Strengthening accountability through media in Sierra Leone

Final evaluation
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BBC Media Action, the international development organisation of the BBC, uses the power of media and communication to support people to shape their own lives. Working with broadcasters, governments, other organisations and donors, it provides information and stimulates positive change in the areas of governance, health, resilience and humanitarian response. This broad reach helps it to inform, connect and empower people around the world. It is independent from the BBC, but shares the BBC’s fundamental values and has partnerships with the BBC World Service and local and national broadcasters that reach millions of people.

The content of this report is the responsibility of BBC Media Action. Any views expressed should not be taken to represent those of the BBC itself or of any donors supporting the work of the charity. This report was prepared thanks to funding from the UK Department for International Development (DFID), which supports the research and policy work of BBC Media Action.
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After more than a decade of brutal civil war (1991–2002), Sierra Leone experienced a peaceful and credible national election in 2007 that transferred power from a governing party to an opposition, followed by another in 2012. These were watershed events in the country’s reconstruction and democratisation processes. However, in 2014 Sierra Leone was hit by the world’s worst Ebola crisis, with a state of emergency being declared in July. A slump in the price of iron ore combined with the socio-economic hardship caused by Ebola constituted a double shock, reversing the country’s positive growth trajectory. At this time, the demand for accountability was stark and high.

Even before the Ebola epidemic, it was in a context of poor public service delivery, lack of access to public information, lack of public awareness of governance issues, social exclusion of women and young people and poor public participation in decision-making that BBC Media Action’s DFID-funded Global Grant project launched in 2012. Alongside producing the fortnightly radio debate programme Tok Bot Salone (Talk about Sierra Leone) and the weekly radio magazine show Fo Rod (Crossroads), BBC Media Action delivered capacity-strengthening activities for media practitioners. The latter particularly embedded a mentoring approach that had been developed under previous projects, and saw the organisation support six stations to produce local accountability programmes. BBC Media Action also created a dedicated Facebook page that, as access to the internet improved slightly, was revamped during the Ebola crisis in 2015 to further encourage participation and dialogue among younger people living in towns and cities.

Through this suite of work, BBC Media Action sought to increase Sierra Leoneans’ participation in constructive dialogue and debate that supports greater demand for improved services and equitable decision-making from government and, thus, to contribute to more accountable, peaceful and inclusive state–society relations in the country.

BBC Media Action conducted research through the project to inform its development and evaluate its impact. This included two nationally representative quantitative surveys and a number of qualitative studies with audiences, governance and media experts, civil society organisations (CSOs) and Facebook users.

**Key findings from the research**

The magazine programme Fo Rod and the debate show Tok Bot Salone built a loyal and engaged audience. The number of people who listened to either one or both programmes increased from 0.8 million in 2013 to 1.1 million in 2015, representing 29% of all adults. The proportion
of regular listeners was very high, with practically all listeners tuning in to at least every other episode. In the year after the elections, almost half the audience (48%) was female. But, despite efforts to maintain this, the proportion dropped to 39% by 2015 – a decline also seen in other Global Grant countries following elections.

Research respondents were drawn to the radio programmes because they were informative and easy to understand, and listeners enjoyed the calm, audience-driven style of presentation. Tok Bot Salone’s format of debates in different localities was considered particularly effective at providing a platform for citizens to ask their leaders questions.

By 2015, the BBC Media Action Sierra Leone Facebook page was the most popular (liked) in the country. It attracted mainly young, urban, politically engaged men and the diaspora, who wanted to keep up to date with current affairs. Research showed that Facebook made a distinct contribution to encouraging debate and discussion; not only did users share content with Facebook friends, but they also discussed it offline with others in the community.

Around three in four listeners to the two radio programmes reported discussing the shows’ content with family, friends or others, and 94% of endline (2015) respondents reported that the programmes had expanded their knowledge of key governance issues, individual rights, the roles and responsibilities of politicians, and the importance of accountability. Listeners to both programmes were also significantly more likely than non-listeners to feel they knew a lot about key issues (such as political party agendas, women’s rights, water and electricity service delivery and corruption) and to report participating frequently in politics (e.g. by contacting a national or local official, taking part in an organised effort to solve a problem, and/or attending a local council meeting). This was true even after controlling for the effects of other social and demographic characteristics.

Fo Rod and Tok Bok Salone appear to have successfully supported bottom-up accountability: more than two in five listeners strongly agreed that they played a role in holding government to account. This is a higher proportion than seen in any of the other countries where BBC Media Action delivered Global Grant-funded governance projects. Accountability was particularly important in the context of the Ebola outbreak when people were reliant on decisive, lifesaving government action. However, the extent to which the programmes supported top-down responsiveness was less clear. There were calls to provide more follow-up programmes to examine leaders’ commitment to making promised change.

Trainees at local partner stations reported improvement in programme-making skills, including newsgathering, packaging and reporting. They felt the training had helped them produce programmes that adhered to the editorial values of fairness, accuracy, balance and objectivity. Audiences of the local programmes produced by the stations under mentoring support appreciated their role in improving knowledge of rights and local issues and in providing a platform for discussion with local leaders.

However, the wider media sector, increasingly fragmented, continues to face challenges. As the country prepares itself for the next elections and a potential constitutional referendum, local media will need to continue being supported to play a central role in the process, providing accurate and balanced information, further engaging Sierra Leoneans and fostering constructive dialogue.
1. INTRODUCTION

This report presents a synthesis of all research and analysis completed under the Global Grant governance project in Sierra Leone between 2012 and 2016. Its main focus is the evaluation of the project’s impact on development outcomes among audiences and media partners (media practitioners and organisations). Based on this evaluation, the report reflects on the impact the project has had on the broader governance system and, in particular, on improving accountability. Where relevant, it draws on formative research and monitoring data collected throughout the project, as well as relevant data from external sources. More detail on the research strategy and methodologies used can be found in section 2.

The report unfolds as follows. Section 1 summarises the project, including the background, the governance and media context of the country, and the project’s objectives and activities; section 2 describes the research approach; section 3 presents and discusses the evaluation’s findings; and section 4 offers some final conclusions.

1.1 Project background

The end of Sierra Leone’s devastating 11-year-long civil war in 2002 was followed by peaceful and credible national elections in 2007 (through which power transferred from a governing party to the opposition) and 2012. These were seen as watershed events in the country’s transition from war to reconstruction and democratisation.

With the country on the cusp of a mining boom, foreign investments in the iron ore sector were particularly high. There were hopes that increased revenues would champion national development. In 2012, growth was estimated at over 20% – making Sierra Leone one of the fastest-growing economies in the world. It was still high in 2014, at 11%.

However, the outbreak of Ebola in 2014 wrought havoc on the country’s social, economic and political development. The epidemic highlighted the fragility of a public health service that was not capable of a rapid and timely response to the crisis. The World Health Organization detailed the inadequate numbers of qualified health workers, the weak infrastructure, and poor management of health services in the country.

The response itself was seen as deeply politicised, with regions affiliated with the ruling party perceived to receive a more robust response. There were accusations that the outbreak was a deliberate ploy by the government to depopulate strongholds of the opposition ahead of a national census. Public mistrust was exacerbated by a lack of transparency in how resources were allocated.

Many of the Ebola response measures, such as community reporting of the sick and restriction of movement, disrupted people’s way of life. This left a legacy of division and mistrust (particularly of the government) among communities, reinforcing the need to address social cohesion. The crisis created new groups marginalised by society with Ebola survivors and frontline responders, such as healthcare workers and burial teams, stigmatised.

The outbreak – twinned with the fall in global iron ore prices during 2014–2015 – also had an extremely negative impact on the economy, which declined by an estimated 21% in 2015.
The World Bank reported that Sierra Leone lost US$900 million (approximately £695 million) to its economy due to the Ebola outbreak. The economy continues to struggle with austerity measures announced in October 2016.

Politically, the country was thrown into a constitutional crisis when the president sacked his vice-president in March 2015, citing “supreme executive authority” powers from the constitution to do so. A Supreme Court ruling that legitimised the president’s action was received with suspicion and scepticism among civil society and the opposition. The sacked vice-president has since taken the matter to the regional Economic Community of Western African States’ court.

There are already concerns about whether the 2018 national election – due to take place in March – can be conducted peacefully given the recent spate of violence that has marred by-elections in some districts and the rising partisan rhetoric characterising national discourse. The government is working on a constitutional review process, which is planned to culminate in a national referendum (potentially in September 2017). However, there are concerns that a delay in this referendum could affect the electoral timetable and, as a result, extend the life of parliament and the presidency – a move that could further exacerbate the fragility of the country.

Sierra Leone’s press is considered ‘partly free’. Its constitution guarantees freedom of speech and freedom of the press and, in 2013, the country drew praise from Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and its own Freedom of Information Coalition, when parliament passed the Right to Access Information Act – a “major step to ensure greater government transparency, the rule of law, and respect for human rights”.

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

Discussions are under way – led by the attorney general and minister of information, with funding from the UK’s Foreign & Commonwealth Office and others in the diplomatic community – to repeal the 1965 Public Order Act that stipulates that libel is a criminal, rather than civil, offence. BBC Media Action in Sierra Leone is supporting the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists to convene briefings and discussions with journalists on this.

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

Over the last 15 years, Sierra Leone’s media landscape has fractured with the proliferation of new radio and TV stations and the increased use of mobile phones and the internet. Radio continues to be the best way to reach wide audiences, with 81% of Sierra Leoneans having access. However, since radio listenership is fractured and no single station is able to reach a national audience, BBC Media Action has to work with a large number of broadcast partners to reach a national audience. Mobile phone usage is high (83%), but people mainly use their mobile to make calls; only a third (33%) send text messages and just 13% use social messaging services such as Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp.
1.2 Project objectives

Against this backdrop, and building on the learning from the previous A National Conversation project funded by DFID’s Governance and Transparency Fund (GTF), from 2012 the Global Grant project in Sierra Leone was designed to address several identified governance needs. These included: poor government service delivery, lack of access to public information, lack of public awareness of governance issues, social exclusion of women and young people, and poor public participation in decision-making. The project was also designed to reflect identified media challenges, including poor editorial standards of governance reporting and the unwillingness or inability of government officials to work constructively with the media.

Accordingly, the overall objectives of the Global Grant governance project in Sierra Leone were:

1. Increase people’s knowledge of key governance issues
2. Increase opportunities for audiences to engage in inclusive and constructive dialogue with and question their leaders about core decisions and service delivery
3. Improve the capacity of journalists and media partners to produce editorially strong content that addresses and mainstreams the goals of the project

The intended cumulative outcome of the project was “increased participation of the Sierra Leonean people in constructive dialogue and debate that supports greater demand for improved services and equitable decision-making from government” and thereby contributes to more accountable, peaceful and inclusive state–society relations in Sierra Leone.

