

**HOW DO DEBATE
PROGRAMMES
INFLUENCE
KNOWLEDGE ON KEY
GOVERNANCE ISSUES
AND POLITICAL
PARTICIPATION?
A CASE STUDY FROM
SIERRA LEONE**

Media and audience research: a key part of BBC Media Action's work

BBC Media Action, the BBC's international development charity, uses the power of media and communication to support people to shape their own lives. Working with broadcasters, governments, donors and others, we provide information and stimulate positive change in the areas of health, governance, resilience and humanitarian response. Last year, our projects reached at least 200 million people in 40 countries across Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Europe.*

The content of this briefing 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 our work.

Acknowledgements

This briefing was written by Trish Doherty. The author would like to thank David Jodrell, Sara Elias, Josephine Casserly, Dorothy Peprah, Paul Bouanchaud, Adrienne Testa, Sonia Whitehead, Zoe Fortune, Sandra Brown, Rebecca Wood, George Ferguson, Lynn Morris and David Musiime.

For further information:
Email: media.action@bbc.co.uk
Web: bbcmediaaction.org

Copyright © BBC Media Action 2015

Commissioning editors: Sarah Lister and Sonia Whitehead
Design: Soapbox.co.uk

How do debate programmes influence knowledge of key governance issues and political participation in Sierra Leone?

This research briefing explores levels of knowledge of key governance issues and political participation among radio listeners in Sierra Leone. Regression analyses were used to establish associations between listenership and levels of knowledge of key governance issues and political participation. This enabled us to remove other potential competing explanations for the outcomes, such as respondents' social and demographic characteristics.

BBC Media Action has produced and aired programming in Sierra Leone since 2008. As part of a five-year Global Grant project funded by the Department for International Development (DFID), BBC Media Action currently produces two nationally broadcast radio programmes: the magazine show *Fo Rod (Crossroads)* and the debate programme *Tok Bot Salone (Talk About Sierra Leone)*.

The intended impact of both programmes is “more accountable, peaceful and inclusive state society relations in Sierra Leone”. To achieve this, the programmes work to help people to engage in constructive dialogue and debate, and to support greater demand for improved services and equitable decision making from government.¹ Both programmes aim to achieve audience-level change based on two specific outcomes: increasing knowledge on key governance issues and increasing political participation. Greater knowledge on governance issues is seen as key to enabling people to engage meaningfully in debate on issues that matter to them, and this debate (which itself is a form of political participation) is the next step in enabling citizens to hold their leaders to account.

Magazine and debate programmes in Sierra Leone

Fo Rod is an hour-long weekly magazine programme broadcast live from Freetown on Friday evenings (at the time the survey was completed in 2013). Government officials, service providers, community organisations and leaders are invited on the programme to discuss a range of issues. Listeners are able to call or text the programme to pose questions to guests.

At the time of the survey in 2013, *Tok Bot Salone* was a twice-monthly debate programme which travelled throughout Sierra Leone. Government officials, service providers, community officials and leaders appeared as panellists to discuss particular topics in front of a live audience. The audience were able to pose questions to panellists; questions are not screened in advance.²



A special episode of Tok Bot Salone recorded for TV ahead of the 2012 presidential and parliamentary elections – with BBC Media Action presenter Edward Kargbo.

Tok Bot Salone listeners show greater levels of knowledge and participation

Compared with non-listeners, regular listeners to *Tok Bot Salone* were more likely to report higher levels of knowledge of key governance issues and more frequent political participation.

People who regularly listened to *Tok Bot Salone*, and those who regularly listened to *Tok Bot Salone* and also listened to *Fo Rod*, were more likely to

report substantial knowledge of key governance issues than those who did not listen.

People who regularly listened to *Tok Bot Salone*, and those who regularly listened to *Tok Bot Salone* and also listened to *Fo Rod*, were more likely to participate politically than those who did not listen.

Defining key governance issues

The programmes have aimed to increase knowledge of a range of governance issues over the lifetime of the project. In the year preceding our survey, the programmes regularly focused on four specific issues: political party agendas, women's rights, corruption, and water and electricity service delivery. These issues were seen as significant given the November 2012 general and local elections, the marginalisation of women within society, a lack of basic services and the endemic corruption that often affects access to these services. In the survey, respondents were asked to assess how much they felt they knew about these issues, in terms of the current situation, the background and causes. People's responses across these questions were then combined into a scale to reflect levels of self-reported knowledge.³

Among those surveyed, levels of self-reported knowledge on key governance issues were low with 40% reporting only a small level of knowledge on the issues asked about. These respondents said they knew only "a fair amount" on the current situation and background of one of the four issues.

