

Globalisation and Children's Media Use in Sierra Leone

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In today's world the rapid increase and spread of modern technology has ensured that information flows quite easily across national and continental boundaries. The pervasive effect of transnational media companies, equipment and services is now felt in every corner of the globe. On a computer with Internet facility, on satellite television channels or on the radio, an occurrence in South-east Asia, for instance, is just a click or tuning away from Europe, America or even Africa. Because of the huge profits that the media business generates around the world, the media market has witnessed considerable restructuring in recent years to the extent that national media markets are now being incorporated into a new global media framework. The major decisions in the media business – production, distribution and marketing – are being made by the leading multinational media companies in America, Europe and Asia (specifically Japan). The consequences of this trend have been stupendously palpable as people everywhere in the world can now claim to have access to media content and services of varying proportions and from various places around the globe.

What does this mean for media and children in the country of Sierra Leone? Is the media market in Sierra Leone becoming caught up in the transnational media structure referred to above? Are children being engulfed by this trend? If yes, what is the proportion compared to other countries? If no, why?

Country profile

Sierra Leone is a small West African country, bounded by the Republic of Guinea on the north and northeast, the Republic of Liberia on the southeast, and the Atlantic Ocean on the southwest and northwest. The country's population is estimated at 4.3 million people.¹ The capital, Freetown, a peninsula on the Atlantic coast, is the largest and most populous city in the country. About 36 per cent of the country's population lives in Freetown.²

Almost 55 per cent of the total population in Sierra Leone are children and young people up to 18 years of age. This means that about 40 per cent of the population is of school age, 6 to 18 years,³ although some children begin school earlier than required. Sixty per cent of all children enrolled in schools in Sierra Leone live in Freetown.⁴

However, not all parents can afford to send their children to school. The primary school enrolment ratio⁵ in Sierra Leone is approximately 50 per cent, whereas the secondary school enrolment ratio is approximately 18 per cent, and, naturally, far fewer inhabitants attend higher education.⁶ The combined primary, secondary and tertiary school enrolment ratio is 27 per cent, meaning that the years of schooling in 2000 were on average 2.4 years.⁷ The adult illiteracy rate is 68 per cent.⁸

Sierra Leone was established in 1787 by British philanthropists as the home of freed slaves. It became a crown colony in 1808, and, in 1896, a protectorate was declared over the outlying hinterland. It gained independence in April 1961 as a constitutional monarchy within the commonwealth, and became a republic in 1971. Today, Sierra Leone is a multi-party democracy practising the presidential system of government.

However, a civil war raged in the country during 1991 to 2001.⁹ The war affected children more than any other group of Sierra Leoneans.

Though endowed with enormous amounts of natural resources, years of neglect and bad governance have ensured that for the past couple of years, the United Nations has named Sierra Leone as the least developed country in the world – 57 per cent of the population lives below the poverty line.¹⁰

The first survey on children's media use

In Sierra Leone studies on children's rights issues, especially media and the way they affect children, are limited at best. This article presents a survey, undertaken by the author for The UNESCO International Clearinghouse on Children and Violence on the Screen at Nordicom, which is the very first of its kind in the country. It seeks to examine the level of children's media access and media use, as well as children's preferences for different media contents. The study focuses on children in Freetown, who have far better access to media equipment and services than do children elsewhere in the country. For example, television coverage is at present limited to only the Freetown peninsula area.

A quantitative survey with children of school age (6-18 years) was conducted in Freetown over a four-month period between December 2000 and March 2001. About 2,000 questionnaires were sent to homes and schools. Concerning the sample itself, Freetown was divided into three zones – East, West and Central. Each zone was further subdivided into ten areas, and each area allocated at least 60 questionnaires distributed on a random basis. For the youngest children and those unable to read or write, the services of older persons (myself, parents, elders, or any educated person present) were utilized in filling the questionnaires. In these instances, it was stressed that the child's answers must

be recorded exactly as they were given. When returned and properly sorted, 1,867 questionnaires remained for analysis.

Additionally, another group of 500 children aged 14 to 18 years was randomly selected through school registers and interviewed in person during this period. The same three-zoning format was used and five senior secondary schools were randomly selected in each zone. At least 35 children were randomly sampled through school registers in each of the 15 schools. The questions in these interviews were the same as in the above-mentioned questionnaires, but in this separate study the children were asked to discuss in some detail and give their views on some of the topics raised.

Table 1 shows the proportions of the more than 2,300 children surveyed by age and gender.