The project’s initial (2012) theory of change, which was built on BBC Media Action’s governance approach, is detailed in figure 2. Many of the challenges it lists remained relevant throughout the project’s implementation. However, to respond to external factors – namely the impact of the Ebola outbreak, a shifting political landscape, and an increasingly localised media – the theory of change was revised in April 2015 (see appendix 1).
This revision did not adjust the project’s intended outcomes, but rather its strategy. For example, as research had highlighted that the Ebola outbreak (and the government’s response to it) had further reduced already low levels of trust in the government and services, BBC Media Action sought to increase the programmes’ focus on the importance of accountability and transparency in relation to post-Ebola recovery planning and system strengthening. One way it endeavoured to do this was by shifting the programmes’ focus to, and showcasing positive examples of, social cohesion.

The country’s changing political landscape also significantly impacted the shows’ thematic focus. For example, the programmes covered concerns relating to the 2015 census and held discussions around the constitutional review. Likewise, as internet usage had increased among the urban youth, the shows revisited and revamped their use of social media, seeking to provide alternative platforms for governance-related discussions and to advertise the national and local debate programmes.

**BBC Media Action’s governance approach**

BBC Media Action’s governance work aims to support more accountable, peaceful and inclusive states and societies. This is based on the view that the lack of government accountability, the presence of conflict, and political and social exclusion can prevent people from living safely and freely, and from exercising their rights.

These factors can act as significant barriers to equitable development. Accountable and inclusive governance can contribute to poverty reduction and the creation of more equal societies. BBC Media Action posits that, as an institutional driver of accountability, the media can directly hold those in power to account by acting as a watchdog over leaders and setting the agenda around certain issues. The media can also indirectly hold those in power to account by equipping individuals with the knowledge, skills and confidence to participate in public life and question power holders to demand and enforce accountability.

In 2012, BBC Media Action developed an **accountability conceptual model** that posited that media can influence a range of individual and collective drivers of accountability that, in turn, reinforce each other. The individual drivers in the conceptual model have been distilled into five key constructs that are operationalised and measured in BBC Media Action’s research. These are: **political knowledge**, **political participation**, **discursive participation** (discussion), **interest in politics** and **political efficacy**. Through influencing these outcomes, BBC Media Action conceives that media can empower citizens to hold their governments accountable.

The Global Grant governance research programme was developed to explore both direct and indirect influences of BBC Media Action’s programming, enabling the organisation to critically reflect on and adapt assumptions underpinning its work.
Figure 2: Sierra Leone Global Grant governance project’s initial theory of change (2012)

**Governance challenges:**
- Post-conflict development context, political violence and impunity is common
- Endemic corruption and poor service delivery from government
- Poor access to public information, low skills and confidence of public officials
- Low literacy levels of audiences, lack of awareness of governance issues, social exclusion of women and young people, poor participation in decision-making

**Media challenges:**
- Radio productions that fail to use facts and evidence to improve state accountability
- Low technical and editorial capacities of local partner stations in providing effective political and elections reporting
- The media is often exploited by political and commercial forces
- Challenging management and governance environment for radio staff
- Government and civil society organisation officials unwilling or unable to work constructively with media

**Objective 1:** Increase knowledge on key governance issues including:
- i) the democratic process
- ii) citizens’ rights
- iii) the responsibility of political leaders and decision makers for service delivery

**Objective 2:** Increase opportunities for audiences to engage in dialogue and question national and local leaders about key decisions and service delivery

**Objective 3:** Raise the editorial standards of journalists to cover governance issues and scrutinise the delivery of public services

**Objective 4:** Improve the capacity of media partners to produce editorially strong programmes that hold elected leaders to account

**Objective 5:** Facilitate inclusive and constructive dialogue between audiences and public officials

**Cumulative outcome:** Increased audience participation in constructive dialogues and debates that support greater demand for improved services and equitable decision-making from government

**Specific outcomes:**
1. Improved knowledge of democratic processes and the right to public services
2. Diverse audiences empowered to voice concerns and question leaders in public forums
3. Sierra Leonean media provide more reliable, responsible and inclusive programming about governance issues and political processes

**Impact:** More inclusive and accountable state–society relations in Sierra Leone.

### 1.3 Project activities

To achieve these objectives, the project centred on several key activities and outputs. These included the production of two national radio programmes – the new debate show *Tok Bot Salone* and the already existing magazine programme *Fo Rod* – and intensive capacity strengthening of local radio stations. Social media content also became an increasingly important output of the country office from 2015 (i.e. during the Ebola crisis) and was funded by the Global Grant from 2016.

All project components, as well as key national events that took place throughout the project, are depicted in figure 3.
Figure 3: Sierra Leone Global Grant governance project timeline

- **PRE-2012**
  - **NOV 2011**: Project launches, continuing earlier radio magazine show Fo Rod

- **2012**
  - **AUG 2012**: Debate programme Tok Bot Salone launches
  - **NOV 2012**: Partnership with Independent Radio Network starts and election coverage co-produced

- **2013**
  - **JUL 2013**: Capacity strengthening study – in-depth interviews with audiences and station staff
  - **FEB 2013**: Assessment of the coverage of the 2012 elections – in-depth interviews with listeners, journalists and BBC Media Action mentors

- **2014**
  - **MAR 2014**: Governance and Transparency Fund-supported project closes
  - **DEC 2014**: Accountability study – in-depth interviews with audiences

- **2015**
  - **MAR 2015**: Social media project component revamped
  - **SEP–NOV 2015**: Endline – nationally representative survey

- **2016**
  - **FEB 2016**: Theory of change revised to respond to changes in project context
  - **MAR–APR 2016**: Local governance radio shows study – in-depth interviews with audiences, panellists and CSOs
  - **AUG 2016**: Social media study – focus group discussions, online surveys, content analysis and Facebook insights

**Qualitative**
- **JUL 2012**: Capacity strengthening study – in-depth interviews with audiences and station staff
- **AUG–SEP 2012**: Audience research (wave 1) – focus group discussions
- **JUL 2013**: Midline – nationally representative survey
- **FEB 2013**: Assessment of the coverage of the 2012 elections – in-depth interviews with listeners, journalists and BBC Media Action mentors
- **MAR 2014**: Audience research (wave 2) – focus group discussions
- **AUG 2016**: Social media study – focus group discussions, online surveys, content analysis and Facebook insights
- **SEP–NOV 2015**: Endline – nationally representative survey

**Quantitative**
- **JUL 2013**: Midline – nationally representative survey
- **AUG 2012**: Debate programme Tok Bot Salone launches
- **NOV 2012**: Partnership with Independent Radio Network starts and election coverage co-produced
- **MAR 2015**: Social media project component revamped
- **AUG 2016**: Social media study – focus group discussions, online surveys, content analysis and Facebook insights
1.3.1 Magazine show: Fo Rod
One of the project’s core components was the hour-long weekly radio magazine show, Fo Rod. Broadcast across the country in Krio\(^1\) since May 2010 (through GTF funding), it came under Global Grant funding in 2012. By the end of the Global Grant project, it was airing on 42 partner stations across the country. Its last episode was broadcast in December 2016.

This programme aimed to address governance challenges around service delivery and corruption by informing the audience of their rights. Two or three government officials, service providers, community organisations and leaders discussed wide-ranging issues such as youth unemployment, the Freedom of Information Bill, Ebola and how the police responded to protests. The show was moderated by a BBC Media Action presenter and interwoven with pre-recorded interviews, vox pops\(^2\) and packages. Listeners could participate by sending text messages and making comments on the Facebook page. Selected comments were read out during the programme and often questions from listeners were put to the studio guests.

1.3.2 Debate programme: Tok Bot Salone
Tok Bot Salone was an hour-long fortnightly radio debate programme, with a live audience, that launched in August 2012 and ended in December 2016. The show roved throughout the country – featuring a broad spectrum of Sierra Leonean citizens and government officials, service providers, community officials and leaders – to debate issues of national and local importance, including peaceful elections, education in crisis, the effect of Ebola on agriculture, and the Abortion Bill. These live debates were broadcast across the country through a network of partner radio stations.

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

From August 2014 to April 2015, the programme shifted to being studio based because the Ebola state of emergency measures had imposed a ban on public gatherings. The audience was able to phone or text in questions that were then put to the panellists. In May 2015, the original town hall debate format (recorded in various locations across the country) resumed.

1.3.3 Social media
Over the course of the project, BBC Media Action adapted its use of social media to reach and engage its growing online audience more effectively.

Facebook
A Facebook page was already being used for the existing magazine show Fo Rod and a separate page was created for Tok Bot Salone when the show was launched in 2012. In March 2015, both pages were merged into one BBC Media Action Sierra Leone Facebook page, with the view to channelling audiences into a single online discussion platform. This approach also allowed the

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\(^1\) This English-based Creole language is used as a lingua franca by over three million people and is the first language of about 350,000 people in Sierra Leone.

\(^2\) Vox pops are short interview segments filmed with members of the public.
Facebook page to go beyond posting content specific to the radio episodes by using quizzes and a range of other content that appealed to audiences. For instance, a series of videos featuring women in non-traditional jobs that was unrelated to the radio shows drove traffic to the page.

In 2016, the BBC Media Action Sierra Leone Facebook page became the largest and fastest-growing page in the country. As of 11 April 2017 it had nearly 306,000 likes and was reaching users in many countries.

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

Twitter and Instagram
In November 2015, in order to engage other sections of society, BBC Media Action set up accounts on Twitter and Instagram, even though these platforms have minimal reach in Sierra Leone and were not intended to directly contribute to the project’s objectives. It used Twitter to share links to blogs, research summaries and reports – specifically targeting key stakeholders (such as government and non-governmental agencies) – and Instagram to share high-quality photos and graphics relating to governance issues and discussions. Instagram is not yet popular in Sierra Leone, but it is growing and, judging by its popularity in other countries such as Nigeria, has potential.

