

TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE REPORTING AUDIT



A Review of Media Coverage of the Truth and Reconciliation Process in Liberia



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▪ **Background**

Liberia's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) offers an opportunity for healing the wounds created by the fifteen years (15) conflict in the country. The TRC created by the Accra Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) was enacted in law in June 2005. By no overstatement, the TRC process is clearly delicate and unless care is taken, the focus might shift from reconciliation to blame shifting, thereby reopening wounds instead of healing them.

Since the process commenced in February 2006, there have been various misconceptions and misunderstanding from various quarters, including the media and the general public, about the work of the commission on one hand and their expectations of it on the other. In this light there have been increased efforts by international and local actors to address potential hindrances to the successful outcome of the TRC process in Liberia. Those interventions have seen remarkable investment in outreach and media related trainings and follow-up activities.

Huge resources have been directed to training Liberian journalists and editors in covering the TRC process. . In March 2006, ICTJ collaborated with the Press Union of Liberia to train local journalists on TRC related issues and share experiences with counterparts from Ghana and Sierra Leone. In January 2007, IMS, ICTJ, TRC, LMC and the Press Union of Liberia (PUL) conducted trainings for some thirty reporters and ten senior editors. The trainings were followed up with a six-month 'Team Reporting' training program for a select number of journalists. In July and August 2007, ICTJ and the BBC World Service Trust conducted trainings in Transitional Justice (TJ) reporting. The trainings targeted roughly forty (40) media personnel. These were media managers, editors, heads of media associations and reporters. All of the trainings were focused on helping journalists to effectively report and cover TJ issues and TRC process specifically- and to do so in a way that brings healing rather than polarization, or blame. Reporters were taught to deal with such raw, emotional issues and still report in a responsible, balanced, accurate and fair way.

It is barely five months since the last training was conducted and the media is now faced with the task of reporting a very crucial process that certainly underpins national healing, recovery and development.

It is against this backdrop that this present initiative was borne. It aims to promoting accountability within the media through independent monitoring of the performance of the media during the TRC process. The media must be able to report the process responsibly bearing in mind the implications and potential fallouts negative coverage could cause the process and by extension the country's national recovery efforts.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

On January 8, 2008, the LMC began monitoring and documenting the news coverage of three (3) radio stations and six (6) newspapers covering the TRC process in Liberia, as a voluntary self-funded initiative. The monitoring coincided with the commencement of the TRC Public Hearings in Monrovia. The three (3) stations which include *Radio Veritas*, *ELBC Radio* and *Truth FM* are amongst seven FM stations broadcasting news and information from Monrovia. The six (6) newspaper monitored are amongst eight regularly published dailies and include, *New Democrat*, *The Analyst*, *The Inquirer*, *The News*, *Daily Observer* and *Heritage*. Following the first month of the monitoring exercise, the project included a fourth station, *Star Radio* and two (2) more newspapers, *Public Agenda* (a tri-weekly) and the *National Chronicle* (a daily).

Under a grant from UNESCO Paris and financial and technical support from the ICTJ, the exercise is envisioned to last for the entire period of the TRC hearings. The project seeks to document all TRC news items aired by the various radio stations and all articles published by the various newspapers in the view of assessing the quality of coverage, the amount of space and prominence the various media accord the TRC process, journalists' adherence to the Press Union of Liberia Code of Ethics and the TRC Code of Conduct for Journalists¹. The project hopes that the findings and recommendations in this report will be used to address the professional issues raised as well as giving due attention to gaps mentioned in TRC related reporting.

This report constitutes a partial assessment and applies only to the period monitored and a prelude to a more elaborate publication that would ultimately document all the experiences and summary of the coverage in a hard back publication to be released following the close of the public hearings.

As the start of this project was quite tedious, the broadcast media was randomly monitored in January, meaning not all TRC related news information were captured and the project hopes performance will be appraised with such understanding. The print media was fully monitored and the report presents an accurate and conclusive picture of the sector's performance.

To accomplish the task of producing this quality of work, a number of media institutions were quite helpful in assisting the LMC with copies of their publications whilst others flatly refused.

¹ The Press Union of Liberia and the International Centre for Transitional Justice started a process of developing Code of Conduct for journalists who will cover the TRC process in March 2006. In March/April 2007, that Code of Conduct was jointly agreed upon by the PUL and the TRC as a basis for journalists covering the process.

1.1 Why Monitor Media Coverage?

The role of media in promoting social change has been widely documented and universally proven. To check the influence media have on society, governments and interest groups have historically fought to restrain the free space under which the media operate and keep the sector at bay. Where free media thrive, there have been greater prospects for democratic governance and the reverse has seen greater repression.

Media freedom has been a long running battle in undemocratic societies and to some extent in societies espousing democratic tenets. Nevertheless, in contrast, media accountability has more or less been on the back-burner as opposed to media freedom and pluralism.

While freedom of the press is essential to the cultivation of a democratic culture, it is only fair for the media to labor in overcoming obstacles to fair, independent, balanced and accurate presentation of news and information. Media reports must not be misleading and journalists should strive to live by standards set by the profession, regardless of the economic condition under which they must work.

To ensure adherence to professional conduct, it is important for independent monitoring of media reports to be undertaken on thematic issues and subjects of national and international considerations. Hence, it is crucial for such exercise to continue in other areas of media reporting to develop the overall standards of journalism and promote increased accountability to standards and ethics in the post-conflict period.

The media must always ensure equal access to all sectors of the population and provide balanced perspective to issues and events. The media can not afford to be corrupted and will need to act in manners and ways that demonstrate independence and professional conduct.

Monitoring the media coverage of one of the core activities (hearings) of the TRC process constitutes an inaugural step in assessing the media more empirically. Though a number of institutions have evaluated the performance of the media in the past, never has such organized quantitative and qualitative examination taken place. This research is the first comprehensive empirical evaluation of the performance of the media. It seeks not to condemn the media's coverage of the TRC process but to rather provide a barometer for media houses to examine their performance and adopt measures that would improve them.

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1.2 Summary of Findings

The results of this study are not intended to stimulate undue competition amongst media houses but to rather help them improve their performance. Overall, the media should be commended for generally staying above the fray in the coverage of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Most of the language used in the various newspapers and on radio reflects the language of the TRC. Generally speaking, the media succeeded in keeping with terms to the TRC Code of Conduct for Journalists.

On the average, the radio sector dominated the print media by ensuring that news and information were thoroughly balanced in a 2-1 ratio. In some instances listed in the report, most of the covered news items from both the print and broadcast media violated Article 12 and 23 of the Press Union of Liberia Code of Conduct “Journalists should not publish or broadcast any report or write-up affecting the reputation of an individual or an organization without a chance to reply. That is unfair and should be avoided”. Most of those accused during public hearings were not contacted for reaction, while some of the accused voluntarily reacted but their responses to the allegations received little prominence compared to when the story was first told. Journalists in very rare instances utilized information regarding the mandate, structure, functions and general legal framework of the Commission in providing context to testimony, emerging developments and stories.

There were very minimum follow-ups, and where they were made, ‘big names’ were the subject. A repeated example in this research is the story regarding the involvement of a famed musician and current Executive Mansion Aide, Sundaygar Dearboy extensively followed-up by the media.

