



SIERRA LEONE ASSOCIATION OF JOURNALISTS



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

SLAJ - Sierra Leone Association of Journalists

WIMSAL - Women in the Media Sierra Leone

SLAWIJ - Sierra Leone Association of Women in Journalism

GEWE – Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment

GAP - Gender Advisory Panel

IMC - Independent Media Commission

NaTCA – National Telecommunication Authority

GFPs - Gender Focal Persons

GBV - Gender-Based Violence

MRCG - Media Reform Coordinating Group

IFJ - International Federation of Journalists

ACJME-SL - Association of Communication, Journalism and Media Educators, Sierra Leone

DEFINITION OF TERMS

In this document the following terms are defined thus:

Harassment: This is the “unwanted conduct affecting the dignity of men and women in the workplace [or during the general execution of their work]. It may be related to age, sex, race, disability, religion, nationality, sexual orientation or any personal characteristic of the individual, and may be persistent or an isolated incident.”¹

Online Harassment: "The definition of online violence against women extends to any act of gender-based violence against women that is committed, assisted or aggravated in part or fully by the use of ICT, such as mobile phones and smartphones, the Internet, social media platforms or email, against a woman because she is a woman, or affects women disproportionately."²

¹ <https://www.nuj.org.uk/about-us/rules-and-guidance/bullying-and-harassment.html>

² <https://eca.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2020/Brief-Online-and-ICT-facilitated-violence-against-women-and-girls-during-COVID-19-en.pdf>

FOREWORD



When I was contesting for the SLAJ presidency in 2019 I resolved, after extensive consultations with potential voters, that it was time to confront the age-old challenge of gender inequality in the Sierra Leone media. The media has always been male-dominated; in terms of numbers, ownership, representation in leadership positions, the distribution of assignments in the newsroom, representation in media content, education, as well as in the operations of SLAJ and its affiliate bodies.

It is true that discrimination, harassment, and inequality on the basis of gender are not limited to the media. But as an agent of societal change, it is important that the media take intentional steps to address these issues within the industry.

In my first term as President, my administration established the Gender Advisory Panel (GAP), composed of SLAJ members and people from civil society, to advise us on mainstreaming gender within the Association and our affiliates and conduct training to help our members cover women and girls better.

This policy, probably the first ever gender equality policy for the media in West Africa and Africa at large, represents a significant stride towards that ambition, to foster a media landscape that reflects the diverse realities and aspirations of all practitioners, irrespective of their gender. It seeks to address equality and equity within the media ecosystem. Equality is about treating everyone the same, regardless of their circumstances or differences; equity is about recognising and addressing existing inequalities by providing different levels of support to different groups in order to achieve equal outcomes. In the context of gender empowerment, aiming for equity means acknowledging the specific challenges and disadvantages that women may face due to historical and systemic discrimination. It involves implementing targeted policies and initiatives that contribute to equality for women colleagues, ensuring that they have the required opportunities and resources to fully participate in the media and society in general.

Through this policy, SLAJ affirms its dedication to promoting gender sensitivity, not as an isolated endeavor, but as an integral part of responsible journalism. Our shared objective is to contribute to a society where the media is a catalyst for positive change, where narratives are rooted in empathy and respect, and where the full spectrum of gender identities finds a dignified place in the spotlight.

Achieving this vision requires collaboration – between media professionals, organisations, policymakers, donor partners, the government, and the public. It requires an unwavering commitment to learning, unlearning, and adapting to the evolving dynamics of gender discourse.

I will firstly commend the GAP team- Naasu Fofanah, Joseph Ayamga, Chernor Bah, and Dr. Williette James (as Chairperson) for leading this initiative in fulfilling one of the key recommendations in our

recently launched Media Manifesto 2023: *The Media We Want: Towards an Empowered and Inclusive Media in Sierra Leone.*

Let me acknowledge the technical support from our various partners in enriching this policy: the Media Reform Coordinating Group (MRCG), Faculty of Communication, Media and Information Studies, Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone, Bournemouth University (BU) UK, the Independent Media Commission (IMC), the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), and to our membership and affiliates/sub-bodies for participating in the nationwide consultations, development, and validation of the document.