1.3.4 Capacity strengthening
At the project’s outset, despite the country’s media sector being characterised by a recent proliferation of outlets and having experienced a loosening of its legal and regulatory environment, journalists continued to be undertrained and underpaid, often worked second jobs that challenged their independence as reporters, faced attacks and harassment, and were subject to the threat of imprisonment if convicted of libel. In this context, the Global Grant governance project sought to build on the capacity-strengthening support it had been providing to Sierra Leone’s media under both the GTF project (2008–2013) and a European Union
(EU) grant, to mainstream the project’s goal (i.e. more inclusive and accountable state–society relations). The GTF- and EU-funded activities had been implemented in partnership with the Independent Radio Network of Sierra Leone (IRN) and Journalists for Human Rights.

Through the Global Grant, BBC Media Action was able to fine-tune its mentoring approach and expand its capacity-strengthening work beyond its existing partnerships. The specific aims of the capacity-strengthening activities were to:

1. Raise the editorial standards of journalists to cover governance issues and scrutinise the delivery of public services
2. Improve the capacity of media partners to produce editorially strong programmes that hold elected leaders to account
3. Facilitate inclusive and constructive dialogue between audiences and public officials

1.3.4.1 Capacity strengthening with partner radio stations
From 2011 to 2016, BBC Media Action carried out over 26 capacity-strengthening schemes with individual partner radio stations across the country.

Following the organisation’s refined mentoring model developed under the previous projects, BBC Media Action mentors spent six months in a station, training a range of production staff including presenters, editors, producers, script writers and newsgatherers. This focused on production and journalism skills, and typically comprised: newsgathering, packaging stories, programme production, script-writing, presentation, interviewing, and recording and moderating panellists.

The capacity strengthening was originally delivered to partner stations producing local versions of Fo Rod. But, after 2013, the project adopted a more flexible model and supported partners to develop a new – or improve an existing – accountability show, in the format appropriate for them and their audiences. By 2016, a total of six stations (representing the country’s four regions) had received more focused mentoring to produce local versions of the Tok Bot Salone debate show.

To improve the capacity and sustainability of the radio stations, a business mentor worked with stations from 2014 to help strengthen income generation.

1.3.4.2 Capacity strengthening with journalist networks
To complement the work with the local stations, BBC Media Action also sought to strengthen existing networks of journalists. During 2012 and 2013, it worked with the only organisation for female journalists in the country – Women in the Media in Sierra Leone – and, in 2016, it partnered with the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists to convene a workshop of 80 journalists to discuss what alternative legislation would be appropriate for Sierra Leone if the 1965 Public Order Act were to be repealed.

In addition, BBC Media Action used its previous partnership with the IRN to co-produce 10 days of elections coverage in November 2012 – from the eve of the elections to the day after the official announcement of parliamentary results. This included a 24-hour-long broadcast on the day of the elections.
BBC Media Action presenter Allieu Sesay moderates a Tok Bot Salone debate.
2. RESEARCH

Research was a core component of the project in Sierra Leone and was implemented by BBC Media Action’s Research and Learning group. The programme of research was designed to:

- Inform project activities
- Monitor results and report to the aggregate-level Global Grant logframe
- Evaluate the project against country-specific objectives and key individual outcomes (such as knowledge, discussion, efficacy and political participation) based on BBC Media Action’s governance approach

In total, over the course of the project, BBC Media Action undertook two nationally representative quantitative surveys, as well as a range of qualitative studies with audiences, governance and media experts, CSOs and radio station partners.

The quantitative surveys, conducted in 2013 and 2015, focused on measuring audience-level indicators. These included the key monitoring indicators of reach,\(^3\) impact\(^4\) and outcome\(^5\) that were used to report to the aggregate Global Grant logframe annually.\(^6\) The 2013 survey also included standardised measures linked to BBC Media Action’s conceptual models of the pathways and drivers of change in relation to accountability. These included knowledge, attitudes, discussion, political efficacy, political participation and perceptions of accountability.\(^7\) The survey also tracked:

- Key issues affecting Sierra Leoneans (both at the national and local level);
- Trust in governance institutions and sources of information;
- Media access and consumption;
- Socio-demographic characteristics.

An overview of the quantitative surveys undertaken is provided in table 1.

Table 1: Overview of quantitative research studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Data collection</th>
<th>Sample size</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Midline survey</td>
<td>July 2013</td>
<td>n=4,390</td>
<td>Nationally representative, adults 15+</td>
<td>1. Monitoring (logframe indicators) 2. Evaluation (collected measures of key outcomes i.e. knowledge, discussion, efficacy, political participation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endline survey</td>
<td>September – November 2015(^7)</td>
<td>n=2,499</td>
<td>Nationally representative, adults 15+</td>
<td>1. Monitoring (logframe indicators)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^3\) Reach is defined as all those who report having seen or listened to BBC Media Action governance programming within the last 12 months at the point of data collection.

\(^4\) The impact indicator is defined as: the percentage of people reached by BBC Media Action accountability-focused programming that strongly agree that the programme(s) play a role in holding government to account.

\(^5\) The outcome indicator is defined as: the percentage of people reached by BBC Media Action governance programmes who agree that the programmes have increased their knowledge on a range of governance issues either a lot or a bit.

\(^6\) The Global Grant logframe is the monitoring framework to which all countries within the Global Grant project report annually. The logframe includes the key indicators of reach, outcome and impact (defined above), which were measured annually, as well as other key indicators related to project outputs.

\(^7\) Fieldwork was implemented by NestBuilders International, an independent Sierra Leonean research agency. For more in-depth information on the sampling strategy and research methodology, see the technical appendix.
A range of quantitative analysis methods were undertaken to explore the data collected in 2013. This included: basic descriptive analysis; testing (chi-squared and Cramer’s V) to determine whether differences between demographic groups were significant; and regression modelling to compare key outcomes (such as improved knowledge and increased political participation) between those exposed to the programmes and those unexposed – testing the impact of the programmes on audiences while controlling for potential confounders such as age, education levels or location.

The qualitative studies explored the impact and outcomes of the project in more nuanced ways than quantitative analysis allows, and examined why these were or were not achieved. They also provided feedback from audiences and experts that informed programme development throughout the project. The studies explored different aspects of the project over the five years, such as experts’ views on accountability, and the use of and engagement with the project’s Facebook page. Table 2 provides an overview of the qualitative studies completed under the Global Grant governance project in Sierra Leone.
### Table 2: Overview of qualitative research studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Data collection</th>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Capacity strengthening study</strong></td>
<td>July 2012</td>
<td>13 in-depth interviews (IDIs) and 23 self-administered questionnaires</td>
<td>Station managers, producers and trained journalists at Radio Bontico, Radio Kolenten and Premier Tok Radio in Bonthe, Kambia and Freetown</td>
<td>Assess the impact of the capacity-strengthening activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Audience research (wave 1)</strong></td>
<td>August – September 2012</td>
<td>24 focus group discussions (FGDs)</td>
<td>Audiences</td>
<td>• Monitor audiences’ views on and engagement with the programmes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Provide additional audience data for the overall evaluation of the project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Inform ongoing project development (i.e. shows’ content and production)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assessment of the coverage of the 2012 elections</strong></td>
<td>February 2013</td>
<td>13 IDIs</td>
<td>Trained journalists, BBC Media Action mentors, and listeners of Choice FM, Eastern Radio, Radio New Song and Radio Bankasoka</td>
<td>Assess the impact of the capacity-strengthening activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Audience research (wave 2)</strong></td>
<td>March 2014</td>
<td>24 FGDs</td>
<td>Adult Sierra Leoneans</td>
<td>As for audience research wave 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Accountability study</strong></td>
<td>December 2014</td>
<td>8 IDIs</td>
<td>Governance and media experts</td>
<td>Explore what accountability meant for Sierra Leoneans and how this had changed during the Ebola crisis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Audience research (wave 3)</strong></td>
<td>March 2015</td>
<td>15 FGDs</td>
<td>Adult Sierra Leoneans</td>
<td>As for audience research wave 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Local governance radio shows study</strong></td>
<td>March – April 2016</td>
<td>22 IDIs</td>
<td>Regular listeners, CSO representatives and panellists who attended the shows</td>
<td>As for audience research wave 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social media study</strong></td>
<td>August 2016</td>
<td>4 FGDs and 2 online surveys Facebook insights data, and content analysis of Facebook posts</td>
<td>Facebook users</td>
<td>• Understand the profile of Facebook audiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Understand how online audiences engaged with the Facebook page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Inform ongoing development</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
This report synthesises findings from the programme of research outline above and presents these findings as an evaluation of the Global Grant governance project in Sierra Leone.

Research strengths and limitations

This report utilises both quantitative and qualitative methods to examine the extent to which the project has achieved its objectives and, within this, the relationship between exposure to BBC Media Action programming and key governance outcomes. It is not the aim here to describe individual groups or factors in detail, but instead to identify patterns that can aid in understanding the influence of BBC Media Action’s project activities.

A series of validity checks were implemented throughout the research process to ensure that data collection and analysis were rigorous and robust. All quantitative samples were fielded to be nationally representative in order to create a cross-sectional snapshot of the population at one point in time. Data was cleaned and weighted to account for any errors or limitations in data collection. Advanced statistical methods were used to analyse the relationship between exposure to BBC Media Action programming and governance outcomes of interest as accurately as possible.

Nevertheless, limitations of the research should be considered when interpreting the findings detailed in this report. Primarily, it is not possible to control for the effects of all variables that may influence the outcome in question. For example, when analysing political participation, analysis does not account for broad contextual factors such as the political environment, personal motivation or distance to a polling station. The measures used were often self-reported and therefore may have been prone to response bias. For example, many questions rely on a respondent’s perception of how much they know about politics. Results should be interpreted with this in mind. Moreover, analysis does not identify the direction of an association (whether one thing (i.e. exposure) comes before the other (i.e. participation)). In sum, causation cannot be inferred from this analysis – significant findings demonstrate a relationship between two variables, but do not suggest one causes the other.

Finally, because survey data is cross-sectional, change in outcomes over time may be due to a change at the population level, as opposed to change as a result of exposure to the programme. Analysis among those exposed to BBC Media Action programming over time provides insight into population-level changes and results are interpreted with this in mind.

To account for some of these limitations, a mixed-methods research approach was used, and qualitative methods were utilised alongside surveys to strengthen and validate findings, where appropriate. While qualitative methods do not provide nationally representative findings, they provide a more in-depth understanding of engagement, knowledge, attitudes and behaviours, and why and how change does or does not happen. When brought together these findings provide a more holistic account of the relationship between exposure to BBC Media Action programming and governance outcomes.
3. EVALUATION FINDINGS

The following sections outline findings from the evaluation of the project. This includes performance against headline indicators monitored throughout the project, a breakdown of the reach of Fo Rod and Tok Bot Salone, feedback on audience engagement with the programme, and evaluation of the impact of the programme on key outcomes related to governance.