Defining political participation

Political participation was measured using a scale that included respondents' reports on whether they had taken part in an organised effort to solve a problem, contacted a national or local government official or attended a local council meeting.⁴ Respondents were asked if they had done any of these activities in the last year and, if so, whether they had done them once or several times.

According to our survey results, political participation is high. Approximately 75% of respondents reported participating occasionally or frequently in the past year. This is not unusual for Sierra Leone, where engagement in political processes is high – for example, voter turnout in the Presidential Elections was 68% in 2007 and rose to 91% in 2012.⁵

Changing context

Since this survey and analysis was conducted, Sierra Leone has faced an Ebola epidemic. The information provided in BBC Media Action programmes and within the media more generally has subsequently changed to ensure that people are provided with the necessary knowledge on how to prevent and treat the virus. Political participation is also likely to have changed during this epidemic. In July 2014, the government banned all public gatherings not related to Ebola response or sensitisation activities and so key elements of our political participation definition – for example, attended a local council meeting – are currently not possible for the population.

Research methodology

In 2013, midway through the Global Grant project, BBC Media Action conducted a nationally representative survey of approximately 4,390 people across Sierra Leone to understand their knowledge of the key governance issues outlined above, their perceptions of current political issues and government, and their political behaviour and media consumption habits.

This paper uses the data from this survey to explore the following research questions:

Is listening to BBC Media Action programming in Sierra Leone statistically associated with increased levels of knowledge on women's rights, political party agendas, corruption, and water and electricity service delivery?

Is listening to BBC Media Action programming in Sierra Leone statistically associated with more frequent political participation?

Research approach

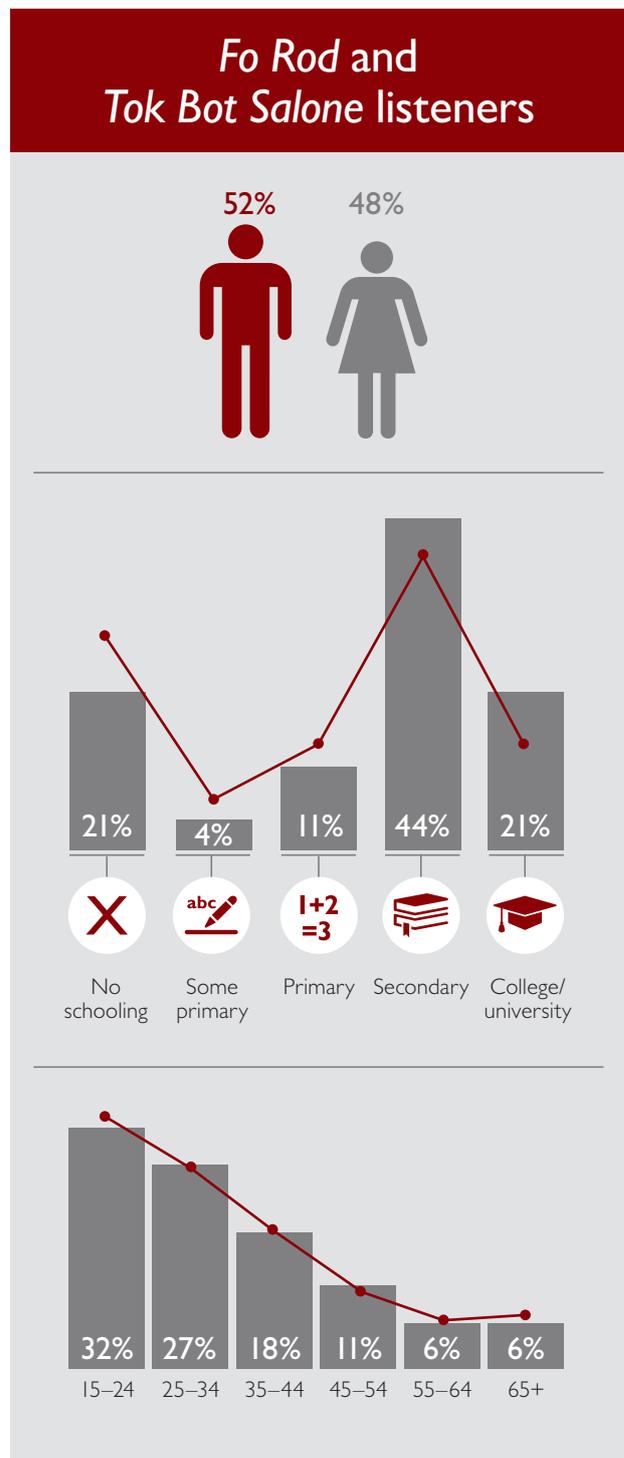
As the people who listen to programmes like *Tok Bot Salone* and *Fo Rod* tend to vary from those who do not listen, it may be these characteristics that also influence their political knowledge and behaviours. For example, someone who is more educated may be more likely to tune into BBC Media Action programmes and also more likely to have higher levels of knowledge or be more politically active. For an examination of how listenership is associated with knowledge and political participation, it is therefore important to remove the distorting effects of these characteristics. To do this, we used regression analyses, which allow us to control for the social and demographic characteristics that we know can affect our outcomes. This allows us to have more confidence in any associations made between listening to BBC Media Action programmes and levels of knowledge and participation.⁶