A big thank you and appreciation to Irish Aid for funding this initiative as part of their support to promoting peaceful, credible, transparent, and inclusive elections in Sierra Leone in 2023.

Finally, I hope that this Gender Equality Policy for the media will serve as a compass guiding us toward a future where media serves as a beacon of inclusivity, a mirror of authenticity, and a catalyst for societal progress. May it inspire introspection, ignite dialogue, and fuel the transformation we seek within the media landscape and society in general in Sierra Leone and beyond. The time for change is now, and with this policy, we take a resolute step towards a more just, equitable, industrious, and harmonious media landscape in Sierra Leone.



Ahmed Sahid Nasralla
PRESIDENT

PREFACE

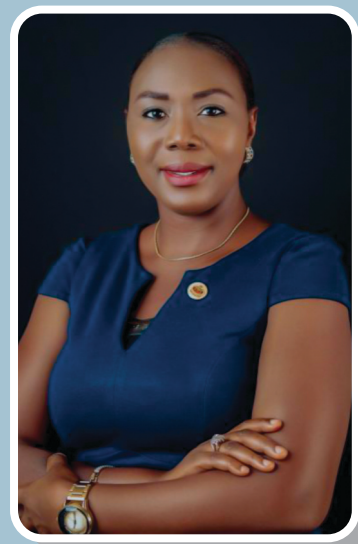
The media in Sierra Leone has come a long way grappling with issues related to gender. Both male and female journalists have been subjected to terrible working conditions³ that they would not have ordinarily experienced if the relevant protection and policies were instituted within their media institutions. In this unsavoury situation, to say the least, women journalists have suffered and continue to suffer the most.

As a result of the vast male dominance that the media in Sierra Leone is plagued with, the media metamorphosed into a state of unconscious chauvinism that confined women to a space from which women journalists still find it very difficult to emancipate themselves.

Women journalists have been made to think that they must always rely on male journalists in order to succeed in their assignments. Male journalists, on the other hand, have been made to believe that only they can handle hard beats. Sexual harassment continues to be an impediment to women journalists who are determined to reach their full potential in the profession. Women in the Media Sierra Leone (WIMSAL) the oldest women journalists' organisation the country, have been very vocal about the prevalence of sexual harassment in the media. Despite that, women journalists continue to be sexually harassed by their male counterparts and other males outside the media landscape. Some women journalists have resigned from their jobs because they would not succumb to issues of harassment, intimidation, demotion and marginalization within their organisations.

As the media in Sierra Leone integrates a more technological approach, some women journalists have had to battle with online violence which, in this part of the world, is a new form of violence that exposes women to cyberbullying, online harassment, and threats. It is a blessing that Sierra Leone now has many laws that speak to violence against women and the Cyber Security Act of 2021, that focuses on the use of online platforms under which violators can be held culpable. However, the Sierra Leone Association of Women in Journalism (SLAWIJ) in its 2022 research report⁴, has recommended a specific law to protect women in the digital space.

Suffice it to say, some women, over the years, have broken loose from their confinement and started making lasting gains in journalism. Women can now be counted among the most learned and experienced of journalists who are making a mark in Sierra Leone. Some women have now headed reputable mainstream media institutions and also the Faculty of Communication at the University of Sierra Leone, where journalism students graduate from with distinctions on a yearly basis. In fact, it was a woman, Bernadette Philomena Cole (posthumous), who developed the proposal to start the journalism programme at the said institution.



³ See: Representation of Women within the Media in Sierra Leone. Unpublished Ph.D Thesis. W. James (2022),

⁴ See: SLAWIJ's Threats Against Public Facing Women, 2022 Report

It is noteworthy that the current SLAJ executive has made, addressing gender-related issues in the media, a priority. The Association heeded recommendations from various partners, including women journalists themselves for a gender policy and sourced funds to actualize this document.