3.1 Headline indicators

Figure 4: What did the project achieve?

 Definitions:
- Adult population: Those aged 15 years and above
- Potential audience: All those who report having access to TV, radio or the internet in the household or elsewhere
- Audiences reached: Those who report having listened to the programme(s) within the last 12 months at the point of data collection
- Audiences regularly reached: Those who report having listened to at least every other episode of the programme(s) within the last 12 months at the point of data collection
- Outcome: The percentage of listeners of BBC Media Action governance programmes who agree that the programme(s) increased their knowledge on a range of governance issues (‘a lot’ or ‘a bit’)
- Impact: The percentage of listeners who ‘strongly agree’ that the programme(s) played a role in holding government to account

Note: figures exclude those who answered ‘don’t know’ and those who did not answer

- Adult population
  - Reach: 2013: 3.5, 2015: 3.8
  - Regular reach: 2013: 0.8, 2015: 1.11

- Increased knowledge and understanding
  - 2013: 87%
  - 2015: 93%

- Held government to account
  - 2013: 33%
  - 2015: 44%
3.2 Audience reach and profile

Key insights

- The programmes built a loyal and engaged audience, increasing their reach from 0.8 million in 2013 to 1.1 million in 2015 (representing almost one in three adults in the country). The vast majority of these (97%) tuned in regularly.

- Cumulatively, 2.4 million Sierra Leoneans tuned in to the shows over the five years of the project.

- The programmes’ audience was representative of the age spread of the general population.

- The proportion of rural and female listeners was higher in the year after the election (2013) than at endline (2015), a pattern observed in other Global Grant countries post-elections, despite efforts to address this.

- The BBC Media Action Sierra Leone Facebook page became the most popular page in the country in 2015. Its core audience was young men (aged 18–34) who described themselves as actively engaged in their communities and were based in the capital. However, users from other countries collectively represented 69% of the page’s fans.

3.2.1 Reach of the programmes

One of the main advantages of media and communications-based interventions is the level of scale that can be achieved through the broadcast media. As such, reach (the number of people who watch or listen to a programme) is one of the key measures of a project’s success (though it is certainly not the only measure).

In total, over the course of the five-year-long project, an estimated 2.4 million adult Sierra Leoneans cumulatively listened to the programmes. The highest reach was at endline (2015), when 1.1 million people (29% of the population aged 15 and above) had listened to either one or both programmes. This represented an increase from midline (2013), when 0.8 million Sierra Leoneans (24% of adults) had tuned in.

In order to increase reach, BBC Media Action leveraged Sierra Leone’s expanding media landscape – which saw the number of radio stations burgeon from eight in 2000 to 90 by 2015 – and more than doubled its broadcast partners (rising from 20 in 2013 to 45 in 2016). The organisation also improved its distribution system for delivering the recorded episodes to partner stations, thanks to funding received during the Ebola crisis. It set up a production coordination unit to manage these partnerships and a structured national programme delivery system.

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*Estimated cumulative reach refers to the number of people who have been reached in Sierra Leone by BBC Media Action programming over the lifetime of the project, acknowledging an amount of churn in programmes’ audiences year-on-year. Cumulative reach is calculated using an assumption that 10% of the audiences are new listeners within existing audiences year-on-year. More detail on the cumulative reach calculation can be found in appendix 3.*
By 2015, the debate show *Tok Bot Salone* was enjoying greater popularity than the magazine programme *Fo Rod*, which had been on air since May 2010. *Tok Bot Salone* reached over 1 million listeners alone, while over 400,000 people listened to *Fo Rod*.

Figure 5: Reach and regular reach of governance programming (2013–2015)

![Graph showing reach and regular reach of governance programming (2013–2015)]

Sources: 2013 midline (n=4,390) and 2015 endline (n=2,499) surveys.

BBC Media Action recognises that watching or listening to a programme once is unlikely to affect outcomes and that detectable impact requires frequent engagement with programme outputs. As such, it is hypothesised that those who watch or listen to BBC Media Action programming regularly are more likely to demonstrate impact as a result of the intervention. Very positively, and unlike in other countries under the Global Grant, the vast majority (97%) of *Tok Bot Salone* and *Fo Rod* listeners tuned in regularly (i.e. listened to at least every other episode).

**3.2.2 Audience profile**

In accordance with the project objective to create an inclusive and constructive conversation across regional, political and other divides, the programmes aimed to reach and engage an audience representative of the country’s diverse population. In particular, they sought to reach the most marginalised in society, who are often left out of national discussion and debate by virtue of being poor or lacking education, or because of their ethnicity, age (youth aged 15–24) or gender (women).

Figure 6 shows the demographic breakdown of the programmes’ regular audience in 2015 and compares this with the national population to assess how representative their audience was.9

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9 National population statistics are based on the overall survey sample (which is nationally representative).
Figure 6: Demographic profile of audiences regularly reached by governance programmes (2015)

**Gender**
- Female: 61%
- Male: 39%

**Age**
- 15-24: 32%
- 25-34: 24%
- 35-44: 19%
- 45-54: 18%
- 55-64: 11%
- 65+: 10%

**Location**
- Rural: 65%
- Urban: 35%

**Region**
- Southern: 15%
- Northern: 33%
- Eastern: 21%
- Western: 19%

**Education**
- 5 years: 2%
- 12 years: 20%
- 11 years: 8%
- 6 years: 8%
- 31 years: 49%

**Financial well-being (income)**
- 2 years: 2%
- 15 years: 24%
- 12 years: 25%
- 16 years: 18%
- 41 years: 46%

Note: figures exclude those who answered ‘don’t know’ and those who did not answer

BBC Media Action audience (regularly reached by Fo Rod and Tok Bot Salone) National population 2015 Endline Base=2,499
In 2015, the audience of BBC Media Action’s governance programmes in Sierra Leone was representative of the age groups in the country, with almost a third (32%) aged 15–24 years.

However, the audience’s gender divide was skewed towards male viewers and there was a pronounced difference from the gender breakdown seen at midline (2013), when women comprised 48% of the audience (see figure 7). This high female reach at midline was likely due to the broader appeal of current affairs programmes during elections – a trait seen in other countries where Global Grant-funded governance projects were operating. The fall seen at endline was in spite of concerted BBC Media Action efforts to maintain this female listenership post-election, which included:

• Developing working relationships with a range of CSOs in order to access groups that tended to be under-represented in the media. These relationships were helpful in securing women as panellists and in the live audience
• Regularly including women as the main, or guest, Fo Rod and Tok Bot Salone presenters. The programmes almost always had at least one female panellist (Tok Bot Salone) or guest (Fo Rod). The production team aimed for 50% female representation, but this was challenging in a patriarchal society in which the duty-bearers – such as government leaders, service providers and civil society leaders – are predominantly male
• Representing women at all stages of programme-making

The proportion of rural audiences also fell between midline and endline (see figure 7), while the audience’s composition by education and wealth remained similar.

Figure 7: Gender and urban/rural breakdown of audiences in 2013 and 2015

Sources: 2013 midline (n=4,390) and 2015 endline (n=2,499) surveys.

10 All changes were significant at p<0.05.
Social media mainly reached a young, male, urban audience

The BBC Media Action Sierra Leone Facebook page became the most popular page in the country when it surpassed Africell in 2015. By April 2017, more than 306,000 people had liked the page.

At endline, only 16% of adults in Sierra Leone had internet access. They were mainly male (67%), urban (81%) and young (15–34 years old made up 40% of those with access). This explains the audience profile of the BBC Media Action Sierra Leone Facebook page, whose core audience (measured in terms of user page likes) was male (77%) – 59% of whom were young (aged 18–34) – and predominantly based in the capital Freetown.\(^{11}\)

Users of the Facebook page who answered the August 2016 survey tended to be educated (the number of students was high) and working in professional, technical or managerial positions or non-governmental organisations. They described themselves as involved in decision-making and bringing change to their community, with many reporting belonging to youth organisations and/or being involved in community work.

The page reached a large number of international users (these comprised 69% of fans in October 2016), although no individual country had a higher number of fans than Sierra Leone (31%). However, Guinea, Somalia, Ethiopia and Bangladesh accounted for more fans collectively than Sierra Leone, demonstrating Facebook’s potential influence and leverage over shaping the diaspora’s opinions about issues of national importance.

Table 3: BBC Media Action Sierra Leone’s Facebook fans – top 10 countries and cities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Top countries</th>
<th>Your fans</th>
<th>Top cities</th>
<th>Your fans</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sierra Leone</td>
<td>55,398</td>
<td>Freetown, Sierra Leone</td>
<td>47,769</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guinea</td>
<td>28,915</td>
<td>Conakry, Guinea</td>
<td>24,043</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somalia</td>
<td>23,873</td>
<td>Mogadishu, Somalia</td>
<td>11,882</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>12,197</td>
<td>Addis Ababa, Ethiopia</td>
<td>7,726</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>10,822</td>
<td>Dhaka, Bangladesh</td>
<td>6,327</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghana</td>
<td>9,498</td>
<td>Accra, Ghana</td>
<td>6,297</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>6,191</td>
<td>Monrovia, Liberia</td>
<td>5,447</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberia</td>
<td>5,874</td>
<td>Hargeisa, Somalia</td>
<td>3,614</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>4,264</td>
<td>Lagos, Nigeria</td>
<td>2,682</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States of America</td>
<td>2,994</td>
<td>Kampala, Uganda</td>
<td>2,375</td>
</tr>
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</table>


\(^{11}\) Facebook Insights, accessed 30 September 2016.
3.3 Engagement with the programmes

**Key insights**

- Almost one in three Sierra Leonean adults listened to debate show *Tok Bot Salone*, which was appreciated for its ability to bring ordinary people face to face with leaders.

- Audiences liked magazine show *Fo Rod* for its vox pops, its informative, easy-to-understand style, and the opportunity it provided to ask questions.

- Research participants welcomed the calm manner of questioning shown by both programmes’ presenters, though they sometimes felt more could have been done to unpick the occasionally technical language used by guests – an issue addressed throughout the project.

- The local shows, produced by partner stations through capacity-strengthening support, were appreciated for giving people a chance to question decision makers by phone or text. Listeners felt that these interactions played a useful role in bringing decision makers closer to the people and increased their knowledge of what was happening in their local communities.

- Social media helped engage young people by offering a public forum to express frustrations and discuss solutions, both online and offline. Some also used the Facebook page to “enlighten” others in their communities.