Table 1. Proportions of children surveyed, by age and gender (cell %)

	6 – 13 years	14 – 18 years	Total
Boys	24	30	54
Girls	19	27	46
Total	43	57	100

The first section of this article presents the statistical findings of the survey regarding children's media access and amount of media use. These data are based on the 1,867 questionnaires in the quantitative part of the survey.

In the second section, the media market in Sierra Leone is described with special focus on children's preferences for different media contents in order to give a deeper understanding of the country's relation to media globalisation. Here the findings to a greater extent represent 14-18 year-olds attending school.

Children's media access and overall media use

Tables 2 and 3 help to explain children's media access and overall media use in Sierra Leone. Table 2 shows the availability of media in children's homes in Freetown. The differences are striking compared to Western countries. Radio and audio cassette player are the only media that at least half of the Sierra Leonean children claim to have at home. In, for example, the US and many European countries, the majority of children have in their homes several television sets, cable/satellite TV, video, radio, audio cassette player, CD player, computer, game machines and books.¹¹

Table 3 presents the Sierra Leonean children's use of the different media at least once a week, which here is regarded as a measure of children's overall access to the media. A comparison of the two tables shows the disproportionate distribution of media in terms of, on one hand, availability in children's homes and, on the other, the overall media accessibility to children in Freetown. The overall access is higher for all media, and – measured as weekly use – at least

half of the children have access to television and video besides radio and sound cassette player.

Various factors are responsible for this discrepancy, one of which is poverty. Most families cannot afford even some of the most traditional media equipment such as radio and television. And since children in Sierra Leone regard media in general, and television and video in particular, as a means of entertainment and passing time, those children whose parents cannot afford to provide such media equipment and facility at home go to their neighbours' homes, or to video centres and mini-cinemas, to gain access to the media. Unavailability of television and video at home has led to the springing up of video centres and mini-cinemas all over the capital, and in other major towns in the country, to accommodate the needs of this growing clientele. The practice of children going to neighbours' homes to watch some of their favourite programmes on TV is a trend acceptable among adults, as well, and this has helped to make media accessible to many children who ordinarily lack them in their homes.

Table 2. Availability of media in children's homes in Freetown, by age and gender (%)

	All children	Age		Gender	
		6 – 13 years	14 – 18 years	Boys	Girls
Print media	35	39	32	34	36
Radio	75	74	76	79	71
Audio cassette player	53	40	63	51	55
CD player	24	20	27	23	25
Television	43	34	49	46	41
Cable/satellite TV	4	3	5	5	3
Video	39	39	39	40	38
Computer	1.0	0.7	1.2	1.01	1.0
Internet access	0.33	0.1	0.5	0.4	0.3

n = 1,867

Table 3. Children's overall media access/weekly media use in Freetown, by age and gender (%)

	All children	Age		Gender	
		6 – 13 years	14 – 18 years	Boys	Girls
Print media	38	26	47	47	27
Radio	87	78	89	87	89
Audio cassette player	67	62	71	63	71
CD player	39	34	39	30	31
Television	71	70	71	71	72
Cable/satellite TV	11	9	13	13	11
Video	53	40	63	51	55
Computer (with Internet access)	3	1.97	3.76	2.7	3.4

n = 1,867

Children's media habits

However, overall availability, or weekly use, does not mean that children in Sierra Leone use these media every day. Table 4 presents the regularity of media habits among the children surveyed.

Table 4. Regularity of children's media habits in Freetown (%)

Use the medium	Print media	Radio	Audio cassette player	CD player	TV	Cable TV	Video
Every day	3	30	7	3	6	1	5
4 – 6 days/week	5	22	20	5	10	2	8
2 – 3 days/week	10	20	25	11	40	5	22
Once a week	20	15	15	20	15	3	18
Less than once a week	62	13	33	61	29	89	47
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

n = 1,867

Comparing Tables 3 and 4 we find that, although almost 90 per cent of the children have access to radio or use it at least once a week, the proportion claiming to use it most (4 to 7) days of the week is about 50 per cent, whereas other children listen to the radio less often. Nevertheless, radio is the medium that children use most; this is consistent with the fact that radio is the most widely accessible media equipment in Freetown.

As regards other listening media, children use sound cassettes much more often than CDs but less often than the radio.

In fact, most children do not use CD players at all and less than a tenth use them 4-7 days of the week. The figures are the same for print media – most children do not have access to them and only a small minority use them many days a week.

TV and video viewing is more common than reading, and of these two media television comes to the forefront. However, Table 4 shows that most children (40%) watch TV for 2-3 days per week. Only 16 per cent do so 4-7 days a week. This is so even though 43 per cent have TV at home (Table 2) and 71 per cent have regular access to it (Table 3).