For Newspapers, the *New Democrat* should be congratulated for devoting the most space and conducting follow-ups on a number of their reports and the quality of their newspaper. However, the paper should strive to clearly delineate its news from its opinion pages. In covering the Charles Taylor Trial and TRC, it is hard to tell when a story is news or opinion. News stories are often linked to feature pages and do sometimes take the form of opinions, with a visible slant seen in some of its coverage.

The paper published more gruesome pictures than all the newspapers combined. While this might not constitute a clear violation of the Press Union Code of Conduct, “publications of these pictures are trauma striking and could revive wounds” says the Press Union of Liberia (PUL) Secretary General, Peter Quaqua².

² The Press Union of Liberia before the commencement of public hearings warned journalists to be mindful of not “reminding people of the country gruesome past” in their news report on the TRC, a warning the *New Democrat* has effectively downplayed.

The *Daily Observer*, *The News* and *The Inquirer* and *Heritage*, made commendable strives to flag TRC stories but once the hearings took to rural Liberia, most of these papers, though with correspondents in the field, devoted very minimum attention to the TRC hearings.

The Commission should share part of the blame for what seems an uncoordinated rural media campaign. The Commission told the LMC, it invited several papers, but most of the newspapers said they did not receive invitations, those that did, received theirs on the eve or day of departure. It acknowledged that UNMIL Radio had agreed to cover the rural hearings and as such it only dealt with community based radio. This was a flawed strategy that should be addressed in subsequent coverage, as unlike the print, the broadcast media is the most viable and highly penetrating medium especially for a predominately non-lettered population.

Overall, the print media devoted just 4.8% of its total content space to news on the TRC process in Liberia for the two months period³. The overall quality of stories, investigation and reports need to be enhanced.

For the broadcast media, *Radio Veritas* was exceptional. Overall, the broadcast sector did well compared to the print sector especially as it relates to diversity in coverage. Combined, the radio sector devoted 12.1 % of the airtime to TRC related news and information. Covering four radio stations, the broadcast sector produced roughly thirty-nine (39) thoroughly balanced articles against the print media's twenty-nine (29) which accounts for eight newspapers. The plus notwithstanding, the broadcast media had serious problems in meeting up with their broadcast schedule. ELBC and Truth FM failed to air seventy-five (75) and forty-five (45) of their news bulletins respectively. *Radio Veritas* had a clean sheet for both months, while *Star Radio* had faults with twenty-two broadcasts.

³ Refer to chapter 2 for details of factors surrounding low print media coverage.

1.3 Objective of the Study

A. General

The general objective of the exercise was to monitor and evaluate media coverage of the TRC public hearings and assess how the coverage affects public appreciation of the process.

B. Specific

The research was conducted in line with the following specific objectives:

1. To monitor the overall quality of media reports of the TRC public hearings process
2. To gauge the overall level of media understanding of the TRC process and legal, institutional framework
3. To assess the depth of relevance the involved media institutions were devoting to TRC related stories
4. To highlight the amount of space the involved media institutions were devoting to TRC related stories
5. To assess the depth of investigation, follow-up and interrogation into TRC stories and reports
6. To monitor adherence to the PUL Code of Ethics and the TRC code of conduct for journalists
7. To assess the impact various trainings conducted prior to the project had had on the conduct and performance of the journalists

1.4 Scope of Monitoring

This project will closely monitor and evaluate the performance of eight (8) newspapers and four radio stations based in Monrovia till July 2008. The project reviewed three (3) stations in January and four (4) in February. It assessed six (6) newspapers in January and eight (8) in February. All media reviewed during the first month were maintained with addition of one (1) more radio station and two (2) newspapers. Broadcast institutions reviewed during the period included *Radio Veritas*, *Truth FM*, *ELBC*, and *Star Radio*. Print institutions reviewed during the period were *The Analyst*, *The News*, *Daily Observer*, *The Inquirer*, *New Democrat*, *Public Agenda*, *National Chronicle* and the *Heritage*. The exercise was restricted to media based in Monrovia due to lack of logistics and resources in tracking coverage of community based radio outside Monrovia. For its final hard back publication, the project will conduct a “perception study” on public view of the TRC process and the performance of the media. The result of this research will form an integral part of that publication.

1.5 Methodology

Desk review of newspapers and review of recorded news and information items were the methods used for collecting data. The monitoring targeted the TRC public hearings but attention was also accorded all TRC related stories including press statements, letters, talk shows, debates and commentaries. The papers were reviewed both qualitatively and quantitatively; likewise the radio stations. During this period, monitors use specific topics codes. These codes represented different actors and subjects in the TRC process.

Space allotment in coverage was derived from examining the total available space in the publication or news broadcast against the total relevant space allotted to the subject. Trends in coverage, common errors, misplaced categorization, and adherence to best practices like the TRC Code of Conduct for journalists were scrupulously monitored. A total of seven (7) monitors were involved with the project, three (3) monitoring the print media and four (4) to the broadcast media. Tables in the annex of this report illustrate how space and time calculations were carried out. It is important to note that some of the interpretations provided by the authors of this report are based on individual observations and comments from other institutions closely following the media and corroborated by common trends and patterns observed by the monitoring. However, the LMC takes full responsibility for this report.

CHAPTER TWO: NEWSPAPER ASSESSMENT

2.0 Articles Reported

For January, a total of one hundred and fifteen (115) TRC related stories were reported. As shown in Table (1), of the one hundred and fifteen (115) articles reported, *Daily Observer* and *New Democrat* carried twenty two (22) stories each representing the highest total. *The News* and *The Inquirer* share twenty (20) and nineteen (19) respectively while *The Analyst* took seventeen (17) and *Heritage* fifteen (15).

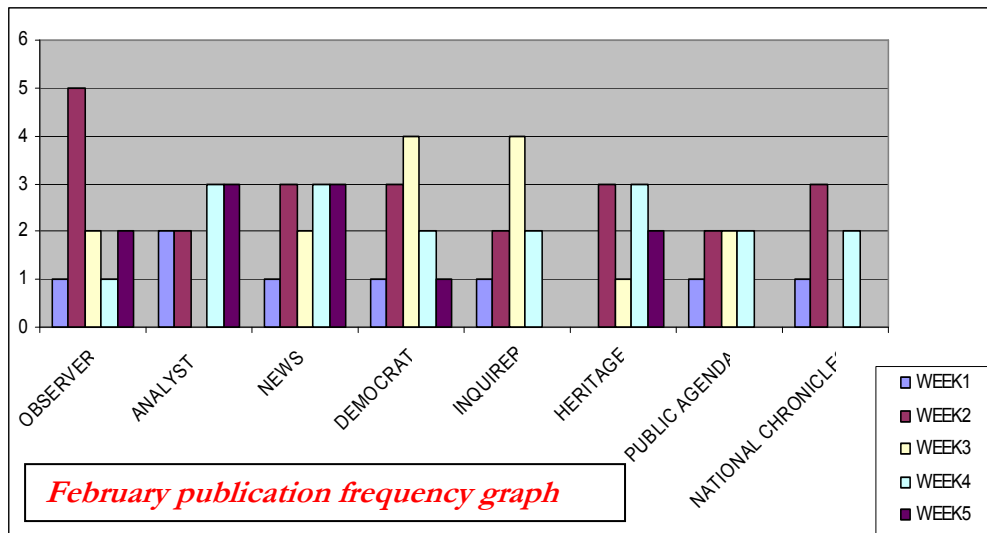
February saw a reduction in news item by roughly 35%. A total of Seventy-six (76) TRC related stories were reported. Of this total, *The News* reported more stories amounting to twelve (12), whilst the *Daily Observer* and *New Democrat* carried eleven (11) stories respectively, *The Analyst* and *The Inquirer* carried ten (10) each and the *Heritage* took nine. *Public Agenda* recorded seven (7) and *National Chronicle* six (6).