The Global Grant governance project in Sierra Leone aimed to support individuals and communities to be better informed and more engaged in governance. It sought to create opportunities for audiences to discuss and question national and local leaders about decision-making on key issues, and it aimed to facilitate inclusive and constructive dialogue across divides, ensuring fair representation of marginalised groups. Debate show *Tok Bot Salone* and magazine show *Fo Rod* were designed to address these objectives by raising awareness of, and engaging people in, the key governance issues affecting the country.

As highlighted in section 3.2.1, both programme’s audiences were highly engaged. Some 98% of *Tok Bot Salone*’s audience listened to at least every other episode of the show, and 88% of *Fo Rod*’s audience did the same. These are very high engagement rates by comparison to the Global Grant-funded governance projects that took place in other countries over the same time period.

The following section explores how and why audiences engaged with the programmes, and looks at their perspectives of the shows. It uses findings from the quantitative midline (2013) and endline (2015) data and explores insights from the qualitative research conducted with audiences, experts, local partner radio stations, and users of the project’s Facebook page.

**A forum for two-way communication between the public and leaders**

The project in Sierra Leone aimed to provide a platform for inclusive dialogue between audiences and public officials. As noted under the GTF project, when *Fo Rod* first went on air in 2010 the concept of the media bringing people and leaders together was still novel; as...
its producer Amara Bangura explained: “there has been a culture here that people don’t ask questions”.xxi

_Fo Rod’s_ magazine format was viewed as an effective platform for communicating information to audiences and providing the opportunity to ask leaders questions. The use of vox pops and airing of people’s opinions made the show interesting and allowed the audience to decide for themselves what they felt about a particular issue.

By the first year of the Global Grant, when the town hall-style panel debate programme _Tok Bot Salone_ was launched (2012), the demand for discussion was evident as, each week, audiences continued to “mob” the panellists with their questions after the microphones were turned off.xxii

Governance and media experts interviewed in December 2014 liked _Tok Bot Salone_’s unique town hall meeting format, and said it was particularly effective at bringing the public and leaders together.

_“Tok Bot Salone is very effective because it creates a forum where citizens interface with their leaders. I think it is unique in its style and approach in terms of the variety of voices…that it brings on the radio.”_  

*Male governance expert, Western Area, accountability study, 2014*

Listeners who took part in the August 2012 and 2015 FGDs also said that they saw the programme as a platform on which government ministers were able to gain ideas and recommendations from citizens on matters of national significance and policy.

Participants in qualitative research conducted in 2014 and 2015 generally considered the choice of panellists in both programmes as appropriate and relevant. However, some were concerned about the lack of relevant authorities in certain episodes (e.g. the absence of chieftaincy figures in the _Fo Rod_ Charcoal Burning episode), and others suggested the need to include specific national figures (e.g. the national Ebola response coordinator), more ordinary people (e.g. Ebola survivors or health workers), or inviting students onto the show to discuss issues affecting them (e.g. schools re-opening).

_Calm, moderated, audience-driven presentation_

As the culture of directly questioning leaders was still a challenging one for some, providing a constructive space for open discussion was critical. There was a view among participants in the qualitative research conducted in 2015 that the presenters asked questions calmly and were very professional in their work. _Tok Bot Salone_’s presenter was appreciated for asking direct questions that the listeners themselves would have liked to ask and making sure that all the panellists took part in the discussion. _Fo Rod_’s presenter was also praised for managing studio guests well, giving time to panellists to answer questions and keeping the discussion on topic.

However, there was also feedback in various waves of audience research that the presenters could do more to help the audience to understand guests’ complex language, citing terms such as ‘demography’, ‘social mobilisation’ and ‘statistics’ as inaccessible. In light of this research,
the BBC Media Action production team started to brief guests before the start of the shows, ensuring that they were aware of the importance of avoiding technical or complex language. They also encouraged presenters to seek clarification when guests used a word, expression or language they felt might not be easily understood by the general public.

As they were designed to reach a national audience, both programmes were produced in Krio. However, given the diverse number of languages spoken in Sierra Leone, Tok Bot Salone allowed audience members to ask questions in their local language and these were then translated into Krio for the panellist(s) and the recording. Partner radio stations that produced local versions of Fo Rod in their local languages – rather than in Krio – also sometimes included a Krio voiceover to ensure broad understanding of the interviews or contributions.

Informative, easy-to-understand topics
In order to inform audiences and build their confidence to engage with issues covered by the shows, BBC Media Action endeavoured to ensure that these were presented in ways that were relevant and easy to understand. In 2012, it introduced a segment with basic explanatory information to Fo Rod, which acted as a prelude to well-moderated discussion and analysis of a topic. Qualitative research suggests this paid off, as audiences saw the programme as informative, helping to explain key issues around governance.

“I really appreciate the programme [Fo Rod] because it is very educative, especially about governance issues. With the aid of such programmes, we will begin to see the need to get better education and try to get into parliament ourselves.”

Female, 25+, Bonth e district, audience research, 2014

Audiences considered certain, well-explained topics as particularly engaging. For example, participants of listening groups who were interviewed in 2015 reported enjoying hearing about the re-opening of schools and roads and the lifting of the travel ban following Ebola. The local governance shows were also seen to play a key role in keeping people – including the least educated – informed about local and national issues that affected them such as: fuel shortages, armed robbery, agriculture, education and examination malpractice, waste management, water and electricity.

“The issue I enjoyed best was the re-opening of schools, because it is nearly a year now since our children last went to school and it is not good for them to sit at home – especially for those who are more than 15-years-old. Anything can happen if children are not engaged in schooling.”

Female adult, Western Area, audience research, 2015

12 A quantitative survey from 2010 on media usage confirmed that Krio was spoken well by the majority (79%) of Sierra Leoneans.
Engagement with local programmes

In an increasingly localised and fragmented media landscape, strengthening the capacity of local radio stations was central to the project’s objectives. Qualitative research in 2016 examined the perspectives of listeners, panellists and CSOs on the role of the two local governance programmes that had received mentoring support from BBC Media Action: Report Card on Tumac Radio and Inside the Region on Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC) in Bo district.

It found that the local shows encouraged discussion and debate in the community, and among private texting groups. Participants reported wanting to hear others’ opinions and to keep others up to date if they missed the programmes. The research revealed that listeners specifically engaged with the local shows because they enjoyed learning about what was happening in their local community, as well as in other regions. They also appreciated the interactive elements (phone-ins and text-ins) because these enabled listeners to contribute to the discussions, made the programmes rich and engaging, and gave ordinary people an opportunity to express their concerns/grievances and to talk to those in authority.

Nonetheless, some participants complained about the number of power cuts experienced by the stations during the show and the timing of broadcast. This highlights the many challenges faced by local media in the country.

Social media engagement

Content for the Facebook page was usually posted around five times a week. It included information about the topics covered in both programmes such as Fo Rod’s discussion of whether Freetown was ready for the rainy season, and Tok Bot Salone’s debate on the constitutional review process. To further engage audiences, content not related directly to the shows – e.g. interviews with political figures, information about international days such as World Blood Day or Day of the African Child, and quizzes and proverbs – was also featured.
Users who responded to a short online survey said that they accessed the page to find out about issues affecting Sierra Leone and to join the discussion and debate online. Meanwhile, FGD participants reported accessing the page to obtain news and information, and to catch up on the radio programmes.

“I used the Facebook page to find out what was happening in my country, especially things relating to governance. Most of their posts are to do with the development of our country. If I don’t see the news I sometimes worry about what is happening.”

18–24, Bo, social media study, 2016

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

“I log on to Facebook every day and I always ensure that I look up [the] BBC Media Action [Sierra Leone] page to read its posts, make comments and share ideas.”

18–24, Bo, social media study, 2016
3.4 Impact on audience-level governance outcomes

Key insights

- Research findings revealed consistently positive associations between listening to Fo Rod and Tok Bok Salone and key governance outcomes that support greater accountability:
  - At endline (2015), 94% of listeners reported that the programmes had increased their knowledge on key governance issues – this is compared with 87% reporting the same at midline (2013)
  - At midline, those tuning in regularly to both Tok Bok Salone and Fo Rod were four times more likely than non-listeners to feel they know a lot about politics, while those who only listened to Tok Bok Salone were almost three times more likely than non-listeners to report the same. This was true even when controlling for other factors that might influence these outcomes
  - At midline, around three-quarters of Fo Rod’s listeners (75%) and Tok Bok Salone’s listeners (72%) reported discussing the shows with family, friends or others
  - At midline, those who listened to Tok Bok Salone, or Tok Bok Salone and Fo Rod, were significantly more likely to report participating frequently in politics, compared with non-listeners

- The programmes specifically helped audiences to learn about: key issues affecting the community and country, individuals’ rights, the roles and responsibilities of decision makers and those in government, and the importance of accountability

- Qualitative research showed that the programmes also improved audiences’ confidence (political efficacy) to question leaders, and that the local governance shows helped stimulate discussion and debate among listeners and friends on topics of interest

- The BBC Media Action Sierra Leone Facebook page made a distinct contribution to encouraging debate and discussion outside the programmes

3.4.1 Fo Rod and Tok Bot Salone’s influence on political participation and its drivers

BBC Media Action believes that, by influencing change among individuals and populations, the media can indirectly hold those in power to account by increasing their participation in accountability mechanisms and supporting their empowerment. Participation in this context is viewed as the extent to which individuals and groups within society are actively involved in the public sphere, political processes, debate and decision-making. BBC Media Action defines empowerment as the process through which individuals: (i) become aware of the forces that have an impact on their situation; (ii) become more aware and trusting of their own abilities, knowledge and experience; and (iii) build on these to gain self-confidence and the self-belief required to be active in improving their life situations.

Based on this premise, Fo Rod and Tok Bot Salone aimed to foster political participation among the Sierra Leonean population by providing access to information, stimulating discussion and
enabling people to interact directly with decision makers: all things that BBC Media Action believes contribute to increased participation in politics. The mixed-methods research methodology implemented throughout the project sought to provide evidence of the extent to which, and the ways in which, the programmes influenced key governance outcomes among individuals and, ultimately, in what ways and to what extent this contributed to supporting improved accountability. This section examines the role both programmes played in encouraging individuals to participate more, both as a direct consequence of watching the programme(s), and via the key drivers of increased political knowledge, discussion and political efficacy.\textsuperscript{xxii} The impact of the programmes is examined against the backdrop of trends over time across these drivers among the broader Sierra Leonean population.