This finding may be surprising when compared to other countries, where most children who have television at home watch it every day or almost every day. Various factors are responsible for this. Firstly, Freetown witnesses frequent power cuts and electricity failure. Power is rationed and some districts of Freetown only receive power supply three or four times per week, and even then it is only for between 6 and 12 hours, occasionally at odd hours. Disconnection of power in homes for failure to pay electricity bills on time is also very common. Also to bear in mind in this context is that national television broadcasts only 6 hours a day on weekday evenings – but more hours on weekends.

Secondly, access to television in homes is controlled and supervised by adults. Furthermore, most children who attend school are either required to attend extra lessons after school, or to help with the household chores, leaving them with less time for recreation on weekdays. The situation for children living in Freetown and not going to school is even worse.

Finally, most children are only interested in entertainment programmes. Some would be in bed when the feature films they prefer are aired late at night. Since they are expected to rise early to perform chores such as sweeping before going to school, most parents encourage their children to study at night and go to bed early.

Generally, children have more access to media equipment and services on weekends. Then, more children prefer to watch TV, or TV and video, at the home of someone else, or in the mini-cinemas and video centres if they can afford it.

This picture is almost the same when taking cable/satellite television into account, as few children have access to and watch such channels. As shown in the previous tables, only 4 per cent of the children surveyed claim to have a satellite dish at home, and 11 per cent claim to have general access to cable TV networks. The majority are older children (aged 14 to 18 years).

Some children gain access to videocassettes through friends and relatives abroad who send them as gifts, or by buying such items in the open market. Others borrow from their friends. The proportion of the category of children with access to such video products is, however, quite small.

As Tables 2 and 3 have shown, access to – and, with that, knowledge of operating – computers, CD-ROMs, digital games and the Internet is very limited; thus these new media were not included in a question about frequency of media use during a week (Table 4). It is only those children whose parents are affluent enough to afford the costs who have access to such digital media equipment. This is not to suggest that no children in Sierra Leone have, for instance, video and computer games. Some digital games are available in shops selling electronic goods. Some children who have family members abroad also receive such products from time to time as gifts. But these occurrences are few.

In sum: How much do children use the media?

The above tables provide an understanding of children's access to and quantitative use of media in Sierra Leone. However, it must be repeated that the figures do not represent children's access to and use of media in the entire country, since media accessibility and usage are far more widespread and concentrated in Freetown, where a third of the population lives, than elsewhere in the country. The capital, Freetown has a much better infrastructure to accommodate media equipment than do other parts of the country. In addition, the most affluent stratum of the population lives in Freetown.

Thus, if the survey were distributed to include the entire country, the figures would be considerably reduced. A survey covering the whole country is extremely difficult to conduct at present for logistical reasons. Certain parts of the country are still inaccessible to normal vehicular traffic. However, from what we know, children's preferences for the various media are generally the same throughout the country.

In short, access to media still remains a great luxury for most children in Sierra Leone and much work is to be done if this situation is to change.

The following section presents the media structure and children's preferences for different media contents.

Broadcast television

The expansion of traditional media in Sierra Leone has been limited severely by the recently concluded civil war. The Sierra Leone Broadcasting Service Television (SLBSTV) is the only broadcast TV station in the country. In fact, it was only restored to the air in 1993 after having gone out of service in late 1985. After its restoration, its coverage has been limited to the Freetown peninsula area, which means that the bulk of the country do not ordinarily have access to its programming. Also, it broadcasts for only about six hours on weekdays (6 p.m. to midnight) and about twelve hours on weekends and holidays (a first segment between 10 a.m. and noon and a second segment from later in the afternoon to midnight).

SLBSTV is a state-owned corporation supervised by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. It is supposed to be an autonomous self-financing parastatal generating income from advertising and sponsorships from private sources, and providing television services for the government and its citizenry. The station's autonomy is, however, compromised because there is a great deal of political interference in its operation. The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting has a hand in the running of the station and its officials can be hired or fired on the directives of the ministry. Self-financing is a problem as well, and the station relies largely on government grants. This makes it very difficult for the corporation to assert its autonomy and stave off political interference. Some of the programmes shown on TV are political propaganda material.