Table 1

No.	Newspaper	WEEK 1	WEEK 2	WEEK 3	WEEK 4	Total Article Reported
1	DAILY OBSERVER	6	8	7	1	22
2	THE ANALYST	6	4	6	1	17
3	NEWS	7	8	4	1	20
4	NEW DEMOCRAT	4	6	10	2	22
5	INQUIRER	9	3	5	2	19
6	HERITAGE	4	6	5	0	15
	TOTAL	36	35	37	7	115

The table above shows the number of times TRC stories appeared in each of the newspapers monitored during January

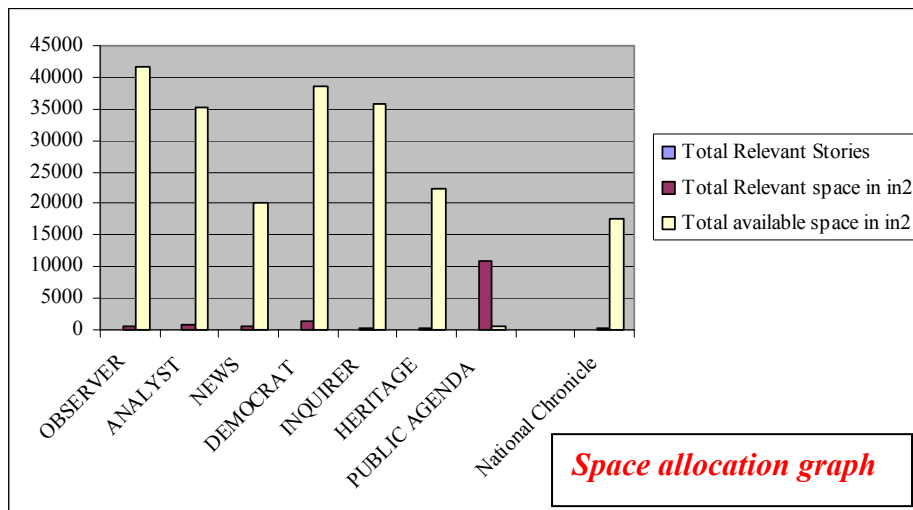
Reading from the results, it is clear that the initial weeks of the hearings recorded huge uptake but coverage fell in the last week of January and first week of February. This might as well be a split period, with the last working week of January essentially falling in the first week of February.



Later in February, as shown in the adjacent graph there was an uptake which later dropped nearly by half till the final week into March. There are a couple of theories that

explain the fluctuation in the numbers. Most obvious is the media fatigue in covering testimonies. As seen in some examples, the lack of follow-up and devotion to finding new angles of human interest made reporting boring and only prominent characters were “seriously” pursued in the follow-ups.

Another reason for the reduction was the movement of the hearings to the interior which essentially cut off a lot of Monrovia based correspondents from the process. Factors surrounding those are elaborated as well in the later sections. Conclusively, the *Daily Observer* and the *New Democrat* carried more articles as compared with other papers. For January, the *Heritage* carried fewer articles⁴ as well as the *National Chronicle* for February.



Essentially what this picture shows is a progressive reduction in the coverage overall. It will interest you to note also that the reduction in the media coverage is not consistent with the flow of witnesses to the hearings. In the closing week of January twenty (20) cases were heard but

media reports in these last few days of January were down to a record low. Again the media institutions monitored generally seems more titled toward prominent names and issues.

2.1 Space Allocation

The one hundred and fifteen (115) relevant stories published by all the newspapers in January took up a total space⁵ of 9675.098 square inches, totaling sixty-six (66) pages against a combined total page of one thousand forty-two (1242). The spaces allotted to the relevant stories by the newspapers in square inches are listed here in descending order: *New Democrat* =2,053.37 ins², *The Analyst*=1716.062 ins², *The News*=1636.776 ins², *Daily Observer*=1429.459 ins², *Heritage*=1567.924 ins² and *Inquirer*=1271.507 ins².

⁴ It is important not to confuse the amount of articles carried against the total amount of space allotted. Some papers carried fewer articles but devoted lot more content space and vice versa.

⁵ Space allotment took into consideration editorial, commentaries, pictures, text as well as headline space. To determine, the three ranking newspaper, the number of articles was assessed first followed by the space allotted TRC issues in a given publication.

For February, the Seventy-six (76) relevant stories published by all the newspapers took up a total space of 4536.24 square inches amounting to total of forty-four (44) pages against a combined total page of 1564. The spaces allotted to the relevant stories by the newspapers in square inches are listed here in descending order: *New Democrat* = 1,443.624 ins², *The Analyst*= 920.124 ins², *Daily Observer*=556.31 ins², *Public Agenda*=543.1 ins², *The News*= 505.933 ins², *Heritage*=416.687 ins², *The Inquirer*= 403.625 ins² and *National Chronicles*=403.374 ins².

What you observe from the reading is an interesting contrast to the previous table. Though *New Democrat* and *Daily Observer* featured more articles, unlike the *Daily Observer* the *New Democrat* had more content space. But *The Analysts*, featuring relatively fewer articles, offered more content space as compared to the *Daily Observer* primarily due to *The Analysts* style of layout. The paper usually devotes huge space to its banner story while the observer share three to four or more stories on its front page. With its seventeen (17) articles in January, *The Analyst* devoted 5.5% of its content space to TRC related stories though it publishes less number of pages as compared to the daily *Observer*.

Table 2

No	Newspaper	Total Relevant Stories in Newspapers	Total Relevant space in Newspapers in square inches (A)	Total available space in Newspapers in square inches (B)	Total pages in Newspapers	Percentage space allocated in Newspapers in square inches (A/B×100)
1	OBSERVER	22	1,429.459	34,795.37	260	4.1
2	ANALYST	17	1,716.062	30,915.5	188	5.5
3	NEWS	20	1,636.776	20,103.55	162	8.1
4	DEMOCRAT	22	2,053.37	32,944	206	6.2
5	INQUIRER	19	1,271.507	34,131.869	258	3.7
6	HERITAGE	15	1,567.924	25,010	168	6.2
TOTAL		115	9,675.098	177,900.28	1,242	

N/B: 'A' represents total relevant space in Newspapers in square inches
 'B' represents total available space in Newspapers in square inches

The table shows the number of relevant items published, the space allocated, space available, and the percentage of space allocated by the newspaper In January

The *New Democrat* which produces almost similar number of news pages devoted 6.2 % of its content space to the TRC, publishing twenty-two (22) articles. And while *The Inquirer* was able to publish more space it carried more articles but devoted comparatively smaller content space to TRC issues as against the *Heritage*, which carried fewer articles but devoted more content space of 6.2% against *The Inquirer* 3.7%.

In February, the scenario repeats itself, with the *New Democrat* taking the lead and *The Analysts* up-taking *The Daily Observer* in space allocation once more, though the latter featured more articles. The same goes for *The Inquirer* and *Heritage*.

One reason that could account for the relatively small amount of space allotted the TRC stories is the overall size of most of the papers. Most dailies are eight to twelve (8-12) pages big. You notice from the graph on the previous page that the legend for the amount of relevant space given to coverage can hardly be seen. This shows that against the total space in all the papers, the TRC relatively received smaller coverage.