3.4.1.1 Improving political knowledge and understanding

Political knowledge is regarded as one of the key pre-requisites of a functioning democracy.\textsuperscript{xxiv, xxv} As such, improving people’s knowledge of key governance issues was a primary objective of the Global Grant governance project. In Sierra Leone, the project specifically aimed to increase people’s knowledge of their rights to services and how to access them, and of the democratic and electoral processes. It sought to do this by improving people’s access to reliable, trustworthy information, both directly through the two radio programmes and indirectly via capacity strengthening with media organisations to improve the content of media outputs.

The midline (2013) survey found that, on average, 87% of people who tuned into either one or both programmes reported having increased their knowledge on key governance issues a bit or a lot as a result of listening.\textsuperscript{13} By endline (2015), this proportion had increased to 94%, with the proportion being slightly higher for Fo Rod, when looking at the programmes individually (see figure 8).\textsuperscript{14}

Figure 8: Improvement in knowledge attributed to the programmes (2015)

Source: 2015 endline survey (n=2,499).

\textsuperscript{13} For Fo Rod, the key governance issues included in the question were: government measures in response to the Ebola outbreak (e.g. closure of schools); child rights; and service delivery (e.g. transportation, water and electricity). For Tok Bot Salone, the key governance issues included in the question related to: democratic and political processes (e.g. census and constitutional review); and local government accountability (e.g. local council/government response to the Ebola outbreak, including the state of emergency measures).

\textsuperscript{14} The differences between 2013 and 2015 were significant at p<0.05.
Exploring this relationship further through advanced analysis on the 2013 midline data showed that those who regularly listened to both Tok Bot Salone and Fo Rod were four times more likely than non-listeners to have substantial knowledge of governance issues, while those who listened to Tok Bot Salone alone were almost three times more likely than non-listeners to report the same. This was true even after controlling for social and demographic characteristics.

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

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

Youth, Western Area, audience research, 2015

The Nagelkerke R statistic for this model was 0.350. The Hosmer and Lemeshow statistic had a chi-square of 6.194 and a significance level of 0.625. See the technical appendix for full results.
Qualitative research also found that listeners gained an understanding of power holders’ roles and responsibilities from tuning into the shows. For example, research participants described learning of the president’s plans to empower women and create job opportunities for youths during his second term from listening to the *Fo Rod* episode about the president’s speech. It also revealed that the programmes alerted listeners to the successes and failures of government service provision. For a number of listeners this had been a positive experience as it had highlighted the progress the government had made on matters that affected them. One listener, for example, spoke of how happy he was to hear from a government minister that the Kabala pipe-borne water project had been approved.

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

3.4.1.2 Prompting discussion
To support greater engagement in politics among Sierra Leoneans, interaction and dialogue around governance issues should be encouraged not just between the people and decision makers, but also among family, friends and others in the community. Talking about politics can help to spread knowledge, support understanding of issues, and share a diversity of views. Discussion of politics at home and in the community is considered a key influence on a person’s confidence to engage in and influence politics (internal efficacy) and an important driver of political participation. Ultimately, transparent, inclusive conversation and debate about key political issues – from the grassroots level right up to formal mechanisms of government – can help to rebuild engagement with, and trust of, the democratic process. The project, through *Tok Bot Salone* and *Fo Rod*, aimed to prompt informal and formal discussion of governance issues among audiences.

Both programmes succeeded in stimulating discussion about the issues they covered; at midline (2013), 75% of *Fo Rod*’s listeners and 72% of *Tok Bot Salone*’s listeners reported talking about the show with family, friends or others.

Qualitative research conducted with Tumac Radio and SLBC Bo in 2016 suggested this was also the case for the local governance shows produced by partner radio stations. Both Report Card and Inside the Region were found to have prompted discussion and debate between friends, colleagues and community members, with listeners saying that they talked about topical issues with people they knew because they wanted to hear others’ views and/or keep them updated if they had missed the programmes. Some of the focus group participants from Bo reported being part of a texting group called Blessed Texters, which discusses issues covered in the media and formulates action plans to create change.

“…We… conduct meetings and discuss issues. For example, we deliberated the Abortion Bill at a meeting of the Blessed Texters and agreed to let our views be known. In the end, we were all speaking with one voice.”  
*Female, 25+, Bo, local governance radio shows study, 2016*
Using Facebook to ‘enlighten’ others in the community
The BBC Media Action Sierra Leone Facebook page also contributed to encouraging debate and discussion. As users described themselves as being actively engaged in and wanting to improve their communities (see section 3.2.2), it is perhaps unsurprising that most of the 2016 FGD participants had shared Facebook content with others – both online (i.e. with Facebook friends) and offline (i.e. by discussing it with others in their community) – to ensure that they too were abreast of important issues.

“One of the things that this Facebook page has encouraged me to do is to enlighten the people in my community.”

25–35, Freetown, social media study, 2016

Research participants particularly mentioned discussing handwashing, waste disposal and peace with others in their community:

“… recently there was a video [that the BBC Media Action Sierra Leone Facebook page] posted about hand-washing. I was doing this, but not always. Since [watching the video], I now wash my hands every day. I also shared that video, so others benefit from it as well.”

Male, 18–24, Freetown, social media study, 2016

3.4.1.3 Building political efficacy
Political efficacy is considered an important mediator of political participation, with low political efficacy being a barrier to engaging and participating in politics. xxx BBC Media Action defines political efficacy as ‘the feeling that individual political action does have, or can have, an impact on the political process’.

Both shows – through informing audiences of their rights (Fo Rod) and providing a platform where ordinary citizens were able to directly question power holders (Tok Bot Salone) – aimed
to influence audiences’ efficacy by modelling good state–society accountability in action and building people’s confidence to engage in political processes.

Research conducted throughout the project showed that audiences had learned about their rights from the programmes and this knowledge had raised their confidence and also motivated them to question their leaders and to participate in public debate.

“The programme [Tok Bot Salone] has enhanced our awareness of national issues. For example, during construction of Marakura Road, the contractors were building the bridges poorly. With knowledge gained from this programme, I went to the IFAD office and the council chairman to ask questions about the construction of the road.”

Male, Kabala, audience research, 2015

3.4.1.4 Increasing political participation

Increasing political participation is seen as one of the key routes to building accountability between citizens and leaders. As such, Tok Bot Salone aimed to provide a platform from which Sierra Leoneans from every part of society could potentially influence the decisions that affect their lives. Broadcast across the country, the programme aimed to role model ordinary people participating in a public forum, leading to increased participation in other forums – whether private (with family and friends) or public (in a town hall meeting or a collective endeavour).

Regression analysis conducted on the 2013 midline dataset showed that, even after controlling for confounders, regular Tok Bot Salone listeners were almost twice as likely as non-listeners to report participating frequently in politics (e.g. contacting a national or local official, taking part in an organised effort to solve a problem, or attending a local council meeting). It also revealed that people who listened to both Tok Bot Salone and Fo Rod were almost three times more likely than non-listeners to report frequent political participation.

However, it found no association between regularly listening to the programmes and occasionally participating in politics. Other factors, such as income and group membership, were more important. This suggests that people who participate only occasionally do so for different reasons, which are not necessarily reinforced or influenced by exposure to Tok Bot Salone and Fo Rod. Indeed, in 2015, qualitative research participants outlined a number of barriers to political participation, including a perceived lack of knowledge, a fear of negative consequences arising from speaking out, a concern that they would not be listened to and a perception that there were not enough opportunities to participate.

16 Regular Tok Bok Salone listeners were 1.7 times more likely to report having participated frequently in politics than non-listeners. The Nagelkerke R statistic for this model was 0.392. The Hosmer and Lemeshow test had a chi-square of 42.488 and a significance of <0.001. See the technical appendix for full results.

17 Those listening to both Tok Bok Salone and Fo Rod were 2.7 times more likely to report having participated frequently in politics than non-listeners. The Nagelkerke R statistic for this model was 0.392. The Hosmer and Lemeshow test had a chi-square of 42.488 and a significance of <0.001. See the technical appendix for full results.
3.5 Impact on the media sector

Key insights

- Training on elections coverage across IRN stations enabled professional reporting of elections, which audiences found to be balanced and comprehensive. However, mentors and trainees struggled to secure representatives from all political parties on the programmes due to their negative perceptions of the media.

- Trainees at local partner stations reported improvement in programme-making skills, including newsgathering, packaging and reporting. They felt that the training had helped them produce programmes that adhered to the editorial values of fairness, accuracy, balance and objectivity.

- Challenges to improving the capacity of Sierra Leone’s media remain. These include the financial sustainability of radio stations and low pay of journalists (many are volunteers), identifying appropriate panellists, and improving sound quality and editing.

- Qualitative research suggests that the two local governance shows – Report Card and Inside the Region – produced with support from BBC Media Action mentors provided valuable information on community issues and encouraged some listeners to take action.

- Listeners welcomed the shows’ interactive elements as a means of ensuring panellists’ responsiveness. However, despite strong moderation, some audiences remained unsatisfied with panellists’ answers and unconvinced that promises would be honoured.

For media to function effectively as a governance watchdog and to support accountability, it must do so consistently, at scale, and with the highest regard for editorial standards. As outlined in section 1.1, over the last 15 years Sierra Leone’s media landscape has fractured with a proliferation of new radio and TV stations alongside increasing use of mobile phones and the internet. At the outset of the project, Sierra Leone’s media faced many challenges that were often reflected in: the low technical and editorial capacities of journalists and radio stations; the lack of motivation among often underpaid or unpaid staff; and the exploitation of the media sector by political and commercial forces. All of these challenges were likely to result in compromised outputs.

As such, strengthening the capacity of the country’s media was a key component of the Global Grant governance project. Through capacity strengthening, BBC Media Action aimed to support its media partners to produce editorially strong content and to facilitate inclusive and constructive dialogue between audiences and public officials. In short, the type of governance programming that BBC Media Action believes contributes to improving accountability within state–society relations.

This element of the project comprised training journalists and mentoring staff at partner radio stations. The aim being to improve editorial, production and management skills, and to enhance trainees’ and mentees’ ability to broadcast high-quality governance programming.
3.5.1 Improving election coverage

One of the key aspects of BBC Media Action’s capacity-strengthening work in the country was supporting improved election coverage. As such, in late 2012, BBC Media Action delivered a week of election reporting training to participants selected to act as mentors to other journalists covering the presidential, parliamentary and local elections of November 2012. These mentors then trained local journalists working at the IRN stations, who in turn produced elections programming with ongoing support from the mentors. Working alongside the IRN stations and SLAJ, BBC Media Action additionally co-produced 10 days of elections coverage, including a 24-hour-long broadcast on the day of the elections.