The content shown on TV in Sierra Leone has a preponderance of foreign import. SLBSTV has neither the sophisticated mechanism and equipment nor the finances and professionally trained personnel to undertake such ambitious ventures as maintaining a string of foreign correspondents reporting from other countries or producing high quality documentaries and films. It does not even have the capacity to relay events live from around the country. It has no locally produced international news segment but relies on CNN for its international news coverage. The local news is on at 8 p.m. every evening. CNN is on SLBSTV every day for about 30 minutes starting at 9 p.m. SLBSTV also relies on foreign cable

networks, mainly CFI, TV Africa, CNN, Euro-Sport, for its international sport coverage. Almost all major international sporting events¹² are broadcast on SLBSTV.

Foreign documentaries and features are also frequently shown on TV. They include documentaries produced by organisations such as UNICEF, UNDP, Action Aid, and those obtained from foreign TV channels such as CNN (*Perspectives*, *People in the News*), BBC (*The African* by Ali Mazrui) and SABC (*Africa, Search for Common Grounds*). There are also some locally produced documentaries on TV, but their proportion is quite small compared to the foreign import.

Sierra Leone is yet to witness the revolution in the production of films and music videos. Naturally, there is no thriving indigenous film industry in Sierra Leone. There are, however, a few poorly recorded television dramas but these are few and far between. For now, any discussion on locally produced Sierra Leone movies must necessarily be non-existent. The films normally featured are western (especially American blockbusters) and third-rate low budget Nigerian and Ghanaian movies. It is interesting that young people (especially young girls and women) clamour for Nigerian movies given their sometimes-poor sound, picture and artistic qualities. Perhaps it is simply because young persons can identify with the characters, scenes and situations in the genre of Nigerian films preponderant in Sierra Leone.

Sierra Leone also has yet to develop the expertise, obtain the equipment and put in place the mechanism to locally produce music videos for her local artists. Thus, while music by local artists heard on radio is quite substantial, it is only those artists who can afford the luxury of producing music videos abroad who are seen on TV. Apart from these, the bulk of music videos on TV in Sierra Leone is foreign import, mostly American and British rap, R&B and pop music, reggae and calypso from the UK, Jamaica and the Caribbean, and African music from mainly South Africa, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Cameroon, Ivory Coast, Guinea (the capital of Conakry) and Senegal. The main music programme on SLBSTV, *Musical Mix*, features music videos from around the world and is aired on Saturday nights. It is very popular with children because it is dominated by western pop music.

SLBSTV normally begins its transmission at 6 p.m. every weekday with 30 minutes of children's programmes. Among others, these are animated cartoons of which all are foreign import. There are, however, some locally produced programmes in which children participate both in production and presentation, and on weekends more time is given to the broadcast of children's programmes. On the whole, however, little time is allocated to children's programming, although children are among the most enthusiastic viewers of the programmes developed by SLBSTV and comprise a considerable proportion of the viewers.

The effects of the recently concluded civil war and the absence of competition in the TV medium in Sierra Leone are some of the reasons why children are not given much consideration when TV programmes are developed. Further, the government is too overwhelmed with other aspects of development after the devastating war to be preoccupied with children's rights issues, let alone children's usage of media. This is valid also for the priorities of the children's rights organi-

sations in Sierra Leone. The war affected children greatly and these organisations are more concerned with other aspects of children's rights. It is important to note, however, that SLBSTV practices a great deal of internal self-regulation in developing its programme schedules and only broadcasts programmes with clear adult themes, such as some of the 'R'-rated ('restricted') films, after 10 p.m., a time at which it is generally held that children should be asleep.

Also, it should be pointed out that the broadcasting of children's programming is one thing and children's viewing it is entirely another, since – as mentioned previously – adults determine TV usage in the homes and children must watch in their presence. Apart from some programmes in which children feature, and *Wan Pot*, a popular local TV comedy shown on Saturdays and repeated on Thursdays, as well as the above-mentioned *Musical Mix*, children in the ages studied prefer programmes with adult themes, such as the feature films shown every day between 10 p.m. and midnight.

Cable/satellite television and videos

As discussed, the availability of cable or satellite television is severely restricted to an affluent few in the big towns, especially Freetown. Recently, because of the presence of British troops, the cable TV station BFBS (British Forces Broadcasting Services) for the British forces deployed in Sierra Leone could be accessed in some homes without satellite dishes in Freetown. Apart from this station, it is only those families who can afford satellite dishes – which are quite expensive in Sierra Leone – who can access other popular transnational TV channels, such as CNN, CFI, BBC World and MTV.

