
Star Radio

Key to the Practice of Democracy in Liberia
Liberia 2009



At the market in Monrovia, Photo Michael Whaite

STAR radio provides Liberia with independent news and information¹⁴ and a half hours a day, much of it live. It broadcasts news summaries every hour. Popular programs include I Beg to Differ, People Talk, Women's Special, We Too Have A Voice, Media Watch, Farmers' Forum, Ask the Expert, STAR Contact (guests seek to restore contacts with missing relatives), Let's Find Out, I Remember, Business World, among many others. STAR radio reaches approximately 60% of the estimated 3.6 million people in Liberia via FM 104 and is rebroadcast by six affiliate FM stations. STAR radio's website, www.starradio.org.lr receives 40,000 visits a month. STAR has approximately one million listeners, representing about 25% of the national listening market.

Prior to the vicious conflicts that gripped the country between 1989 and 2003, Liberia enjoyed relative social stability and economic progress. Recovery is on-going, but the economy operates at only about one-third of its pre-war level and overall Liberia remains one of the poorest countries in the world. STAR radio plays a key role in the everyday practice of democracy in Liberia. STAR has "stringers" reporting from every part of the country and STAR broadcasts in a multitude of languages, including Liberian English, English, French, and 16 local languages. Ordinary people voice their opinions in public forums, political debates, and interviews. Through this, STAR affirms the value of diversity in a culture recently ravaged by conflict. In May 2008 the Press Union of Liberia (PUL) chose STAR radio, Inc. for its Best Radio Station of the Year Award. STAR's reporters Bruce Boweh and Vivian Gartayn won the Best Judicial Reporter Award and Best Newscaster Award, respectively.

Star radio was built by *Fondation Hironnelle* in 1997 but it was shut down for political reasons by former President Charles Taylor in 2000. STAR was re-launched by *Fondation Hironnelle* in 2005. The main donors have been the UK, EU, Luxembourg, Norway, the Netherlands, and more recently Humanity United in the US. Since 2008, the radio is managed by STAR radio, Inc. and has a 100% Liberian staff, diversity among its audience base, digital equipment and modern studios, as well as an effective advertising sales force.

The name of the station was chosen by George Bennett, former head of the BBC African Service, who designed the STAR project. "STAR" is a recognized brand name; its "rebirth" remains symbolically important to the Liberian people.

STAR radio, Inc. has a public service mandate and pursues fee-for-service activities to generate income to cover its expenses. It has developed innovative income-generating services and can now cover a significant portion of its budget through advertising and sponsorship and by serving as a regional journalist training center where interns focus on newsgathering, news writing, and production activities. Over 70 journalists from the region trained at STAR in 2008.