The methodology used to develop this policy was standard. Having observed the gender-related issues in the Sierra Leone media for decades, baseline information was put together. Data was also collected from articles published by the MRCG⁵ and dissertations⁶ on gender issues in the media, from Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone. Nationwide consultations were also done to obtain information from journalists on their felt needs and to also solicit information from them regarding the contents of this document. A draft was put together that was sent to all members of the GAP for their input. That draft document was also reviewed by the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) Gender Expert, our partners at Bournemouth University and Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone. The updated draft was later presented for validation during a meeting of journalists (including members from the various SLAJ affiliates and sub-bodies and media stakeholders) held at the SLAJ headquarters in Freetown. Today, we can safely say that this strategy is representative of the views of journalists and media partners in Sierra Leone.

This policy, is a major step in tackling the issues of gender inequality and women's empowerment within the media. There is no gainsaying the fact that this document will prove greatly advantageous to all journalists, media institutions and partners, provided all stakeholders put premium on its implementation within the media institutions in Sierra Leone.



Williette Kemi James (Ph.D)
CHAIRPERSON, SLAJ GAP

⁵ See MRCG State of the Media Reports (2018-2021)

⁶ See unpublished dissertations (PhD, MA and Diploma) James W. 2009, 2020

1.1 PREAMBLE

This Sierra Leone Association of Journalists' (SLAJ) gender equality policy for the media demonstrates the commitment to take proactive steps to integrate gender equality and women's empowerment in line with the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, Act 2022. At institutional and programme level, SLAJ has purposed to ensure that gender issues are addressed equitably and in a transparent and professional manner. The Executive of SLAJ through its instituted Gender Advisory Panel (GAP), will ensure to report annually to the general body on the implementation of this policy.

1.2 Background

The SLAJ is a not-for-profit professional organisation advocating for the right to freedom of expression, free media, and democratic good governance. SLAJ recognises that gender inequality is a major challenge in the media in Sierra Leone. While SLAJ acknowledges that discrimination, harassment and inequality on the basis of gender are not limited to the media, SLAJ has made it a priority to deal with these issues within the media.

The media in Sierra Leone is male dominated, in terms of ownership and representation in leadership positions across individual media institutions as well as in SLAJ and its affiliate bodies. Out of a total of 718 active members in SLAJ only 170 are women. We see significant changes in the electronic media, but the print media still has a long way to go.

Women in the media suffer unequal distribution of assignments in the newsroom. While male reporters are given assignments to cover hard news stories female reporters are given soft beats. Gender-sensitive reporting in the media is also very low. Women journalists face sexual harassment, exploitation and intimidation in the media from their male colleagues and superiors. These are only a few of the challenges female journalists face⁷.

To address these issues, SLAJ set up the Gender Advisory Panel (GAP) that comprises members and people from civil society to advise the Association on issues related to gender and with the availability of funds, to conduct periodic gender audits that inform the way the Association formulates policies. The GAP does the following:

- i. Reviews policies, processes and opportunities that engender bias and discrimination,
- ii. Makes sure SLAJ (and its sub-bodies) move towards a more gender equitable association that can be replicated in media houses owned by SLAJ members.
- iii. Develops gender-sensitive policies, which SLAJ can encourage media houses to adopt at management level and in their newsrooms.

⁷ See articles written by James, W. in State of the Media reports published by MRCG (2018 - 2021)

- iv. Encourages SLAJ to support affirmative action policies to increase the voices of women in the sector and to ensure that they thrive.
- v. Works to conduct training of journalists on GBV issues to ensure the improvement of media representation.
- vi. Actively helps in making media spaces gender equal and inclusive.

While SLAJ does not have control over the employment and editorial policies of media houses, the Association support efforts aimed at formulating policies that make the newsroom conducive for journalists. This policy therefore aims to contribute to gender equality and women's empowerment in all forms of the media in Sierra Leone⁸.