SLBSTV relies mainly on videotapes pre-recorded in Europe or the US, which can be procured on the open market in Freetown. There is also a thriving business in pirated videotapes, DVDs, CDs and sound cassettes from mainly Asia and Nigeria. AOL-Time Warner, Walt Disney, Viacom, Vivendi-Universal, Bertelsmann, News Corporation and Sony may be the leading entertainment companies in the world but direct access to their products and services in homes for children through cable TV networks as is the case in western Europe, the US and Japan, is severely limited to a few children in Freetown.

As is the case with broadcast TV, several children gain access to satellite stations by going to video centres or homes with satellite dishes.

Mini-cinemas and video centres

The mini-cinemas and video centres referred to are not standard theatres, but makeshift film parlours that are more interested in making money off children. The admittance fees are rather expensive. Standards at such places are appalling, to say the least. And since government does not regulate their operations, these film parlours are practically left to their own designs. Some even operate illegally, and regularly show 'R'-rated action and horror thrillers as well as 'X'-

rated sex films. Especially boys also watch major football league games on TV at these video centres.

The video centres' primary targets are children, who form a large proportion of their clientele. The grandeur of standard cinema as a place of entertainment declined in the late 1980s and early 1990s; cinema going suffered greatly as adults preferred passing their time with other media. Thus the successors that developed, mini-cinemas and video centres, targeted children. The effect on children of the content of the materials shown at such places is a possible area of future research.

Computers and the Internet

Almost all children surveyed have very little or no knowledge of computers, let alone have access to one. Poverty, ignorance and illiteracy are responsible for this situation. Only about 3 per cent of the children surveyed claim to have access to computers and Internet services in some way (Table 3), and in these cases it is restricted to those whose parents are affluent.

This picture is even worse elsewhere in the country. And it is not a situation peculiar to children alone. Most adults in Sierra Leone are computer illiterate. Internet services are quite expensive and the services are not as efficient or properly developed as in other West African states such as Senegal or Gambia, for instance. Because of the cost, having an ordinary e-mail account is viewed as prestigious and enhances one's social standing and status.

A great deal of work must be done by policy planners, media producers and practitioners if knowledge of computers in Sierra Leone is to be broadened and if the Internet is to be widely accessible and used as a regular and major means of communication and information for both adults and children. There is, of course, the much-hyped talk of introducing computer education as part of the regular school curriculum, but save a couple of private schools in Freetown, this plan is yet to be implemented. And until it is, discussion on the accessibility and impact of computers and the Internet on children in Sierra Leone will remain a limited area of evaluation.

For adults, however, there are a number of computer training institutes springing up across Freetown, where certificate courses in software application systems such as MS Windows 95/98, Word and Internet access can be pursued. However, those who attend these institutes are mostly young adults who have either completed normal secondary schooling or dropped out of school.

Radio, audio cassettes and CDs

The above picture sharply contrasts with that of radio. Radio is, as we have seen, the most widespread medium with almost 90 per cent of children in Freetown having overall access to radio services, and 75 per cent of all children surveyed having a radio set in their homes.

Anyone with a multi-band radio receiver can easily access programmes by the world's leading broadcasters, such as the BBC, VOA, RFI, and Deutsche Welle. To increase their global audience, it is now common practise for these corporations to establish repeater stations in many cities around the world, especially in Africa. In Freetown, for instance, both the BBC and RFI have repeater FM stations, which broadcast their programmes via satellite 24 hours a day. Some VOA programmes can be heard on Sky FM 106.6. Other FM stations also air programmes from some of these corporations in different proportions and at various times of the day in Freetown.

This strategy, however effective it may be in marketing the programmes of the corporations referred to above, is not of much significance to children, since they regard radio, especially FM stations, as a medium more for entertainment than for listening to news broadcasts.

Apart from the intermittent airing of programmes obtained from some of the foreign news corporations referred to above, most of the programmes produced and aired by the radio stations based in Freetown are produced locally. There are at least 7 FM stations in the capital (and one, Kiss 104 FM, in Bo, the second city).

The national broadcaster, the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Service (SLBS), is the only radio station in Sierra Leone that broadcasts on both FM and short wave, and covers the entire country. It broadcasts mainly in English (the official language of Sierra Leone) and some of the major local languages – Krio, Mende, Temne and Limba. The programmes it develops and airs include national and international news, talk shows and phone-in programmes, discussions and features on topics such as religion, politics, economics, and security. As the official government broadcaster, it also carries a great deal of propaganda material, government releases, and policy statements, some of which, however, are downright boring to children. Although the war increased people's interest in listening to news broadcasts on the radio, children's attitude towards radio has largely remained the same. For them, the radio is an instrument created primarily for amusement.