In this analysis, we have looked at those who regularly listened to *Tok Bot Salone*, and then those who regularly listened to *Tok Bot Salone* and who listened to *Fo Rod*. Our comparison group for the analysis was those who had access to media but did not listen to the programmes. Media access is defined as having access to television, radio, internet or newspapers in the home or elsewhere. Those with media access represent approximately 84% of the population of Sierra Leone.⁷

Who is listening?

Both *Fo Rod* and *Tok Bot Salone* are broadcast nationally across Sierra Leone. In 2013, together the programmes reached a total of 827,000 people or 27% of the adult population (aged 15 and over) with access to media in Sierra Leone. Of the total listeners, approximately 706,000 people listened to one or both programmes regularly.

The audience profile for BBC Media Action listeners is more educated than the sample population with media access: in total, 65% of listeners had completed secondary or college/university education, compared with 51% of the sample population with media access.



What impact did the programme have on listeners?

Impact on knowledge on key governance issues

Both *Tok Bot Salone* and *Fo Rod* aim to raise levels of knowledge on key governance issues by addressing topics in detail and enabling audiences to ask questions to those appearing on the programmes. Our regression analysis found that there was an association between listening to BBC programmes and levels of knowledge on key governance issues.

- People who regularly listened to *Tok Bot Salone* were more likely to report moderate and substantial knowledge, rather than low knowledge, across political party agendas, women’s rights, water and electricity service delivery and corruption, compared with people who did not listen to the programme.
- People who regularly listened to *Tok Bot Salone* and listened to *Fo Rod* as well were more likely to report substantial knowledge, rather than low knowledge, compared with those who did not listen.



Radio Gbafth, one of BBC Media Action’s partner radio stations that broadcasts *Tok Bot Salone* and *Fo Rod*.

- People who had listened to both *Tok Bot Salone* and *Fo Rod* were more likely to have substantial knowledge, rather than moderate knowledge, compared with those who did not listen.
- Overall, our results suggest a trend of higher levels of perceived knowledge with more exposure to our programmes in Sierra Leone. Those who listened to *Tok Bot Salone*, or *Tok Bot Salone* and *Fo Rod*, were more likely to have substantial knowledge, rather than moderate or low knowledge, of the key governance issues compared with non-listeners.

Table 1: Knowledge of key governance issues⁸

Level of listenership	Level of knowledge on key governance issues (comparing level of knowledge of listeners with non-listeners)					
	Moderate knowledge rather than low knowledge		Substantial knowledge rather than low knowledge		Substantial knowledge rather than moderate knowledge	
	How much more likely?	Significant	How much more likely?	Significant	How much more likely?	Significant
Regularly listens to <i>Tok Bot Salone</i>	2.0	Yes***	2.7	Yes***	1.1	No*
Regularly listens to <i>Tok Bot Salone</i> and listens to <i>Fo Rod</i>	2.1	No*	4.0	Yes***	2.4	Yes***

How to read this table: The “How much more likely?” column indicates how likely someone is to have a specific level of knowledge compared with those who did not listen. The significant column details the degree of confidence we have that the finding did or did not occur by chance in our data. The more asterisks the more confident we are in the odds ratio: *** indicates 99% confidence, ** indicates 95% confidence and * indicates 90% confidence. We consider results significant at a 95% level of confidence.



BBC Media Action's Edward Kargbo interviewing Olara Otunnu, Chairperson of the Commonwealth Observer Group, observing the 2012 presidential and parliamentary elections.