2.0 THE POLICY

2.1 Gender Balance

- a. SLAJ and its affiliates commit to ensuring the removal of all obstacles to equal opportunities within the Association and its affiliates, with the aim of enhancing the work of journalists, especially women journalists whose contribution has been minimal because of their low status and other impeding factors.
- b. Every journalist must endeavour to practice the profession with the utmost sensitivity of gender issues and the mind-set of implementing equality and equity in the practice of the profession.
- c. SLAJ through its GAP commits to training and undertaking periodic newsroom sensitisation of media organisations on gender-sensitive issues.
- d. Media institutions are encouraged to do a bi-yearly gender audit assessment to ascertain the gender dynamic within the institution. The Gender Audit Checklist provided as an appendix to this document will be helpful. Media institutions must take affirmative actions and institute Gender Focal Persons within their newsrooms, to ensure that gender-sensitive actions are employed in the day-to-day affairs of their institutions, and the recommendations made in this document are executed to the letter.
- e. SLAJ will collaborate with the Independent Media Commission (IMC) to ensure that media houses adopt and implement the provisions of this policy. SLAJ will work with the IMC to ensure compliance. SLAJ will work with IMC to provide the requisite gender-sensitive training for journalists across the country.

3.1 SLAJ ENROLLMENT

- a. All Journalists (full-time, volunteer and freelancers) practising in Sierra Leone are encouraged to become members of SLAJ.
- b. Journalists of other nationalities practising in Sierra Leone are also encouraged to join SLAJ as affiliate members.

⁸ See SALT Manifesto, Nasralla A., 20

- c. SLAJ women's affiliates shall develop strategies to encourage women to pursue journalism as a profession. They shall also proactively seek to appoint women journalists, who will be given the assignment to undertake specific recruitment campaigns to ensure more women take up journalism as a profession and register with SLAJ. This could include appointing recruiters tasked to engage with women outside the professions (eg: female students, contributors, freelancers, other professionals) so as to motivate them to take up journalism as a full-time profession.
- d. SLAJ shall ensure that affirmative action is employed in executing policies regarding membership enrolment. Records show male journalists far outnumber female journalists. Where there are criteria for enrolment, the Association shall take into consideration the low representation of women in the profession and institute a reduction in the requirement to allow more women into full membership.

4.1 OWNERSHIP AND REGISTRATION OF MEDIA INSTITUTIONS

- a. All journalists that meet the legal requirements, must be allowed to register and own a media institution.
- b. As the IMC records show male dominance in respect of ownership of media institutions, women shall be encouraged to register media institutions as proprietors.
- c. SLAJ shall set up a Business Advisory Committee to help women journalists with the intention of starting media institutions, to compile formidable proposals for business grants, or provide guidance regarding registration of media outlets with the requisite legal bodies.
- d. SLAJ shall collaborate with the IMC and National Telecommunications Authority (NaTCA) to ensure that licensing and registration are equitable and transparent, to encourage more women own media institutions.

5.1 RECRUITMENT OF STAFF

- a. Gender balance must be a key consideration in appointments and promotions in all media houses. Beyond this, media houses must support equity by prioritising required resources for women as a way to promote gender equality.
- b. Job openings must be handled transparently. They must be openly advertised so that both male and female journalists have the opportunity to apply.
- c. Media owners or proprietors should give a minimum of 30% employment opportunity to women.

- d. Journalists with disabilities must not be discriminated against in the hiring or promotional processes, and media houses must absorb them into areas they can operate effectively.
- e. Appointment letters must be provided for both male and female journalists upon employment. All appointment letters must be consistent with the Labour laws.
- f. Journalists who are volunteering must also be issued letters to that effect, with conditions of service clearly spelled out.
- g. SLAJ shall effectively monitor how its members are remunerated within media institutions and make recommendations with the IMC.

6.1 BEATS AND ASSIGNMENTS

- a. Every journalist must be given equal opportunity to cover beats or undertake assignments, regardless of sex, physical stature, or disability.
- b. Female journalists must be given equal opportunities to report sports. They should be treated fairly, similar to male reporters, while covering the beat.

7.1 PROMOTION OPPORTUNITIES

- a. Every journalist is entitled to be promoted upon the successful fulfilment of their institutions' criteria for promotion, regardless of sex.
- b. Flexible requirements for promotion should be implemented for qualified female journalists.

8.1 ACCESS TO RESOURCES

- a. All journalists must have the necessary equipment required for use in the execution of their tasks.
- b. Where institutional policy demands, financial support in the form of loans or scholarships should be provided to journalists on equal terms.

