

# Meeting challenges to SAI Independence

## Handling of an attempt to reduce the SAI's operational independence (SAI Sierra Leone)

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In fragile situations, provisions for independence in the SAI legal framework cannot be taken for granted. Following the enactment of the SAI's Act, we at SAI Sierra Leone had enjoyed relative operational independence for a long time. However, in a reform of the wage bill, it was proposed that the SAI be reintegrated into the central payroll as part of a harmonization process.

An appeal was made to the international bodies to make a call for the SAI to be exempted but the international bodies were clearly not interested and did not want to get involved.

At some point, we had to engage the office of the President and it took the intervention of the Attorney General as legal advisor to the Government to send out an eight-page rejoinder to the Ministry of Finance that, to build on the gains made through the SAI's operational independence, the status quo must not change and the SAI must not be integrated into the mainstream public service. The SAI was subsequently exempted as a result of the Attorney General's intervention.

An important lesson learnt was that we cannot always count on international bodies as they may be constrained in some instances to intervene on national issues.

**This shows that SAIs in fragile situations need to be constantly aware of and apt in their response to challenges to independence.**