Table 3

No	Newspaper	Total Relevant Stories in Newspaper	Total Relevant space in Newspapers in square inches (A)	Total available space in Newspapers in square inches (B)	Total pages in papers	Percentage space allocated in Newspapers in square inches (A/B×100)
1	OBSERVER	11	556.31	41,588.148	308	1.337
2	ANALYST	10	920.124	35,293.5	216	2.607
3	NEWS	12	505.933	20,219.43	168	2.502
4	DEMOCRAT	11	1,443.624	38,694	240	3.730
5	INQUIRER	10	403.625	35,703.119	260	1.130
6	HERITAGE	9	416.687	22,340	152	1.865
7	PUBLIC AGENDA	7	543.187	10,980	84	4.947
8	NATIONAL CHRONICLES	6	403.374	17,595	136	2.292
TOTAL		76	15,629.68	211976.4	1,564	

The table shows the number of relevant items published, the space allocated, space available, and the percentage of space allocated by the newspaper

In the same vein this should not be interpreted to mean that the media did not strive to highlight the TRC. The problem is, the media was simply reporting testimonies,

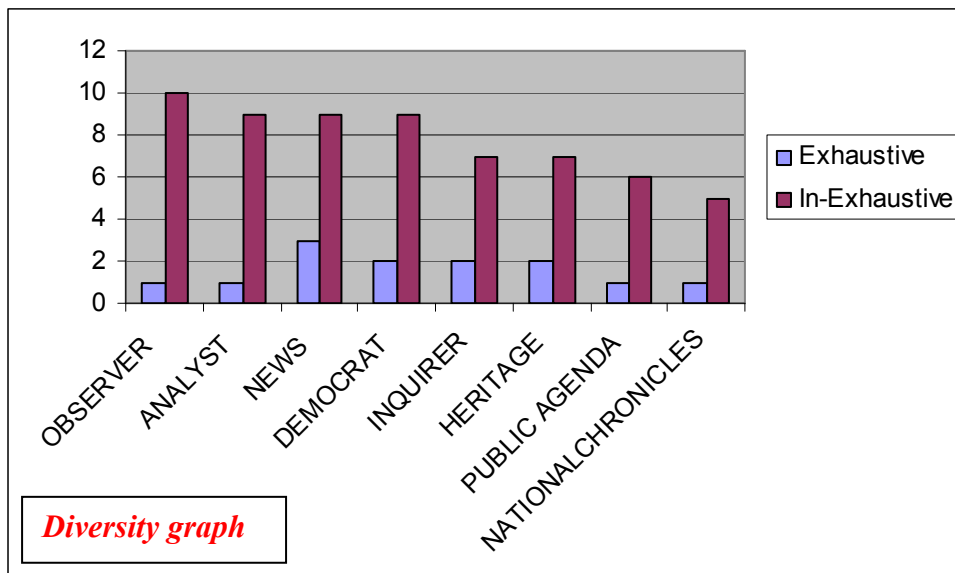
providing limited backgrounds and literally not finding other angles. Most papers were also not fielding public comments and interpretations. Very few outlets were critically reviewing the process through their editorials, commentaries and opinion columns. Of the one hundred fifteen (115) articles reported in January, only six (6) editorials were recorded, with five repeated- totaling eleven recorded.

In February, there were no editorials at all, though it was a period that saw the resignation of Bishop Alfred Kulah and the reported altercation between two Commissioners (Massa Washington and Cllr. Pearl Bull at hearings in Rivergee County). But the papers brought the issue to fore in their March publications. In fact, no newspaper monitored wrote more than two editorials on the process in January and few devoted space for commentaries, notably the *Daily Observer*.

The *New Democrat* for example, covered an extensive follow-up on the implication of Musician Micheal (alias Sundaygar Dearboy) and now a special aide to President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, in the torture, rape and murder of civilians in the county of Grand Bassa. Lifted from multiple angles, the story accounted for a good depth of the *New Democrat* space devoted to the TRC coverage. In fact, the paper’s first edition on this story has been flagged “Story of the Month of January” for its effort to provide background and attempt in contacting the accused when the allegation was made.

Judging by these outcomes, it can be established that overall the *New Democrat* Newspaper allotted more of its content space to TRC and other TJ issues, followed by *The News* and the *Daily Observer*. The *National Chronicle* and *Public Agenda* ranked least in terms of space given to coverage.

2.2 Diversity



Diversity refers to the various sources the medium contacted in ensuring balanced and fair coverage. In examining whether coverage was “Exhaustive” sources mentioned were checked against the story angles and their subjects. As shown

in table 4, of the total one hundred fifteen (115) relevant newspaper items in January, a total of ninety-four (94) articles needed to have been thoroughly balanced. But disappointingly, sixteen (16) published articles met this target while Seventy-eight (78) of the articles were “In-Exhaustive” and in most cases, had limited background and cross check and made no follow-up. Several examples have been captured in the General Observation section. Under diversity, the media outlets monitored generally did not do well.

For example except for the “Sundagay Dearboy” story that was widely published and followed-up, no other story received such background investigation. Allegations on individuals like current legislators, Prince Johnson, Saah Gbolie and former President Moses Blah amongst others were published without any initial effort to contact the alleged perpetrators for their version of the story. However, most of the alleged perpetrators provided some outlet interviews and issued statements to address the allegation.

Within the context of fairness in coverage, the media outlets were duty bound to contact the persons named (alleged perpetrators) and indicate where efforts proved futile when the story was first reported. This is a fundamental part of news reporting that was ignored. Some outlets could eventually argue that they later ran reaction but most of those reactions did not receive the prominence they had when they were first published. An instant reaction from former House Speaker Nyundueh Monkonama on allegation he was a mastermind of the infamous Duport Road massacre, was carried in the January 23 edition of *The Inquirer* Newspaper without due prominence, though the allegation received huge space and prominence when was originally carried, with the alleged perpetrators not being contacted before the paper went to press.

Table 4

No.	Newspaper	Exhaustive	In-Exhaustive
1	OBSERVER	1	13
2	ANALYST	2	13
3	NEWS	2	14
4	DEMOCRAT	4	17
5	INQUIRER	4	11
6	HERITAGE	3	10`
	Total	16	78

Even with the “star” investigation of Sundaygar Dearboy, except for the *New Democrat* and *Heritage Newspaper* no print media backgrounded the Sundaygar Dearboy article when it was first revealed at the hearings. Nevertheless, media outlets eventually made up for this deficit by follow-ups on several fronts.

In February, as shown in table 5, the outlets only managed to meet a combined total of thirteen (13) “Exhaustive” items of the sixty-six (66) story items that needed to have been thoroughly balanced. Like January, February monitoring had similar problems.

Regarding diversity, most of the newspaper did not do well. Almost half of their published articles did not qualify for classification and well over 2/3 of those qualified were “In-Exhaustive”. Though a few papers like *The News*, *New Democrat*, *The Inquirer* and *Daily Observer* had relatively higher diversity numbers, the overall picture is not impressive. It’s hard to understand why the print media, which has the luxury of production time, was low on follow-up compared to the electronic media that performed quite impressively.