While the associations are positive, there are two results that are not significant (see Table I): (i) regularly listening to *Tok Bot Salone*, as well as listening to *Fo Rod*, and having moderate rather than low knowledge; (ii) only listening to *Tok Bot Salone* and having substantial rather than moderate knowledge. This means we cannot be sure that these two findings (although positive) are not due to chance.

Audience research conducted in 2012 and 2013 provides some insights into the ways in which *Fo Rod* and *Tok Bot Salone* are increasing knowledge among listeners. Participants in listening groups on the programmes said that they felt both programmes provided information relevant to their lives and raised their awareness around the challenges they faced on a daily basis. For example, youths remarked positively on an episode of *Fo Rod* that focused on the Constitutional Review, a process that they said they had not heard of before listening to the programme. Others mentioned episodes of *Tok Bot Salone* that had taught them about the rights of women in relation to land:

“By listening to this programme, I have come to understand clearly that women too should be involved in the discussion and distribution of land.”

Participant, audience research 2013

Impact on political participation

In the theoretical model for our programmes, knowledge of key governance issues is one prerequisite to effective and engaged political participation. Preliminary statistical tests on our data suggest that there is a statistical relationship between knowledge and political participation.⁹ This is supported by our qualitative work where participants spoke of how programmes had provided them with information that enabled them to exercise their rights at the point of service delivery:

“Based on the awareness I had from the previous programme (Free Health Care) I had to turn down a request made by some nurses who delivered my brother's wife's baby. These nurses demanded from us the sum of Le40,000 (£6) for their service. I had to tell them that we are not paying a cent for the service as it falls under the free health care package. They then handed over the baby to us and we went home without paying.”

Participant, audience research 2012

Our regression analyses tried to establish whether there was a statistical relationship between listening to our programmes and reported political participation in the whole population of media users. The analyses found:

- People who regularly listened to *Tok Bot Salone* were more likely to report participating frequently in politics, rather than not participating, through contacting a national or local official, taking part in an organised effort to solve a problem and/or attending a local council meeting, compared with people who did not listen to the programme.
- People who regularly listened to *Tok Bot Salone* and listened to *Fo Rod* were more likely to report participating frequently in politics, rather than not participating, compared with those who did not listen.
- People who listened to both *Tok Bot Salone* and *Fo Rod* were more likely to report participating frequently rather than occasionally in politics, compared with those who did not listen.
- People who listened to both *Tok Bot Salone* and *Fo Rod* were more likely to report participating frequently in politics, compared with people who only listened to *Tok Bot Salone*.
- Overall, our results show that there is a significant association between frequent political participation and listening to BBC Media Action programmes in Sierra Leone. Those who listened to *Tok Bot Salone*, or *Tok Bot Salone* and *Fo Rod*, were more likely to report participating frequently in politics, compared with non-listeners.



BBC Media Action's Amadu Sandy interviewing a member of the African Union Elections Observation Mission during the 2012 elections.

Table 2: Political participation¹⁰

Level of listenership	Level of political participation (comparing level of participation of listeners with non-listeners)					
	Occasional political participation rather than no participation		Frequent political participation rather than no participation		Frequent participation rather than occasional participation	
	How much more likely?	Significant	How much more likely?	Significant	How much more likely?	Significant
Regularly listens to <i>Tok Bot Salone</i>	1.3	No	1.7	Yes**	1.2	No
Regularly listens to <i>Tok Bot Salone</i> and listens to <i>Fo Rod</i>	1.1	No	2.7	Yes***	3.0	Yes***

How to read this table: The “How much more likely?” column indicates how likely someone is to perform a behaviour compared with those who did not listen. The significant column details the degree of confidence we have that the finding did or did not occur by chance in our data. The more asterisks the more confident we are in the odds ratio: *** indicates 99% confidence, ** indicates 95% confidence and * indicates 90% confidence. Results without an asterisk indicate less than 90% confidence. We consider results significant at a 95% level of confidence.

These results are less consistent than those for knowledge of key governance issues. The relationship between listening to the programmes and occasional participation was not significant. In addition, the association between listening to the programmes and frequent participation rather than occasional participation was only significant for people who listened to both *Tok Bot Salone* and *Fo Rod*.

The lack of a strong and significant association between listening to the programmes and occasionally participating may be due to the fact that people who participate only occasionally do so for very different reasons, which are not necessarily reinforced or influenced by exposure to *Tok Bot Salone*, *Fo Rod*

or other forms of media. In addition, it may be that the category of ‘occasional participation’ was not sufficiently different from that of ‘no participation’ to see any effect from programme exposure.

