

How media and community platforms empower citizens to demand transparency in Sierra Leone's mining sector

BBC Media Action's 'Supporting Media for Transparency and Accountability in Natural Resource Governance' in Sierra Leone sought to strengthen transparency, accountability, and citizen participation in the extractive industries. Stories written by journalists amplified community voices and helped translate complex issues into narratives that supported civic action. Audiences said that hearing directly from officials and mining companies on the Town Hall Debates and radio programmes helped them to question authority and push for transparency.

Project Context

Sierra Leone's mining industry is a cornerstone of the national economy, with diamonds, rutile, bauxite, and iron ore driving growth and employment. Yet weak regulatory enforcement, corporate influence, and the technical complexity of mining operations often exclude communities from meaningful participation in governance. Citizens face environmental degradation, land disputes, and corruption without adequate platforms to express grievances or hold authorities accountable.

To bridge this divide, BBC Media Action's project combined journalist training with community-focused platforms to strengthen accountability in the extractive sector.

Eighteen fellows received advanced investigative and ethical reporting skills training to produce 15 in-depth stories on governance, corruption, land rights, and environmental impacts.

Six in-person Town Hall Debates (and radio broadcasts) across mining districts brought communities, authorities, mining companies, and civil society together to air grievances, co-create solutions, and reinforce commitments to transparency and accountability.

Research methodology

A qualitative evaluation was conducted between October 2025 to January 2026 to assess the impact of the journalist training and media programming, including Town Hall Debates and radio broadcasts, on dialogue, participation, and accountability in Sierra Leone's mining districts. Key informant and in-depth interviews were conducted with:

- **6 journalists** from partner radio stations who received capacity strengthening.
- **8 trained fellows** who featured as case studies of investigative reporting.
- **30 community members** (male and female youth, adults, and marginalized groups) who attended or listened to Town Hall Debates.
- **10 stakeholders** (civil society leaders, local authorities, government officials, and mining company representatives) who engaged in the debates.

KEY FINDINGS

Journalists improved their investigative reporting

Journalists who received training reported stronger investigative and ethical reporting skills. They explained that the mentorship and support enabled them to produce stories that covered complex governance issues in an accessible manner for ordinary citizens. Their reports highlighted underreported issues such as corruption, land rights, child labour, and environmental degradation.

"The stories gave us the evidence we needed to push for change. We were no longer just complaining we had facts and examples that authorities couldn't ignore."

Female Journalist, Kono.

Journalists also emphasized their commitment to integrity, rejecting bribes and maintaining neutrality even under pressure from powerful interests. This strengthened public trust in media as a watchdog institution.

Community Engagement and Participation

Community members described the Town Hall Debates and radio programmes as spaces where they could learn about the environmental and social impacts of mining. They valued these platforms for giving them a voice and for including women, youth, and marginalized groups in conversations that had long excluded them.

"For the first time, we had a platform where our voices could be heard by those who make decisions about our land and our future."

Female youth, Moyamba.

Participants explained that direct engagement with officials and mining companies during the debates allowed them to question authority and press for transparency. Stakeholders also valued the format for creating open, clearer communication.

"The Town Hall Debates helped us understand community grievances more clearly. They gave us a chance to respond and explain our responsibilities."

Mining Representative, Kono.

Civic Action

The research found that the journalists' investigative stories resulted in several concrete changes in communities.

Reporting on illegal sand mining became a turning point for community oversight, bringing the issue into public view and the

Environmental Protection Agency and National Disaster Management Agency. Interviews with stakeholders confirmed that his coverage triggered institutional action.

"The report on illegal sand mining compelled us to act, it highlighted the urgency and made enforcement unavoidable". KII, Mining representative, Sierra Rutile, Moyamba.

Coverage of child labour in stone quarries sparked public outrage and advocacy for stronger child protection laws, highlighting the link between mining practices and school dropouts.

In Yielleh, reporting on illegal dredge mining, mobilized residents to form WhatsApp groups and draft community bylaws to curb harmful practices.

These cases illustrate how media content not only raised awareness but also catalyzed civic action and pressured authorities to respond to governance failures.

Key implications

The qualitative endline evaluation findings demonstrate that media-driven approaches effectively promote awareness, citizen engagement, and accountability in Sierra Leone's extractive sector.

Future initiatives should build on the project's successes as well as establish systems to track outcomes and sustain impact beyond the initial intervention. It should aim to address ongoing challenges in environment, education, and infrastructure that is essential for long-term progress.

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