Table 5

No.	Newspaper	Exhaustive	In-Exhaustive
1	OBSERVER	1	8
2	ANALYST	1	8
3	NEWS	3	8
4	DEMOCRAT	2	9
5	INQUIRER	2	6
6	HERITAGE	2	6
7	PUBLIC AGENDA	1	4
8	NATIONALCHRONICLE	1	4
	Total	13	53

(Note:

A story is considered “Exhaustive” when the news medium ensures that the article is thoroughly balanced. Not all news articles such as commentaries, editorials and letters need to be thoroughly balanced. Therefore articles falling in this category are deemed not applicable for classification. In most cases, stories bordering on accusations, allegations, and name calling need to reflect diversity. News on public announcement, pronouncement by the TRC and donations do not necessarily need to be thoroughly balanced, however, when the news medium go a step forward to give additional background, and supplementary references, the story could be placed on the medium scorecard as “Exhaustive”. “Exhaustive and In-Exhaustive” categorization varies

between the print and electronic medium. For the electronic medium, a developing story, whether an allegation against a person or news article requiring cross check, can not be immediately evaluated using this indicator until the full day's news coverage of that issue has been exhausted. Where the medium in subsequent broadcast strives to update this information to reflect a diversity of views, the developed story will then be considered "Exhaustive". In other scenarios, radio programs and talk shows can not normally fall in this categorization unless there's a one-sided debate that failed to provide an opportunity for the other side to appear.)

2.3 Summary on Specific Print Media

The Inquirer

Seven (7) editions of *The Inquirer* did not carry any issue related to the TRC hearings and the process in general. The paper published all seventeen (17) editions from January 9-31 and carried a single editorial in its January 9 edition (“We Insist on the Truth”) and repeated on the 10th. It published nineteen (19) articles, eighteen (18) pictures and carried ten (10) as prominent stories. In February it published nine articles, six of which were given prominence and four pictures. *The Inquirer* was low on commentaries, letters and analysis and generally stayed in tuned with the TRC Code of Conduct for Journalists except for failing to follow-up and providing diverse perspective to quite a lot of its reports. It published no gruesome picture but had series of font size uniformity problems. The Inquirer did well in trying to exhaust at least six (6) articles in its January and February Editions but overall published less articles compared to other media with much smaller diversity numbers. The paper needs to organize its layout, text and font uniformity.

The News

The paper had sixteen (16) appearances and covered twenty (20) TRC related articles. The paper never appeared on the newsstand on January 21, 2008. Twenty (20) photos were published on the TRC hearings, with one (1) of its twenty (20) photos displaying a gruesome picture of victims during the Liberian Civil War. At the same time, the print qualities of some of the pictures were bad; especially the 15th, 18th and 25th editions. It carried fourteen (14) prominent stories in January. Five (5) of eleven (11) stories reported in February, were prominent and published only two (2) photos. It devoted some content space to the coverage of the Charles Taylor trial as well.

Like other newspapers, majority of articles reported by *The News* were ‘In-Exhaustive’, though the paper did better in contacting all sides in at least (2) two of its January editions and four (4) of its February. On day one of the hearings, *The News* was one of two papers that allotted space to all those testifying and also got the views of some ordinary and prominent Liberians on the prospects of the TRC. Though The News ran the highest number of editorials (two and which were repeated twice), the paper needs to work on general editorial content, including layout.

Daily Observer

During the period of January 9- 31, the *Daily Observer* published news stories, letters, editorials and commentaries related to the TRC process. It published regularly during the period and carried twenty-two (22) articles in January, of which fourteen (14) were prominent. It had eleven (11) in February and seven (7) gaining prominence. It is important to stress that the paper was able to flag eighteen (18) of its thirty-six (36)

articles, a remarkable feat!. The paper made limited investigation and ran a single follow-up on the Sundaygar Dearboy story, compared to the other news media. There was no infringement on the Code of Conduct except what appears the universally inadvertent failure of most of the media outlets to follow-up and exhaust issues and stories. The language in the Observer like most papers was the language of the TRC. The paper should also be praised for its layout, text and font uniformity.

The Heritage

The *Heritage* published fifteen (15) articles in January, with ten (10) given prominence. There were nine (9) articles in February, of which two became prominent. It printed twenty-five (25) photos in January, and four in February. The *Heritage* also repeated two of its editorials on the TRC hearings. Of the twenty four (24) combined articles published, only 5 were “Exhaustive”.

The Heritage should be singled out among the papers scoring high marks in the epic follow-up of the Sundaygar Dearboy story but seemed to have concentrated too much of its effort on this single investigation that most of other TRC related investigations were left aside. *The Heritage*, like most of the other papers tried to stay above the fray, avoiding sensational reporting, though in some isolated incidents it was involved in the blame game.

New Democrat

The *New Democrat* was the only newspaper that labored to link the TRC hearings to the Charles Taylor trial. It devoted huge spaces to the Taylor trial and ran seven times more gruesome pictures than all the newspapers combined for the TRC monitoring. The Taylor trial added, it published far more gruesome photos- a serious ethical problem. Some examples of those photos can be seen in its 10th, 15th, 17th, and 23rd, editions. It published a total of thirty-three (33) stories in two months, twelve (12) gaining prominence in January and nine in February, a remarkable appearance!

The *New Democrat* in a record twenty-seven (27) editions since January 8, featured the Charles Taylor trial and the TRC, though the Taylor trial was the most prominent. It even ran and still continues sections of the hearings verbatim. It is not clear why the paper alone has chosen to devote this huge space, accounting for a staggering 10% of total space published in January and February to the Taylor trial alone. However, the paper has a track record of being very critical of the former Liberian President’s involvement in the civil war even before he was elected and subsequently indicted. In fact, before its closure in 1996, the paper ran a column titled “The Trial of Charles Ghankay Taylor”- predicting the arrest and prosecution of the then rebel leader.

It also ran a very impressive investigation into allegations linking Sundaygar Dearboy to atrocities committed during the civil war. That article has been named the print media “Story of the Month of January”.

An error noticed in its publication was the continuous repetition of a single date, ‘January 21’, and edition numbered (014) on four of its publications for the month. The date, ‘January 21’ and ‘No.014’ appeared in its 21st, 22nd, 23rd, and 24th editions.

The Analyst Newspaper

The Analyst published seventeen (17) stories in January and ten (10) in February. Thirteen (13) of the twenty-seven (27) articles were made prominent. It published a single editorial on the 9th and was repeated on the 11th. It recorded twenty-six (26) photos; outperforming the rest of the newspapers in photographic coverage of the events and TRC issues. In its January 16th and 25th editions, *The Analyst newspaper* failed to follow their front page stories on the pages mentioned on the cover.

The paper flagged TRC related stories as headlines and major back page leads. It failed to appear on the newsstand on January 10th and 30th and most of the stories in the paper were ‘In-exhaustive’, except for the Sundaygar Dearboy article, a plus shared by most papers.

Finally, *The Analyst* also sampled the views of some prominent Liberians on the TRC hearings and equally reported on all those who appeared on the first day of the hearings.

National Chronicle

The National Chronicle was only monitored during the month of February. Fourteen (14) editions of the paper did not carry any article about the TRC process. It published 6 stories, with 3 making front page headlines and 4 photos. The Chronicle had problems with labeling as elaborated in the observation as well as text, fonts and layout problems.