The midline survey (2013) found that the IRN’s coverage of the elections reached over 1.4 million (42%) adults in Sierra Leone. Post-elections qualitative research with journalists, mentors and listeners of four IRN stations (Choice FM, Eastern Radio, Radio New Song and Radio Bankasoka) revealed that the training was felt to have improved journalists’ ability to report on elections in a professional way, which could: mitigate the likelihood of conflict and unrest; provide objective, impartial and fair coverage of political parties; and incorporate citizens’ voices into discussion programmes on the elections. For example, listeners appreciated the comprehensive coverage that the IRN stations had provided and saw their output as balanced and impartial:

“When I listened to their [Radio New Song’s] analysis about the rally, it was almost exactly the same as what I saw with my naked eyes.”

Male Radio Bankasoka listener, elections coverage assessment, 2013

However, mentors, journalists and listeners alike reported that coverage would have benefited from more balanced political party presentation, with some listeners particularly saying that they would have liked to have seen more representatives from the two main political parties (the All People’s Congress and the Sierra Leone People’s Party). Nonetheless, mentors and journalists reported that it was challenging to secure such representatives’ participation on the programmes due to their negative perceptions of the media. Indeed, sometimes those who had agreed to be interviewed or appear on a show cancelled at the last minute.

“The problem is when you call some of these politicians for a programme they will assure you [of their participation] until the eleventh hour, [and then] they disappoint you by saying they either have other programmes at hand or they don’t want their opponent to know their strategy.”

Choice FM mentor, Freetown, elections coverage assessment, 2013

3.5.2 Strengthening partner radio stations’ capacity

BBC Media Action’s capacity-strengthening schemes with partner radio stations were evaluated through two main research studies conducted in July 2012: training evaluation questionnaires given to all available trainees at three stations – Radio Bontico (Bonthe Island), Radio Kolenten...
(Kambia District) and Premier Talk Radio (Freetown) – and IDIs with station managers, producers and selected trained journalists at the same stations. A further qualitative study with audiences was conducted in 2016 and looked at the impact of two local governance shows – Report Card and Inside the Region – that were produced with mentoring support from BBC Media Action in Freetown (Western Area) and Bo (Southern region).

Enhanced programme-making skills at local radio stations
Trainees at the three stations evaluated in 2012 reported improvement in programme-making skills, including newsgathering, packaging and reporting – a view echoed by station managers:

“"My staff can now edit news themselves, conduct quality interviews and are more efficient in identifying governance and human rights issues.""

*Station manager, capacity strengthening study, 2012*

Trainees felt that the training helped them to confidently produce governance programmes in accordance with editorial values of fairness, accuracy, balance and objectivity. Most partner radio staff interviewed agreed, saying that governance issues were presented on these shows without bias and from different perspectives.

Trainees also reported gaining the required technical production skills to produce good governance programmes, with some saying that they had made the transition from manual editing to Adobe editing as a result. They also found the basic computer skills one of the most useful modules.

Positively, the benefits of the training appear not to have been confined to the context of governance programming:

“"I can now sit and plan a programme all by myself. I am using what I learned from BBC Media Action training in a programme called Health Talk.""

*Male news editor, capacity strengthening study, 2012*
BBC Media Action sound engineer Ibrahim Sillah, production coordinator Paul Massaquoi, producer Mariama Sesay, and Starline radio producer Patrick Salia, record a live episode of Fo Rod.
Mentoring contributed to well-received and informative local governance programmes

Mentoring partners to produce local versions of Fo Rod was a key facet of the capacity-strengthening component of the Global Grant governance project in Sierra Leone. Research conducted in July 2012 showed that these shows were well received by communities, with some station managers particularly noting the attention they had attracted:

“Our new local programmes have generated lots of interest from the community and have increased the level of interaction between the public and the radio station.”

Station manager, capacity strengthening study, 2012

The 2016 qualitative study – undertaken to gain a greater understanding of the potential impact of Report Card and Inside the Region on discussion and accountability at the community level – found that listeners and CSO representatives felt that the shows had raised awareness of important topics and generated valuable interaction between the public and people in positions of responsibility. They also generally thought that the panellists on both shows were the right people to be discussing the issues featured because they were involved in, or knowledgeable about, them.

“I believe that the aim of this show is to bring the people closer to the government and the government closer to the people. If you take a look at the fuel crisis that is ongoing, we see how the programme deliberates on it and how it explains it to people, so that they will have a thorough understanding of what is going on.”

CSO representative, Freetown, local governance radio shows study, 2016

The shows were considered useful for aiding understanding of local issues. Listeners not only learned about the roles and responsibilities of people in power and about accountability,

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<th>Some challenges – a view from the mentors</th>
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<td>Mentors felt that the management and staff of the various radio stations could now identify topics, write scripts, edit their programmes and follow the BBC’s editorial guidelines.</td>
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<td>However, the mentors were also clear about some of the challenges they experienced. A freelance trainer/producer who supported the mentors to produce local debate shows outlined the key challenges as follows:</td>
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<td>- Staff motivation. Most of the staff at these stations were unpaid. A good number were volunteers and a programme needs motivated manpower to produce it. It was very difficult for the few paid staff to champion the production activities</td>
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<td>- Most of the stations were still struggling with identifying appropriate panellists and the right audiences for their programmes</td>
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- Most of the stations were still struggling with identifying appropriate panellists and the right audiences for their programmes
- Sound quality and editing were still posing serious challenges
but also about what they could do, as individuals, to help respond to local issues. A few listeners reported that they were motivated to contact those in authority after listening to the programmes or felt more confident to speak to leaders in general.

**The power of interactivity and importance of strong presenters**

The phone-in or text-in elements of these shows gave listeners a chance to make corrections and hold guests to account if they perceived that they were not being truthful. One CSO representative explained that young listeners often called in to demand answers, and some listeners themselves reported that callers or texters were able to ask questions that presenters did not have the courage to raise.

However, the benefits of the shows’ interactive elements had to be balanced by careful moderation. A panellist from Bo pointed out that callers sometimes attacked individuals (rather than engaging with the issue at hand) and that listeners did not always have a full understanding of issues and needed a moderator to contextualise these.

**Mixed feelings about panellists’ answers and responsiveness**

Although audiences and CSO representatives generally thought the shows’ choice of panellists was appropriate, there was a mixed response from listeners on whether the answers given by panellists during shows were satisfactory. Despite deeming some responses unsatisfactory, research participants generally thought that the programmes provided a fair space for officials to come and explain issues to the community. Audiences and CSO representatives considered the presenters to be professional at moderating discussions and able to keep debates on track and ask mostly the right questions. The panellists that appeared on Inside the Region and Report Card thought the moderators gave them time to express themselves and address the issues.

The extent to which the shows resulted in improved service delivery was less clear. Some listeners attributed changes they had noticed in their communities to the programmes (e.g. new police posts installed in crime-ridden areas and youths mobilised to work on bad roads). These had been enacted both by local leaders and by local people themselves.

“I can remember the last time the minister of transport was on the programme and promised to provide 100 buses. He fulfilled his promise.”

_Female youth, Freetown, local governance radio shows study, 2016_

However, others (including a CSO member in Bo) thought panellists failed to make good on their commitments:

“Like most of the leaders in the Eastern part of town, they do participate in the programmes of the two radio stations – Citizen and Tumac. They go there and make promises that they then fail to fulfil.”

_Female youth, Freetown, local governance radio shows study, 2016_
3.6 Overall impact: contributing to improved accountability

Key insights

- The Ebola crisis emphasised the crucial need for accountability and increased public demand for clarity on new laws and processes as well as financial transparency.

- More than two in five listeners to the Global Grant governance programmes (44%) strongly agreed that the shows played a role in holding government to account, one of the highest levels of agreements across all Global Grant countries.

- Audiences felt that the programmes themselves were an important mechanism for accountability as they provided a platform for the public to question those in authority and gave them the opportunity to express their views.

- While the debate format worked to expose leaders and air issues, there were times when guests were seen as having given inadequate answers or when the panellists were too junior to respond adequately.

- While the shows appeared to have successfully supported bottom-up accountability, the extent to which they supported any increase in responsiveness among leaders was less clear. There were calls to provide more follow-up programmes to examine leaders’ commitment to making the change they had promised.

Through the production of the radio magazine programme *Fo Rod* and debate show *Tok Bok Salone*, as well as the capacity-strengthening activities, ultimately the Global Grant project in Sierra Leone sought to contribute to more inclusive and accountable state–society relations. Based on BBC Media Action’s governance approach, and building on the efforts of the GTF-funded project that preceded it, the Global Grant project sought to use the media to improve audience-level outcomes including: knowledge and understanding of democratic processes and rights, private and public discussion of these issues, and confidence in people’s ability to engage in and influence political processes.

Hard copies of *Tok Bot Salone* episodes for archiving.
### Evolving perspectives on accountability and governance

As a result of the learning under the GTF-funded A National Conversation project (2009–2012), BBC Media Action published a report in October 2014 entitled ‘The power of talk – media and accountability in three African countries’. This explained the limitations of a ‘watchdog’ or ‘blamegame’ approach whereby assertive media and citizens demand accountability from their leaders. Such an approach, the report argued, can be overly simplistic and not necessarily effective in certain fragile democratic settings.

Instead, an approach that focuses on creating opportunities for collective problem-solving between people and leaders – especially at local levels – is more likely to engage audiences, and to lead to grassroots change. A National Conversation project focused on strengthening the capacity of radio stations to act as public forums where people, their government and service providers could come together to talk about issues that mattered.

However, the report also highlighted that responsiveness – the extent to which public policies and institutions respond to the needs of citizens and uphold their rights – is not always improved by questioning because audiences feel disempowered by what they perceive as inadequate answers and simply tune out, as disillusionment sets in.

For BBC Media Action, amplifying people’s voices and creating a safe space for contestation, debate, discussion and provision of information are ends in themselves and core pillars of a functioning democracy. Sometimes panellists and guests do respond to the needs of citizens and uphold the commitments they made on a programme. However, it is impossible to estimate the scale of this effect or whether such responsiveness was achieved via a linear question and answer route.

#### 3.6.1 The programmes’ role in improving accountability

Accountability, as conceptualised by BBC Media Action, is amorphous and complex and, as such, the extent to which accountability is increased, or how a particular media programme may have played a role in that, is virtually impossible to measure accurately. One way that BBC Media Action attempted to capture this in Sierra Leone was simply through asking audiences whether they felt the programmes had played a role in holding government to account.