9.1 APPOINTMENT TO LEADERSHIP POSITIONS

- a. Media institutions must endeavour to have 30 % representation of women holding leadership positions within their media organisations. Women must be allowed to become editors-in-chief, editors, heads of department, heads of desks etc.

- b. For effective monitoring, media institutions are encouraged to allow their Gender Focal Persons (GFPs) to work with the SLAJ GAP in collating information on the number of women holding leadership positions within their organisations. This would help monitor the progress of women in leadership positions on a yearly basis.
- c. SLAJ will set up redressal mechanism for all complaints emanating from issues of appointment and promotion to leadership positions.

10.1 SLAJ ELECTIONS

- a. Women must form 30% (or above) of the executive members in the SLAJ executive.

10.2 Appointment Of Committee Heads And Board Members

- a. The appointment of Committee Heads and Board members shall be done on a 50/50 proportion for both male and female journalists.

11.1 REMUNERATION

- a. For journalists' efficiency, salary scale must be pegged according to qualification and task assigned other than sex.
- b. Media institutions should adhere to the Labour laws regarding staff remuneration and benefits including overtime.

12.0 ALLOWANCES

12.1 Risk

All journalists should be given risk allowances and insurance to cover potential high-risk situations, including coverage of violent incidents, pandemics, high security zones, hard to reach areas, crime scenes, elections, natural disaster-prone areas, etc.

12.2 Transportation

- a. Journalists should be provided with transportation allowance to facilitate their movement to and from coverage and alleviate absolute dependence on salary and individuals.

- b. Media houses should provide communication and wardrobe allowance in the case of journalists working in audio-visual outlets.

13.1 CAPACITY BUILDING

- a. Every media house should provide equal opportunities for women to access capacity building and training initiatives.
- b. More opportunities should be made available for the empowerment of women journalists. Media institutions are encouraged to provide women journalists with study leave after three years of dedicated service to the institution.
- c. SLAJ shall work with ACJME-SL to ensure that journalists access professional journalism training in Sierra Leone.
- d. SLAJ through GAP shall organise regular trainings on gender equality issues.

14.1 LEAVE

- a. Leave: maternity, paternity, sick, annual, and compassionate should be granted to journalists appropriately, as stated in the labour laws of Sierra Leone.

15.1 SAFETY

- a. Safety measures must be put in place to protect all journalists while executing their duties. The safety of female journalists should be regarded as a priority.
- b. Work environment must cater for disability needs and health status of women, including the requirements of pregnant women and mothers. SLAJ encourages media institutions to have creche facilities, and a flexible working schedule to support women journalists.
- c. Media institutions must provide basic amenities like toilets for women, and facilities for eating and changing, especially to support female journalists working in television institutions.
- d. There must be punishment for discrimination against journalists based on their sex.

16.1 HARASSMENT

- a. The SLAJ GAP shall treat all cases of sexual harassment with utmost confidentiality.

16.2 In Newsrooms

- a. No journalists should be sexually harassed during the execution of their task.
- b. Reports of sexual harassment should be made to the GFPs who shall lead the journalist making the complaint to the SLAJ GAP. Reports can also be made directly to the SLAJ GAP.

16.3 By Non-journalists

- c. SLAJ shall support legal actions taken against non-journalists who sexually harass journalists during the execution of their work.
- d. SLAJ shall execute all recommendations from the GAP regarding sexual harassment issues adjudicated on.

16.4 Online Harassment

- a. Online harassment is a health and safety issue and must be considered as such by all media institutions. Media employers have a duty to ensure a safe workplace and provide a solid mechanism that encourages women members to report online abuse and receive protection.
- b. SLAJ shall stand firmly by any journalist who faces online harassment and will ensure that the law, (the Cyber Security Act of 2021) takes its full course.

17.1 MONITORING

- a. The SLAJ GAP must provide reports on actions to ensure gender balance in the workplace.
- b. They shall register GFPs in the various media organisations and liaise with them to get regular updates on gender issues within media organisations.

APPENDIX

SLAJ GENDER AUDIT CHECKLIST

I. OVERVIEW

1. Administrative information:
2. Name of organisation:
3. Contact person:
4. Contact information:
5. Please give a brief background of your media organisation, its history, objectives, and targets.