Public Agenda

Like *the National Chronicle*, the *Public Agenda* was monitored only in February. *The Public Agenda* appeared ten (10) out of the (12) twelve times on the news stands. It published seven (7) stories with two making headlines and two (2) photos being relevant to the TRC hearings. The paper in its February 8th edition, the paper accused the Government of sponsoring individuals some people from Grand Bassa to appear on a local radio station in defense of Sundargay Dearboy, but fell short of saying how much money was involved and the names of those in government that were sponsoring the scam.

CHAPTER THREE: RADIO ASSESSMENT

3.0 Stories Monitored

During the month of January, three (3) radio stations were monitored randomly between 9:45am and 6:45pm, Monday to Friday. During this period, a total of sixty-three (63) TRC stories were monitored from all these stations. As stated previously, the project underestimated the enormity of work associated with tracking the broadcast sector and coupled with lack of initial financial support, it was constrained to randomly monitor selected news items in the first month. The stations monitored were State Radio, *ELBC*, *Radio Veritas* (owned and operated by the Catholic Church in Liberia) and *Truth FM* (owned and operated by Renaissance Communication Incorporated).

Of their monthly news bulletins, a total of fifty-six (56) news broadcasts were monitored from *ELBC*. Thirty-one (31) of these news broadcasts were marked “problem bulletins”⁶. As for *Truth FM*, forty-nine (49) news broadcasts were monitored. Twenty-seven (27) were marked as “problem bulletins” for similar reasons. For Radio Veritas twenty-four (24) news bulletins were monitored without any incidents of problems or interruption.

Table 6

No.	Station	WEEK 1	WEEK 2	WEEK 3	WEEK 4	Total Articles Reported
1	ELBC	7	2	0	2	11
2	TRUTH	3	5	8	2	18
3	VERITAS	16	4	4	10	34
TOTAL		26	11	12	14	63

The table above shows the number of articles broadcast by each of the stations monitored during the specified period:

3.1 Airtime Allocation

Only sixty-three (63) of the total seven hundred seven (707) news stories monitored from the fifty-six (56) news broadcasts were about the TRC hearings, representing 8.91 % of the total news stories broadcast by all the stations combined. Out of the total 57,977 seconds or approximately sixteen (16) hours used for the broadcast of all programs monitored, a total of 6,469 seconds or approximately two (2) hours were devoted to TRC stories by all the stations combined, representing 11.1% of the total air time for news recorded and monitored.

⁶ Problem bulletins refer to items not carried by the news media for various reasons including technical, priority for other programs like live outside broadcast etc.

Table 7

No.	Station	Total Airtime in Seconds	Total Airtime in Minutes/Seconds	Relevant Air time in Seconds	Relevant time in Minutes/Seconds	Air in	Percentage of time allocated
1	ELBC	16,207	270 mins. 7 secs.	668	11mins. 8 secs		4.1
2	TRUTH	12,963	216 mins. 3 secs.	2,387	39 mins. 47 secs.		18.4
3	VERITAS	28,807	480mins 7 secs.	3,414	56 mins. 54 secs.		11.8

The table above shows available airtime against airtime in seconds, minutes and hours and what the allocated durations translate to in percentage in January.

Radio Veritas led with the highest airtime of approximately fifty-seven (57) minutes, amounting to 11.2%. Notwithstanding, all institutions tally shows a low percentage of coverage of the TRC process in their bulletins for the month of January.

Table 8

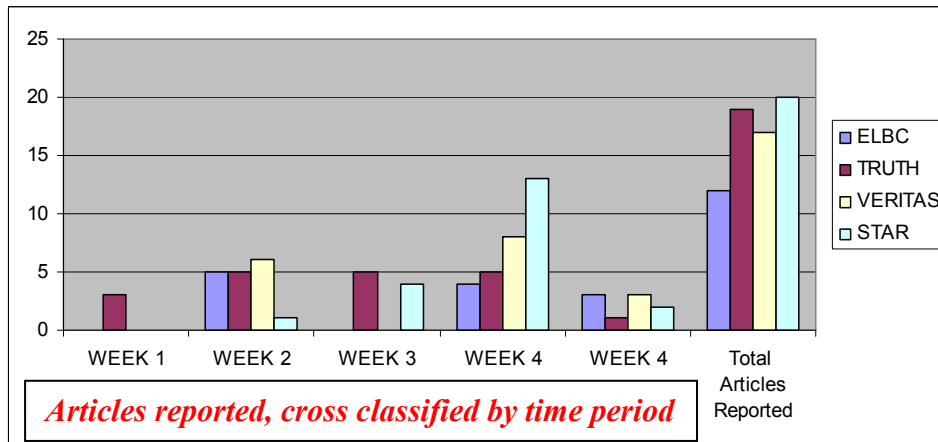
NO	Station	Total News Bulletins	News Bulletins Recorded	Problem Bulletins	No: of Relevant Items from radio bulletins recorded (A)	Total No: of items from radio bulletins recorded (B)	Percentage of No: of Relevant Items (A/B×100)
1	ELBC	152	79	44	12	617	1.945
2	TRUTH	95	58	18	19	502	3.785
3	VERITAS	57	51	0	17	576	2.951
4	STAR	95	47	22	20	492	4.065
TOTAL		399	235	84	68	2187	

**N/B: 'A' represents the Number of relevant Items from radio bulletins recorded
'B' represents total number of items from radio bulletins recorded**

The table above shows the total number of stories carried by each station in relation to the total number and percentage of TRC hearing-related stories in February:

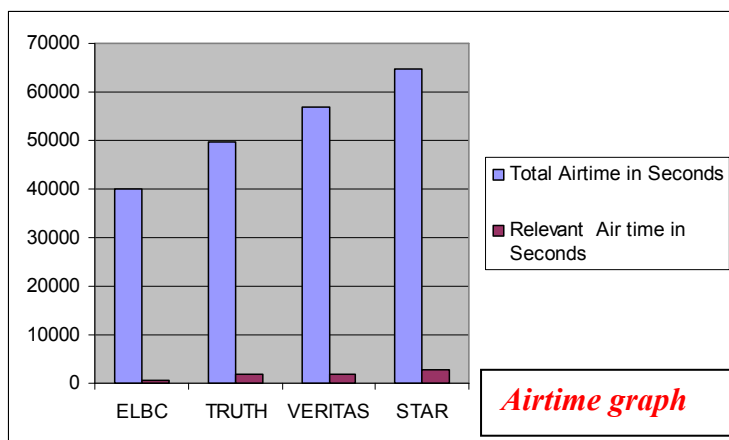
Of particular concern are problems associated with the news broadcast of *ELBC* and *Truth FM*. It was observed that both institutions failed to broadcast thirty-one (31) and twenty-seven (27) of their bulletins respectively, but had far more news schedules.

February



Radio Veritas' nine-minute story on the TRC aired on January 9th, 2008, has been selected as the broadcast story for the "Month of January". It brought diverse angles and provided in depth analysis, serving as a

model for thorough and balanced coverage. Not only was airtime a factor, but also it went extra mile in gathering additional background information. For *ELBC*, the statement of the President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf at the launch of the Public Hearings was its main news for the day and running into January 9 while *Truth FM* scored marks by trying to contact one of the accused during day one, Sundaygar Dearboy, though it gave a relative small airtime as compared to *Veritas*.



During the month of February, four radio stations were monitored between 9:00am and 6:45pm, Monday to Friday. During this period, a total of 68 TRC stories were monitored from all the stations⁷. The stations monitored were *ELBC*, *Radio Veritas*, *Truth FM* and *Star Radio*.