Radio Democracy FM 98.2, broadcasting almost exclusively in Krio, the *lingua franca* of Sierra Leone, is the most popular radio station both among children and adults in Freetown, not least because of the popular locally produced programmes it airs: A discussion/phone-in feature called *Patient, Beatrice and Elfreda* focuses on love and relationships between married couples; the *Jambo Show*, a local phone-in comedy show aired every Saturday morning, offers features such as local comedians, African music and quizzes; *Heart to Heart* is also a feature phone-in programme on Saturday mornings, on which young people seek advice on sexuality, love and relationships and share their problems and experiences with others.

The Voice of the Handicapped FM 96.2 is also popular largely for its controversial stands on national, political and social issues. It is significant because it is owned and operated by handicapped people. It has, in a way, contributed to changing people's attitudes towards handicapped people in Sierra Leone. One

such person, M. B. Attila (blinded in both eyes) is not only a popular radio producer and presenter, but is also a DJ and local music artist considered among the nation's best. There are, however, no handicapped children working for the station either on a part-time or full-time basis.

On all the radio stations in Freetown, music and entertainment constitutes a huge part of the programmes, and it is in this segment that children are the most interested. The amount of airtime given to playing music on radio varies from station to station but music is played at different times of the day, every day, on radio. The popular music culture among children in Sierra Leone, especially in Freetown, is by and large western oriented, and perhaps it is in this area, among others, that it could be said that media globalisation is having its greatest impact on children in Sierra Leone. This impact is felt in the music played on radio, in audio cassettes and CDs that children play, and even in music videos played on TV. The proportion of foreign, especially western, music on radio (as well as on TV) is quite substantial. Young boys and girls in Freetown prefer in particular American rap, R&B, pop music and to some extent calypso and reggae. It is quite easy to forget that one is in Africa when in a typical Freetown nightclub. The western artists most popular among young people in Freetown are also mostly young American and British artists representing the above-mentioned music genres. And since some of these artists are very young, it is quite simple for children to identify with them. It is a common practice for young boys and girls to form groups and call themselves Tupac Boys, Thug Angels, Destiny's Child, Spice Girls, etc., or for individuals to simply refer to themselves as Makaveli, DMX, Ja Rule, Craig David, J. Lo, etc., all in imitation of the western music tradition and their favourite groups and solo artists.

This is not to suggest that there is no African music tradition among young people in Sierra Leone. The music tastes of rural and urban children differs slightly in that the former tend to identify somewhat more with traditional and African music (local and foreign), while the latter are more western oriented with little taste for African music. Some local Sierra Leone music artists (both at home and abroad) and some African music stars enjoy success in the urban Sierra Leone music scene from time to time.

However, the artists likely to make the greatest impression on the youth are those who give a tinge of western bias to their music or those whose music could be danced to in clubs and at parties. Jimmy 'B', an internationally acclaimed Sierra Leone music star, is very popular among the young because he has mastered this art. So also are Yvonne Chaka Chaka, the South African music star, Angelique Kidjo of Benin, Kanda Bongo Man of Gabon, Awilo Logumba of Cameroon, and Shaka Bundu and Lucky Dube, both of South Africa. Any African artist who produces a song in the genre referred to above is likely to be successful in the Sierra Leone children's music scene. It is interesting, however, that Youssou Ndour, the internationally acclaimed Senegalese music star, enjoys very little popularity among children and young people in Sierra Leone, mainly because of the nature of the music he plays.

The proportion of African music on radio especially from South Africa, DR Congo, Gabon, Guinea Conakry, Ivory Coast, Cameroon, and from local Sierra Leonean artists is quite substantial, but its appeal to the youth is very limited. (African music, though, enjoys a huge popularity with the older generation.)

Print media

As for print media, not used much by the majority in Sierra Leone, local newspapers are the least preferred by children. However, they show a great deal of interest in foreign magazines, especially those dealing with entertainment and celebrities. These are hard to come by, for they are quite expensive. Most children only manage to have a glance at such magazines in school with their friends whose parents are affluent enough to afford it.

Advertising

Advertising is a strong force in the media business in Sierra Leone. Most businesses have realized that a clever advertising ploy can influence peoples' tastes and, with that, the effective marketing of a particular product or service. It is therefore common to see businesses, goods and services being advertised on media in Sierra Leone – mainly on TV, radio and in the print media: newspapers, magazines, billboards, handbills, etc. Most media houses depend heavily on the income generated through advertising.

