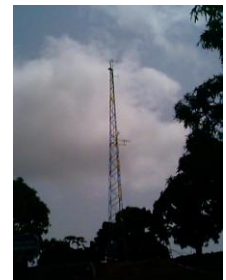
Interest in CGP programming and support. Indication of willingness to accept CGP programs for airplay by Anna Fullah and Dr. Julius Spencer.



98.1’s Broadcast Studio during broadcast.



98.1’s Signal Hill Studio Building.



98.1’s Signal Hill Transmitter Tower

SLBS – FM/Shortwave, Freetown

Contact Information:

Owner/Operator: Government of Sierra Leone.
 Station Manager: Adum Wilson, SLBS Deputy Director General
 Location/Address: Studios: New England, Freetown; Transmitter: Leicester Peak
 Phone: Tel: 241-919; FAX 240-922

Operations:

In Operation? Currently broadcasting.
 Broadcast Times: As of 18 April: FM: 6:00 AM to Midnight; SW: 6:00 AM to Midnight
 Began Broadcasting: 1934

Station Frequency and Range:

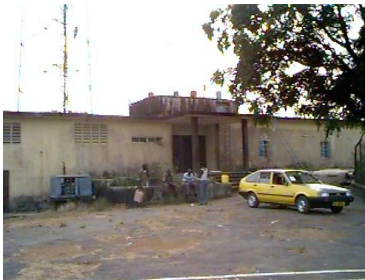
Frequency: FM: 99.9; SW: 5980 kHz (day), 3160 kHz (night)
 Power Output: FM: 250 Watts; SW: 10 kW.
 Estimated Broadcast Radius: Tower height from Leicester Peak results in good coverage from low power transmitter, though reach to Bo & Makeni irregular. SW strength OK throughout SL.

Type of Programming (Estimated):

Station broadcasts, news, music, public affairs, and a broad range of radio programming. Production is currently limited by problems with damaged SLBS facilities.

Interest in CGP Programming:

Adum Wilson, Deputy Director General, expressed interest in cooperation with CGP and interest in accepting for airplay common ground programming.



SLBS's Leicester Peak Transmitter Site.



SLBS's Leicester Peak transmitter tower. Leicester Peak is at an altitude of 1850 feet.

Voice of the Handicapped – FM, Freetown

Contact Information:

Owner/Operator: James Cullen, Managing Director
Station Manager: James Cullen
Location/Address: Quarry, off Mend Street, Freetown
Phone: 228-309; 229-950

Operations:

In Operation? Currently broadcasting.
Broadcast Times: As of 18 April: 7:00 AM to 11:00 AM; 2:00 PM to 5:00 PM
Began Broadcasting: 24 April 1996

Station Frequency and Range:

Frequency: 96.2 FM
Power Output: 250 Watts
Estimated Broadcast Radius: Limited to portions of the peninsula and mainland by limited Antenna height. Station location not optimal.

Type of Programming (Estimated):

Mostly music and request programming. Programming once included more public affairs oriented programs which have been cut back due to political situation.

Interest in CGP Programming:

Very interested in cooperating with CGP or outside producers to play radio programs. Would become broadcast partner for common ground media if such programs were available.



Voice of the Handicapped's
Broadcast Studios in
Freetown.



VOH's Managing Director,
James Cullen, and his wife.

SKYY – FM, Freetown

Contact Information:

Owner/Operator: Solarcom: Andrew Kromah.
Station Manager: Olive Sawyer
Location/Address: Studio at Leicester Peak; Bus. Office: 13 Pademba Rd, Freetown
Phone:

Operations:

In Operation? Off the air since the Junta takeover. Plans are to restart Solarcom stations, though station in Bo in priority.
Broadcast Times: NA
Began Broadcasting: 1996

Station Frequency and Range:

Frequency: 106.6 FM
Power Output: 500 Watts
Estimated Broadcast Radius: Freetown Peninsula and nearby districts. Reports from Bo and Makeni.

Type of Programming (Estimated):

Includes music, discussions, talk shows, local news, and VOA retransmissions.

Interest in CGP Programming:

Anita Kromah, Andrew's sister, expressed interest in collaboration with CGP and in the exploration of common ground programming.



Solarcom's Freetown business office on Pademba Road. Still closed in April, 1998.

KISS – FM, Bo, Bo District

Contact Information:

Owner/Operator: Solarcom: Andrew Kromah
Station Manager: Olive Sawyer; Roy Stevens, Program Director
Location/Address: Studios next to Presidential Lodge; Bus. Office: 20 Kissi Town, Bo
Phone: 32-379 (not working as of April 1998)

Operations:

In Operation? No.
Broadcast Times: NA
Began Broadcasting: 15 September 1993

Station Frequency and Range:

Frequency: 104 FM
Power Output: 1000 Watts
Estimated Broadcast Radius: Southern and most of the eastern province of Sierra Leone.

Type of Programming (Estimated):

Includes music, discussions, talk shows, local news, and VOA retransmissions.

Interest in CGP Programming:

Anita Kromah, Andrew's sister, expressed interest in collaboration with CGP and in the exploration of common ground programming.



KISS-FM's
VOA
Reception
Antenna.



KISS-FM's Studios on hill
Presidential Lodge
overlooking Bo.



KISS-FM's
Transmitter
Tower.

Romankneh 1520 AM, Makeni, Bombali District

Contact Information:

Owner/Operator: Wesleyan Church of Sierra Leone
 Station Manager: Said Nixon Bangura
 Location/Address: Kabala Highway, Wesleyan Conference Center, Makeni
 Phone: City Code 52, 383 (not working as of 18 April)

Operations:

In Operation? In operation as of 18 April, 1998, though broadcast time limited.
 Broadcast Times: As of 18 April: 7:30 AM to 9:15 AM; 6:00 PM to 8:30 PM
 Began Broadcasting: 1994

Station Frequency and Range:

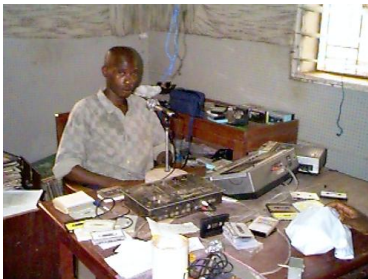
Frequency: 1520 AM
 Power Output: 50 Watts
 Estimated Broadcast Radius: 10 miles only; limited to town of Makeni

Type of Programming (Estimated):

News: 10% Talk: 10%
 Advertising: 0% Music: 30% Religious: 50%

Interest in CGP Programming:

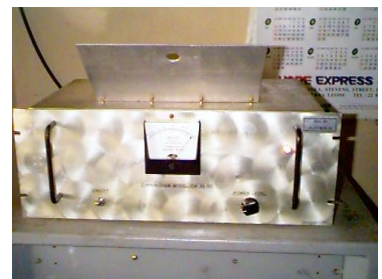
Station Manager, Said Nixon Bangura, would be interested in receiving Common Ground Programs, but would be interested in receiving some minimal help with production equipment as all of their primary equipment was looted by fighters associated with the Junta.



1520 AM's broadcast booth after 1997 looting.



1520 AM's broadcast facility on the Wesleyan compound.



1520 AM's 50 Watt AM transmitter.