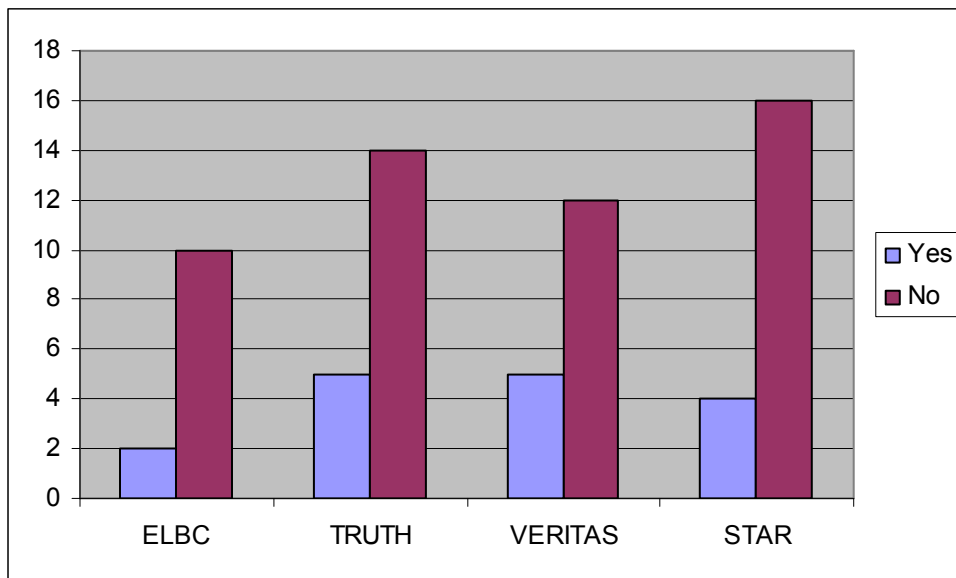
Of their monthly news bulletins individually, a total of 123 news bulletins were monitored from *ELBC*. Forty-four (44) of these news bulletins were marked as problem bulletins. As for *Truth FM*, 78 news bulletins were monitored. Eighteen (18) of these bulletins were marked as problem bulletins. *Radio Veritas* carried 51 news bulletins. Again *Veritas* did not have any problems associated with its broadcast and did not miss any of their news bulletins. Sixty nine (69)

⁷ Note that the project did not recall all news bulletin brought by the stations as a result of power failure and technical problems associated with recording as can see in table 8.

news bulletins were monitored from Star Radio. Twenty two (22) of these bulletins were marked as problem bulletins because of technical faults leading to broadcast cancellation. The recurring problems of news not being aired accounted for *Veritas* high performance though *Star radio* was able to eclipse this performance due to the total time in seconds it allotted the TRC stories.

Airtime Allocation

In February, only sixty-eight (68) of the total 2,187 news items monitored were about the TRC hearings, amounting to 3.1 % of the total number of news stories broadcast by all the stations. Out of the total 211,388 seconds or approximately fifty-eight (58) hours used for the broadcast of all programs monitored, a total of 7124 seconds or approximately two (2) hours were devoted to TRC stories by all the stations combined, representing 3.37% of the total air time for news recorded and monitored. *Star Radio* led in February with the highest airtime given to TRC related stories of approximately forty-six (46) minutes.



Actuality Graph

3.2 Diversity

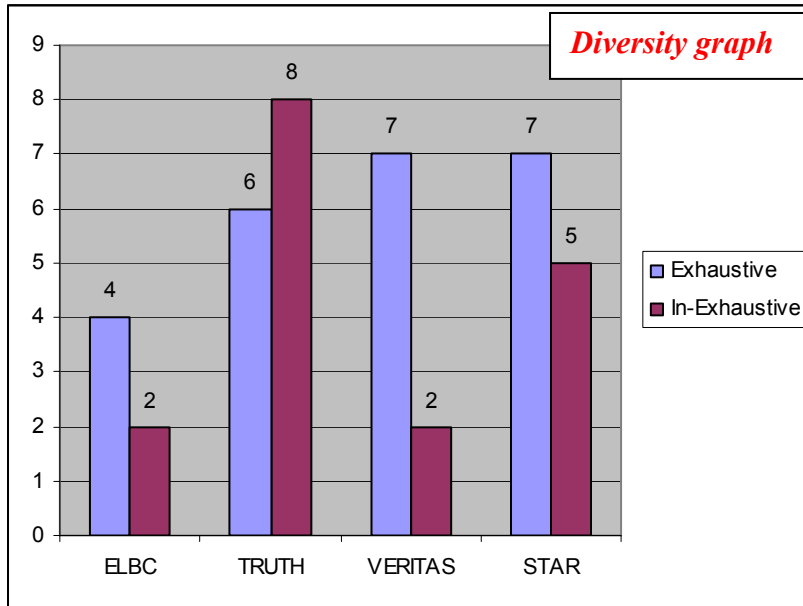
January

NO	Station	Exhaustive	In-Exhaustive	Not Applicable
1	ELBC	3	4	4
2	TRUTH	5	5	8
3	VERITAS	5	14	15
TOTAL		13	23	27

February

NO	Station	Exhaustive	In-Exhaustive	Not Applicable
1	ELBC	4	2	6
2	TRUTH	6	8	5
3	VERITAS	7	2	8
4	STAR	7	5	8
TOTAL		26	16	27

In examining whether coverage was “Exhaustive,” sources mentioned were checked against the story angles and their subjects. In January, twenty-three (23) out of thirty-six (36) stories that should have been thoroughly balanced were “In-exhaustive”. Thirteen (13) of all broadcast news items aired were ‘Exhaustive’. In February, the number increased by 100%, with *Truth FM*, *ELBC* and *Veritas* having uptakes. In a reverse scenario, February recorded less “In-Exhaustive” numbers compared to January.



In cross referencing the data, *Truth FM* scored high marks by sharing diversity numbers with *Veritas* and having less number of “In-Exhaustive” articles in January, while *Veritas* came ahead in February by recording the least “in-Exhaustive” and highest “Exhaustive” numbers. *Star Radio* began the monitoring on an impressive standing, with *ELBC* changing the face of its downward trend. Overall *Radio*

Veritas should be credited for devoting on aggregate, the most airtime, most articles reported and most diversity numbers for the period.

3.3 Summary on Specific Broadcast Media

ELBC

ELBC, for a record period failed to air news bulletins during the hours monitored. Their news stories followed a trend where most of the bulletins recorded saw dominance of government related news and articles, especially on the Presidency. The station had series of intermittent breaks during transmission due often to technical glitches.

On the 17th of January 2007, in its 2:00 pm “News Half Hour” bulletin, the station carried a wrong actuality on the TRC process. In an unrelated incident, the station in its January 10, 12pm news bulletin, did not state the name of the person who accused the former LURD rebels of forcing her to drink their urine. On same the day, the station in its 2pm broadcast, ran a 17-second actuality with the voice of a Christian preacher as the voice of the Chairman of the TRC, Cllr. Jerome Verdier (TRC).

In February, *ELBC* was the only station to air TRC related issues in a discussion format program, the *ELBC Panorama*, evident in its February 27 edition of the program. It is worthy of note that the station provided free airtime for the coverage of the public hearings in Monrovia.