Advertising on the Internet, on the other hand, is a trend only just beginning in Sierra Leone. Those businesses that can afford this luxury now have websites on the net. But this strategy only goes to show that Sierra Leonean businesses are catching up with the rest of the world in terms of maintaining a website. For effective marketing of products and for the Sierra Leoneans, especially children, this does not amount to much, since knowledge of and access to Internet services is severely limited.

On radio and TV, however, advertising is big business. The amount paid for the advertisement of a particular product or service is determined by the length and duration of the advert and the time that it is aired. Advertising periods are divided into 'peak' and 'off peak' periods. Peak periods are times when it is expected that an advert aired would be received by a larger audience, such as in the evenings when most people will have returned from work and are resting at home, which is why peak period advertisements are more expensive. Some businesses or organisations also sponsor whole programmes on radio and TV or buy specific airtime in order to market their products or explain their plans, policies, etc., to the public. Most adverts on TV and radio also have large music content. Sometimes, whole songs are composed. To captivate the interest of especially children and young people, the latest songs hitting the airwaves are used in adverts.

Most of the adverts on radio and TV are produced locally. While many are relatively professionally done, attractive and interesting, others are downright unintelligent and less attractive. The products, services and organisations advertised are both local and foreign and the type of advert used is sometimes determined by the origin of the product being advertised. The Sierra Leone Brewery (SLB), a government parastatal that brews beer and distributes other foreign alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages such as Guinness and Amstel Beer, is one of the biggest sponsors of both TV and radio programmes through advertising. Almost all the adverts it airs on TV and radio are professionally produced abroad. Other businesses dealing with foreign electronic and technology goods, such as LG Electronics and Samsung Electronics, also use adverts produced abroad. Businesses marketing foreign manufactured cigarettes are using foreign adverts, as well. These businesses are spending huge sums of money in sponsoring programmes on TV and radio just to market their products.

In the above categories of adverts, children are seldom used and there is no evidence to suggest that children are specifically targeted. It should be pointed out, however, that even though the programmes these businesses sponsor are not children's programmes, yet they are programmes that are very popular with children. There is no way the adverts will not reach children when they are linked with the children's favourite programmes.

However, there are other genres of adverts that are directly targeted at children, especially young girls. These include adverts marketing beauty products, dresses, shoes, foodstuffs such as chocolates, biscuits and toffees, baby products, discotheques, beauty salons, and so on. Various other adverts intended to spread information and education on sexuality, HIV/AIDS and safe-sex practices are also targeted largely at children, especially adolescents. In these categories, children are not only the intended consumers but are also used in the production of the adverts.

The marketing of interactive digital games may be big business in the western world, but this is not so in Sierra Leone. There is not a single advert on TV marketing such goods. This should naturally be taken within the context of the nature of the digital media in Sierra Leone.

In conclusion: Impact of media globalisation in Sierra Leone

When studying the role of media globalisation in Sierra Leone, one is faced with a complex paradoxical situation. This is so because most children in Sierra Leone have access to few media, yet the impact that media globalisation is having on children in Sierra Leone, especially those in Freetown, seems so great that it would be easy to forget that media is still an unattainable luxury for a great many children in the country. The paradox is shocking and confusing.

Childhood has been under attack in Sierra Leone for a long time now. The civil war helped to destroy the innocence of children in ways inconceivable. Children as young as eight years old, for instance, were made to commit horrendous

dous crimes during the ten-year war period. Those who did not come under the direct influence of the insurgents may have witnessed numerous sorts of cruelties, which can simply not be shut out of their memories in a hurry. Today, many children see themselves as grown-ups because of some of these experiences. The media, too, is in some respect exacerbating the situation. Media content on radio, television, in magazines and even in newspapers are produced and marketed by adults for an adult audience. Most of these materials, because of the way they are marketed, end up being consumed by children. The effect is that most children must see themselves either as adults or through the eyes of adults, which is bad for both their physical and psychological development and well-being.

The advertisements on TV and in magazines usually portray skewed images about life to children – vivid images of beautiful women in sexy clothes, belly-exposing blouses, tight jeans, miniskirts, high-heel shoes, etc. Western music videos, especially American rap and R&B, British pop, and Jamaican reggae dance hall music even further exacerbate the situation. Half-naked, beautiful, mostly young girls, dancing and exposing their sexiness, mostly adorn music videos. This has immense implications for children's cultural identity and the way they look at themselves. So also have their dress patterns, behavioural and social lifestyles been influenced by this trend. A common sight is children of all ages gleefully clad in flimsy dresses in the streets of Freetown. The traditional African dress pattern is very quickly being eroded.

