

Journalists trained in health reporting in Sierra Leone

FREETOWN, Sierra Leone - A new journalists' network in Sierra Leone aims to strengthen information flows and accountability around the health sector in the country.



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Around 150 journalists in Sierra Leone are taking part in a new initiative to strengthen coverage of health issues in the local and national media, with the official launch of the Health Accountability Network of Journalists (HANoJ).

The journalists, from all districts of the country, have already taken part in two-day training workshops organised in Freetown, Makeni, Bo and Kenema, during the month of December by UNICEF implementing partner, Initiatives for Media Development (IMdev).

The network has the aim of promoting accountability in the health sector and will work closely with the existing bodies including the Media Reformed Coordinating Group (MRCG), Women in the Media – Sierra Leone (WIMSAL), the Independent Radio Network (IRN), and the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ), amongst others.

"As media practitioners, we will ensure that the media play their monitorial, facilitative, collaborative and radical roles, and collaborate with strategic partners for better health outcomes in Sierra Leone," HANoJ president, James Tamba Lebbie, asserts.

Many of the journalists in the network will be participating in a new series of radio programmes on health matters, which will be broadcast on 30 radio stations across the country from next week. These shows will include interviews with leading health officials, discussion forums and broadcasts from communities.

Executive director of IMdev, Yeama Thompson, said, “As a media development organisation, we are excited to be part of this journey in enhancing the capacity of the media to promote societal dialogue and accountability for sustainable change in the health sector.”

The overall aim is to strengthen information flows and accountability around the health sector.

“Providing quality basic health services is a life and death matter, and is vital for the well-being and productivity of a nation,” said UNICEF Representative, Dr Hamid El-Bashir. “The media play a crucial role in sharing information both about the health services available, and about what issues people encounter when accessing them.”

The initiative is being supported by UNICEF with funding from USAID as part of a broader \$3.8 million ‘Health Governance’ project aimed at strengthening the health sector through better data management, stronger community accountability on health matters, and media engagement.

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