Overall, the proportion of *Fo Rod* and *Tok Bok Salone*’s audience who strongly agreed that the programmes played a role in holding government to account increased over the project’s lifetime: rising from 33% in 2013 to 44% in 2015. This was the highest proportion of all the other countries (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Kenya, Myanmar, Nepal, Nigeria, the Palestinian Territories and Tanzania) delivering Global Grant-funded governance projects in either 2015 or 2016.

Figure 9 disaggregates this agreement by programme.
Qualitative research provided insights into why audiences believed the programmes played a role in holding the government to account. Listening group participants felt both shows gave Sierra Leoneans a platform to ask questions and to hold their leaders to account. Audiences were able to question those in authority about issues that mattered to them and to express their views. One respondent described how *Fo Rod* provided a more effective means of holding leaders to account than other radio stations or approaching the local council because of the interaction it facilitated between officials and citizens.

“There are several channels to access government, but these channels are not effective. Take the local council for example. Secondly, some of the radio programmes are monologues. Citizens are not given the opportunity to participate by way of expressing their concerns and views. However, these BBC Media Action programmes provide platforms for us to access government and make our views known.”

Youth, Kenema, audience research, 2015

Participants were able to give specific examples of instances when an audience member had questioned and held public figures to account on the shows:

“The programmes produced by BBC Media Action have provided a platform for people to express their views and needs to the government. I have listened to some of the episodes produced at Waterloo [Western Area rural district] where people asked the minister of water supply for [access to] water. A similar thing was also done in Kenema and the minister promised that his team would carry out a feasibility study.”

Male adult, Kabala, audience research, 2015
Experts interviewed during the 2015 accountability study viewed the programmes as a space where public officials could explain what they were doing and then audiences could take a view on a topic, ask a question and even condemn certain actions.

**Challenges to accountability**

While the shows were perceived as creating a platform for accountability, there were a number of challenges that sometimes compromised their effectiveness in holding leaders to account.

Firstly, securing high-level government officials (especially ministers) as guests on the programmes was problematic at times. In some instances, government ministers delegated this responsibility to low-level officials to avoid having an empty chair. This contributed to a lack of depth in some discussions, with officials unable or unwilling to make commitments, or take responsibility for the failure of poor and ineffective service delivery. For example, the minister of lands, housing and country planning did not appear on the *Tok Bot Salone* episode that looked at land, planning and distribution, leaving the BBC Media Action producer to instead invite two personnel from the ministry (director of country planning and a senior surveyor) to discuss the issue.

Secondly, the 2012 audience research revealed that there were a number of listeners who felt the programmes left a lot of questions unanswered as panellists ‘beat around the bush’. Listeners and experts interviewed in 2015 suggested that both *Tok Bot Salone* and *Fo Rod* should start producing follow-up episodes to provide an opportunity to extract answers on issues that had not been fully covered in previous episodes or to investigate what actions, if any, had been taken as a result of the discussions.

Heeding this advice, several follow-up episodes were produced. For example, following the minister of transport and aviation’s commitment during one *Fo Rod* episode to procure 100 buses to alleviate the acute public transportation situation, a follow-up episode discussed the issues surrounding the allegations of corruption in the procurement process and how the new buses could help make public transport much more accessible and affordable.

**Providing a much-needed platform in a challenging context**

The programmes’ contribution to increasing accountability should be viewed in the context of the Ebola outbreak, which itself elevated public demand for accountability and expectations of what the government should be offering, and shone a spotlight on the pressing need for greater accountability in Sierra Leone.

> Before Ebola, accountability for the most part meant asking government to account for money... now accountability actually means life.

*Governance expert, accountability and the media study, 2015*

The ban on public gatherings and other measures under the state of emergency also meant that the media was crucial in providing a platform for discussion and accountability. Indeed, during the Ebola outbreak both *Fo Rod* and *Tok Bok Salone* sought to challenge leaders
without increasing (already heightened) public fears. They created opportunities for audience participation, using methods (such as SMS, phone calls, WhatsApp and Facebook) that were still available despite the emergency measures that banned public gatherings. The shows also included moderated discussions among panellists only, about issues relating to governance and the Ebola outbreak, and produced broadcasts that explained government initiatives, looked at the impact of Ebola on areas such as transport and education, and continued programming on other key areas of service delivery.

Overall, it is clear that the shows played a crucial role at a time when demand for accountability in Sierra Leone was most needed. Media programmes are well placed to be a platform for accountability and to encourage greater demand for it. The extent to which leaders will respond to this demand is, however, more uncertain.
4. CONCLUSIONS: to what extent has the project met its objectives?

At the end of the five-year-long Global Grant project in Sierra Leone, are Sierra Leoneans better informed and more engaged in tackling challenges in governance? And are state–society governance relations more accountable? And, if so, to what extent did BBC Media Action’s intervention influence these outcomes?

The first question, while broad, is perhaps easier to grasp and, as such, easier to measure and validate. Findings from BBC Media Action’s evaluation of the Global Grant governance project in Sierra Leone suggested that the radio programmes *Tok Bot Salone* and *Fo Rod* contributed towards audiences being more informed about and engaged with politics. This was evidenced by analysis confirming a significant positive relationship between listening to the shows and consistently higher levels of political knowledge. While this analysis cannot provide evidence that the programmes caused this outcome, audiences themselves drew direct links between what they had heard on the shows and increases in their knowledge of key governance issues, individual rights, the roles and responsibilities of politicians, and the importance of accountability. Users of the accompanying Facebook page also described how they used the content to inform and engage others in their communities.

The analysis also showed that audiences were significantly more likely to participate frequently in politics than non-listeners, although they were not more likely to participate occasionally. Barriers to participation included fear of reprisal or a perception that there were not enough opportunities to participate. These findings further emphasise the importance of programmes like *Fo Rod* and *Tok Bot Salone* in providing a platform for dialogue, reminding Sierra Leoneans about their right to have a say in the governance of the country and keep authorities in check.

Whether state–society relations are more accountable is much more difficult to comprehend and even more problematic to measure. Nonetheless, more than in any other country under the Global Grant, audiences reported that the programmes played a role in holding government to account – something that became even more critical during the Ebola crisis. In a country where the culture of questioning leaders was still a foreign one when BBC Media Action first started producing *Fo Rod* in 2010, it is significant that the shows contributed to fostering dialogue.

However, the extent to which demand for accountability resulted in responsiveness from leaders is less clear. Some public officials continued to mistrust the media, as shown by their unwillingness to take part in the programmes as panellists, and audiences, sceptical of politicians, continued to demand that the shows followed-up on promises made.

The mentoring approach BBC Media Action pursued through the capacity-strengthening component of the project resulted in improved production and editorial skills among radio station partners, and programmes that were appreciated by audiences. However, the wider media sector, increasingly fragmented, continues to face challenges. As national elections approach in 2018, the importance of the media in supporting constructive dialogue, holding leaders to account and contributing to a peaceful conduct of the polls remains critical.
5. APPENDICES


Problem
- Ebola response perceived as deeply politicised
- Outbreak damaged already low level of trust in government
- Limited effective delivery of basic services
- Lack of trust in healthcare system
- State of emergency measures and Ebola outbreak aggravated tensions and mistrust with the government and within communities
- Limited public engagement with democratic and political processes
- Women and young people marginalised from decision-making and Ebola created new marginalised groups

Barriers
- Distrust between regions exacerbated by lack of transparency around resource allocation
- Low public awareness of their rights to services, of how to access these and of complaint mechanisms
- Divisions based on suspicion, fear and prejudice
- Lack of information about democratic and electoral processes, as well as their relevance to everyday life
- Limited public consultation around these processes
- Low representation of marginalised groups in the media

Intervention
Use media to explain key governance issues, hold leaders to account, and create platforms for discussion between audiences and leaders

Media includes:
- National radio programming (debate and magazine shows)
- Local radio programming (debate shows)
- Social media content and distribution

Outcome (intermediate)
- Audiences have improved knowledge of key governance issues and associated rights
- Increased opportunities for audiences to engage in dialogue and question national and local leaders about decision-making on these key governance issues
- Facilitated inclusive dialogue at national and level levels between audiences and public officials and across regional, political and other divisions – ensuring representation of marginalised groups
- Raised the editorial standards of journalists to cover governance issues (including democratic and political processes and post-Ebola recovery) and to scrutinise the delivery of public services
- Improved the capacity of media partners to produce editorially-strong programmes that hold elected leaders accountable

Outcome (ultimate)
- Increased audience participation in dialogues and debates
- Sierra Leonean media produce more reliable, responsive and inclusive programming about key governance issues
### 2. Capacity-strengthening schemes

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3. Cumulative reach calculations

Cumulative reach measures long-term engagement in a particular country and across all countries, and the measure was used to set the overall reach targets at the beginning of the Global Grant. The measure utilises a calculation acknowledging 10% of new listeners and/or viewers within existing audiences year-on-year. The 10% is seen as a conservative estimate and takes into account the following:

- 15-year-olds entering the survey data and older people leaving
- New viewers or listeners reached by programming
- Natural turnover – people reached previously but no longer viewing or listening
- Increased geographical reach, improved access and new broadcast partnerships

This 10% is applied on the principle of adding the ‘lowest reach’; this means that if the reach figure for the prior year is higher than the current year, then 10% of the reach from the current year is added onto the cumulative reach figure. In turn, if the reach figure in the current year is higher than the reach figure from the prior year, then 10% of the reach figure from the prior year is added to the total amount.
ENDNOTES

1 The Global Grant was a centrally-managed grant from DFID that supported implementation of the project in 14 target countries across Africa, Asia and the Middle East between 2012 and 2017. The five-year-long grant focused on three core themes (governance, health and resilience) and aimed to produce media and communication outputs that contribute to better governance, healthier populations and an increased ability to cope with humanitarian crises.


14 Ibid.


16 Its broadcast partners grew from approximately 20 to 45 during the project’s lifetime.

Launched in 2008, A National Conversation was a five-year-long, £5 million, multi-country initiative operational in Angola, Sierra Leone and Tanzania. Conceived within DFID’s GTF’s accountability framework that saw the media as critical in giving voice to ordinary people to demand improved governance, it specifically sought to: (i) enable the public to participate in informed debate about the way their societies were run; (ii) create demand among communities for more responsive government; and (iii) hold governments to account.

The research strategy for the grant was built upon using multiple complementary research methods to answer the overall research questions. The strategy draws on multiple pieces of research to generate a broad evidence base, both across countries covered by the grant.