Globalisation, it is true, is opening significant new avenues for media programming and is offering children variety in terms of media content relating to communication, information and entertainment. Media houses in countries where there is little public funding for programme development, such as Sierra Leone, now have the chance to air programmes of high quality, which they ordinarily would not have been able to produce by themselves. This helps children's overall growth process in that it introduces them to experiences, cultures and materials of varying sources and sorts.

However, the opportunities for education, communication and entertainment are being overwhelmed by commercial considerations in that much of the media contents has been tied to advertisements. As such, excessive commercialism and profit maximisation have now become the hallmarks of media globalisation. This is destroying childhood and placing much more pressure on children than they can handle. The sometimes lurid, poor quality and violent content of foreign media marketed to children, all in the name of choice and democracy, as well as the strong and excessive advertising linked with the marketing of such programmes, are destroying the beautiful points of globalisation. Even traditional programmes on TV are interspersed with advertisements. This aggressive commercialism only helps to alienate the child while increasing commercial pressure, which further confuses him/her.

Regulating children's access to harmful foreign media content would also prove a large problem when Sierra Leone will be more incorporated into the global media market. For now, transnational media content via satellite televi-

sion networks, interactive digital games, etc., have not yet, in the true sense of the word, started taking root in Sierra Leone, and their impact at this stage could not be assessed. It will, naturally, be a long time before such media content becomes widely available to Sierra Leonean children, but plans must be drawn now so that the authorities will not be caught by surprise when this finally happens. For at present media globalisation, on the whole, still does not apply to Sierra Leone, since children in this country generally have access to few media. In spite of the great impact that media globalisation appears to have on children in Sierra Leone, globalisation in its true sense should perhaps be seen as a process for only affluent nations, and for small affluent minorities of the populations in poorer countries.

Notes

1. United Nations Development Programme (2001) *Human Development Report 2001*. New York, Oxford University Press. The projected population growth rate per year for Sierra Leone, according to the UNDP, is 3.2 per cent between 1999 and 2015.
2. United Nations Development Programme (2001) *Human Development Report 2001*. New York, Oxford University Press.
3. Sierra Leone adopted the 6-3-3-4 system of education, under which children are required to start effective schooling at age six and obtain six years of primary education. This is followed by three years each of both junior and senior secondary schools, and finally four years of university.
4. Ministry of Education, Freetown, Sierra Leone, December 1998. Dr. Alpha Wurrie, Minister of Education, released this figure during a symposium held by the government to explain government policies to the people.
5. The school enrolment ratios are gross ratios and indicate the total number of children enrolled in a schooling level – whether or not they belong in the relevant age group for that level – expressed as a percentage of the total number of children in the relevant age group for that level.
6. UNICEF (2002) *The State of the World's Children 2002* (<http://www.unicef.org/sowc02/fullreport.htm>)
7. United Nations Development Programme (2001) *Human Development Report 2001*. New York, Oxford University Press.
8. United Nations Development Programme (2001) *Human Development Report 2001*. New York, Oxford University Press.
9. The civil war began in March 1999 when the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels, led by Foday Sankoh, attacked Bomaru, a town on Sierra Leone's southeastern border with Liberia. After several years of hostilities characterized by unmitigated brutality and carnage, the United Nations brokered a peace agreement between the Sierra Leone government and the RUF in the Togolese capital, Lome, in July 1999. The disarmament of the rebels was finally completed in 2001 by UNAMSIL, the largest UN peacekeeping force in the world, deployed in Sierra Leone.
10. United Nations Development Programme (2001) *Human Development Report 2001*. New York, Oxford University Press.
11. Roberts, Donald F., Foehr, Ulla G., Rideout, Victoria J., and Brodie, Mollyann (1999) *Kids & Media @ The New Millennium. A Comprehensive National Analysis of Children's Media Use*. A Kaiser Family Foundation Report, Menlo Park, C.A., from which a number of tables and comments are reprinted under the heading "Children's Media Use in the U.S.A." in *News from*

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Livingstone, Sonia, Holden, Katharine J. and Bovill, Moira (1999) "Children's Changing Media Environment. Overview of a European Comparative Study", in Cecilia von Feilitzen and Ulla Carlsson (Eds.) *Children and Media. Image, Education, Participation*. Yearbook 1999 from The UNESCO International Clearinghouse on Children and Violence on the Screen at Nordicom, Göteborg University, pp. 39-59.

12. Such as the Olympic games, Football World Cup, African Nations Cup, European Nations Cup, UEFA Champion's League and some of the Golden League Grand Prix of the IAAF.