Alternatively, it may be that the groups that were significantly different from each other (no participation vs frequent participation) were due to members of those groups being different on a variety of other characteristics that were not accounted for in this analysis; significant associations may simply have reflected these characteristics. The analysis not fully accounting for differences between listeners and non-listeners also offers a potential alternative explanation for the findings about knowledge.

Implications

The findings presented here provide evidence of a relationship between listening to *Tok Bot Salone* and *Fo Rod* and knowledge of key governance issues and political participation in Sierra Leone in 2013.

This analysis was not designed to causally attribute impact on governance outcomes and does not demonstrate that listening leads to improvement in levels of knowledge of key governance issues or increases in political participation.¹¹ Further analysis would be needed to explore why levels of exposure interacted differently with people on different levels of the political participation and knowledge scales.

Nevertheless, at the point in the Global Grant at which this analysis was conducted, these results were encouraging. This is particularly true when viewed alongside our qualitative insights, which demonstrate

how, for individuals, the programmes are making a real difference to their knowledge and the ways in which they are able to participate and exercise their rights.

This analysis is part of an overall assessment of how BBC Media Action interventions contribute to key outcomes on a range of behaviours. The results presented here are an initial look at a specific country context and provide a credible indication of impact through the removal of potential competing explanations. Similar analysis is currently being conducted for other country programmes and the results will be looked at, in terms of consistency and replicability of results, alongside other qualitative and quantitative analysis to establish a case for impact – specifically that BBC Media Action programmes lead to stronger performance on our key outcomes.

Endnotes

¹ Sierra Leone Country Information Planning Sheet, 2012.

² The format of *Tok Bot Salone* changed in August 2014 as the Ebola outbreak in Sierra Leone led the government to ban public gatherings not related to Ebola response or sensitisation. The programme also changed to accommodate more issues related to Ebola. In addition, audience members now share their questions with producers before the programme. Producers may help audience members keep their questions short and focused. *Fo Rod* continues to keep the same format and broadcast slot.

³ There was a factual quiz within the questionnaire, where respondents were asked to answer the following questions: “Who is the party with most members in parliament?” “What is the minimum voting age?” “Who decides whether a law is constitutional?” “What is Chief Samuel Sam-Sumana’s job?” On a scale developed for these questions, most participants scored highly (72% scored high or very high), meaning the scale was not sufficiently discriminative for this type of analysis and therefore may not have captured the full range of political knowledge in the population.

⁴ Political participation is an average of four items, which is then divided into even bands, with the lowest band representing those who have not participated at all. Knowledge on key governance issues is an average of eight items. Thresholds for banding are based on the overall distribution of these items for all eight countries with baseline governance surveys. For further detail on this measure, please see *The Challenges of Designing a Cross-Cultural Measure of Political Participation*, which is available on request.

⁵ Full information on voter turnout in Sierra Leone is available here: <http://www.idea.int/vt/countryview.cfm?CountryCode=SL>

⁶ Further details on regression and the process followed for this piece of analysis can be found in the Technical Appendix, which is available on request.

⁷ Those without access to media have been excluded from this analysis as they differed significantly from media users on key governance measures, including political participation and knowledge. By excluding those with notably different media consumption and political behaviours we are ensuring that the groups we are comparing are as similar as possible.

⁸ This analysis removed the distorting effects of education, income, province, perception of freedom, media consumption, group membership and ethnicity. Characteristics such as political interest, self-efficacy, collective efficacy, discursive participation and political knowledge were not included in this analysis, as we believe our programmes work in conjunction with these characteristics to achieve outcomes such as participation and knowledge.

⁹ Political participation was significantly correlated with self-reported knowledge on key governance issues with Spearman’s rho (0.246).

¹⁰ This analysis removed the distorting effects of education, gender, income, literacy, location, province, perception of freedom, group membership and ethnicity. Characteristics such as political interest, self-efficacy, collective efficacy, discursive participation and political knowledge were not included in this analysis, as we believe our programmes work in conjunction with these characteristics to achieve outcomes such as participation and knowledge.

¹¹ As the data is from a cross-sectional survey, this analysis does not provide evidence of whether exposure to BBC Media Action programming determines knowledge of key governance issues or political participation. To establish these effects, we would need the support of a longitudinal and/or an experimental design.

BBC Media Action is registered in England & Wales under Charity Commission number 1076235 and Company number 3521587.

Registered office: Broadcasting House, Portland Place, London W1A 1AA, United Kingdom