II. KEY GENDER ISSUES

1. What do you consider to be the key gender issues in your area of work?
2. What are your journalistic responsibilities in respect of the issues of freedom of expression and of the press?
3. Do you believe that there are any gender dimensions to the above issues?
4. If so what are they?
5. What do you regard as the key gender issues?

III. GENDER POLICY FRAMEWORK

1. What is the policy formulation process in the organisation?
2. Are both women and men consulted and do they participate in the policy formulation process?
3. Do international agreements on gender equality, such as CEDAW, inform the policies and activities of your organisation?
4. To what extent does your management regard gender mainstreaming as a priority?
5. Has the issue of gender ever arisen in your policy dialogue and or other dealings ?
6. Is your organisation familiar with the SLAJ gender policy that affirms commitment to gender equity?
7. Is your organisation willing to integrate gender equality into your programmes and projects?
8. Does everyone in the organisation feel ownership of the gender policy?
9. Does management take responsibility for the implementation of the gender policy? Is this referred to frequently? Where and how?
10. In your organisation, how do you ensure that positions taken on gender issues, at the head office or branches are consistent and shared by the whole organisation?
11. Does your organisation have a gender policy, how does this inform other policies and/ or practices in the organisation (for example your human resource policy, codes of conduct, editorial policies?) Please provide examples.
12. If your organisation does not have a gender policy, in what way is gender reflected in existing documents that guide the work of your organisation? Please provide examples.
13. Is gender reflected in the mission and vision of the organisation? Please provide these.

IV. PUBLICATIONS

1. In your production of publications, to what extent do you ensure gender balance in the contributions?
2. To what extent do the images you use depict women and men?
3. If the articles quote sources, is there an attempt to ensure gender balance?
4. Do articles/images challenge or reinforce gender stereotypes. Please give examples.
5. Is the language used gender sensitive. Please give examples.
6. Do your publications include gender specific articles? Please give examples.
7. Is gender mainstreamed into other stories/ issues you publish? Please give examples.
8. Do you have data of your audience, publications reach, and has this been disaggregated by gender? What did this show and how was this acted upon?
9. How do you solicit feedback from those who access/use your publications? Is there a gender analysis of this feedback? What does this show and how have these findings been acted upon?

V. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

1. What gender indicators, if any, have been developed for your programmes?
2. Is gender disaggregated data collected for projects and programmes? Does this inform programme/project design and evaluation?
3. Is the gender impact of programmes/projects monitored and evaluated?
4. What are some of the obstacles to incorporating gender analysis in programming/project planning, implementation and evaluation in your organisation?

VI. ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

a) Personnel

1. Please provide a summary of the composition of the organisation using the table below:

	No of women	No of men	Total	%women
Board				
Management				
Programme staff				
Administrative				
Clerical				
Total				

* Is the Proprietor a woman or a man?

* Is the Managing Editor/ Editor or main manager a woman or a man?

2. Based on the above what are the main gender gaps within the organisation?
3. Has the organisation taken explicit measures to promote a more equality and balance among staff in your organisation at all levels? What are these steps?
4. Have there been changes over the last few years? If so what are these changes?
5. Are there proactive strategies implemented to recruit or promote women into senior positions?

b) Selection and Recruitment

1. Is there a written equal opportunity policy?
2. How are jobs advertised? What efforts are made to encourage women to apply?
3. Are interview panels gender balanced?

C) Career Path

1. What special efforts are made to provide training for women to bridge the gender gap?
2. Is gender a consideration in promotion?

d) Working Conditions and Environment

1. Are there flexible work arrangements in your organisation?
2. Is there a maternity and paternity leave policy?
3. Does the organisation have child care facilities/provisions?
4. Does the organisation comply with gender sensitive behaviour, e.g. in terms of language used?
5. Does the organisation have a sexual harassment policy?
6. Would you regard your organisation as having family friendly policies? If so what are these, and how have they affected the way your organisation works?

VII. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. How significant is gender to your work? Do you feel you are doing enough on this front?
2. What could SIDA and or other partners do to assist you?
3. Please give two or three key recommendations of how you would like to see this process moving forward.



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