Radio Veritas

Of all the stations monitored, *Radio Veritas* gave the highest air time on aggregate to TRC related stories. Regarding follow ups on issues that came out at the hearings, the station performed well, resulting to a high diversity ranking. . One such example was its February 19, 1:30 PM news bulletin in which the Station made a follow up on the abrupt resignation of TRC Commissioner Bishop Alfred Kulah on the same day and brought the excerpt in their subsequent broadcast.

Radio Veritas February 4, 1:30 pm news bulletin, carried the highest amount of time in news broadcast on the TRC hearings for the entire month

Radio Veritas was the only station monitored that reported the low turnout at the TRC hearings during the month of January.

Truth FM

In January, it was observed that *Truth FM* did not make sufficient follow up on stories recorded from the hearings. Nevertheless, there are few instances in which the station tried to provide balanced perspective in its coverage. Some examples: accusations against former INPFL Commander and current Senator, Prince Y. Johnson on the death of

former President Samuel Doe; allegations linking musician and Executive Mansion staff Marcus Davis to rape, torture and murder, etc.

Out of its nineteen (19) news editions broadcast in January, *Truth FM* brought the actual voices of some of the people making news at the hearing process in its 2 pm news editions of January 9, January 14, January 15, January 21, January 22, January 24, and January 29. On the subject of follow ups, *Truth FM*, in very few instances gathered information from diverse players in the current TRC process

Star Radio

During its first month of monitoring, it was observed that the coverage given to TRC was substantial compared to *Radio Veritas* which gave the highest coverage. *Star Radio* in its “From the Counties”, reported issues of the TRC more than the other stations. *Star Radio* was only monitored during the month of February.

CHAPTER FOUR: OBSERVATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.0 General Observation

A. Taylor's Trial and the Hearings

The TRC public hearing began with the recommencement of the war crimes trial of former Liberian President Charles Taylor in The Hague. Apparently anticipating a huge local media emphasis on the TRC public hearings two of the papers monitored opted to give the Taylor Trial more prominence than the TRC public hearings. Both the *New Democrat* and *The News Newspaper* devoted over eighteen (18) lead story items on the Charles Taylor Trial. In the initial few weeks, both outlets outnumbered the rest of their counterparts with the frequency of their prominence given to the Taylor Trial. *The New Democrat* was traditionally consumed with the Taylor issue even after the *News Newspaper* shifted focus. The *New Democrat* ran far more editorials, features, splash pages and background information on Charles Taylor, in often times taking clear slant even in their news stories. The rest of the newspapers covered the hearings in greater prominence as opposed to the Taylor Trail. The rest of the newspapers covered the hearings in greater prominence as opposed to the Taylor Trail.

For radio, *Talking Drum Studio*⁸ (*TDS*) syndicate its reports on the Trial to a number of radio stations in and outside Monrovia including the stations being monitored under a partnership arrangement. It has been observed that the broadcast media seems to be more involved with the coverage than the print, apparently as a result of the *TDS* partnership. Occasionally, a number of papers report very striking developments, while the broadcast media kept at pace with every detail of the Trial through the *TDS* and BBC World Service Trust Partnership. On the other hand, aside from the *TDS* syndicated reports, there are few instances where the stations followed the Trial and reported from their perspective.

B. Hearings Outside Monrovia

As hearings moved from the Capital Monrovia, there was a drastic fall in the media coverage of the issues as can be seen in all the frequency graphs. It has been observed that the primary reason for this decline has been limited media presence in those areas where hearings were being conducted. And even with the few newspapers, coverage was very low amongst those papers. For instance, the *Inquirer*, which was amongst the four papers, only reported on the TRC hearings in Maryland once. When the hearings moved

⁸ With funding from the Ford Foundation and the British Common Wealth Office, Search for Common Grounds and the BBC World Service Trust have been following the Trial of Charles Taylor by assigning Liberian and Sierra Leonean journalists to the Hague. See, www.talkingdrumstudio.org for details.

to Grand Kru, it focused on a row between the TRC and the Executive Mansion, regarding allegations linking the Mansion and famed musician Sundaygar Dearboy to a scam to discredit the TRC.

All of the four papers had similar problems. For radio, no station was invited to the counties and the TRC Communications Officer, Richmond Anderson informed the project that the TRC chose to utilize community radio stations in those counties.

C. Follow-up and Investigation

Following up stories, conducting background investigation and adding human dimension to the coverage proved quite elusive for a number of outlets. An interesting human interest issue that was left unattended was the heart wrecking testimony of Amelia Dimsea, severely dehumanized during the war and left with huge physical scars. The TRC Commissioner Jerome Verdier on January 10, 2008, responded to the victim's appeal for medical assistance by inviting the public and other individuals to assist the victim. Since the statement was made, there was no follow-up by the media to ensure that Amelia's case was given attention or whether she has received any assistance up till the moment. It was important for the media to seize this opportunity as it is the only platform on which issues affecting victims can be brought back to the fore and treated as an agenda issue. Once left unchecked by the media, there's a natural tendency for such issue to erode in oblivion. There are couples of incidence where the media failed to follow-up on issues which culminated to a poor diversity ranking. In fact, the media was mainly pre-occupied with following on the 'big name' stories like Sundaygar Dearboy.

For instance, when the wife of slain Deputy Public Works Minister Isaac Vaye, testified on the death of her husband, she mentioned living sources that could verify conversation with former President Taylor that indeed the men were murdered. Those mentioned were former Nimba County Superintendent Harrison Kanwea and former Immigration Commissioner Prince Myers. A follow-up on those individuals would have added fresh and interesting perspective to the story. In fact, no media outlet made any effort to take the Kanwea and Myers angle but instead reported the story from the 'loud speakers' of the hearings. Similarly, no paper monitored follow-up allegations levied against Senator Adolphus Dolo ordering the massacre of all members of the Khran ethnic group in a village.

Epic Investigation

The media should have drawn cheers here for what seemed an outstanding work of tireless efforts in reporting the Sundaygar Dearboy allegations in a ruthless manhunt to seek the truth. But with new revelation that the TRC facilitated the media's investigation by providing transportation, new questions have arisen. This was confirmed by the TRC Media Director, who said he acted on his own and with good intentions. Almost all media outlets that follow story went to Compound # 3 in Grand Bassa under the TRC

arrangement except the *New Democrat* that chose to conduct its own investigation outside the TRC arrangement. Pictures were captured as well as interviews conducted. It appeared apparent that named perpetrator was also beating the media to its own game when some residents alarmed that the media was misrepresenting their position. Except for the *New Democrat* that tenaciously followed the issue, until the accused was able to provide some form of admittance of involvement most of the other outlets eventually settled on other issues. Though not covered by the monitoring, former SKY FM News Director David Targbe should also be credited for a news report raising doubts over the credibility of some residents who earlier testified against Sundaygar Dearboy but were later driven to Monrovia to provide defence of the accused in a media appearance. According to the Sky FM broadcast read by Targbe, the residents were seen riding with Sundaygar a day before their 50-50 Talk Show appearance. The report further claimed that the musician was seen making arrangements for the program prior to the appearance of the residents. The media reports trigger was later followed by trading of accusations between the TRC and the Executive Mansion.

D. Common Errors

Common errors noticed during the review period were mainly typographical. Reporters and editors should draw pluses for the overall appreciable editorial content of their papers. However, it is important to cite a few common problems. *The Analysts* for instance carried articles that weren't complete. In its January 17 and 18 stories on the TRC regarding the death of Samuel Dokie, formerly of the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) and massacre involving Roland Dou and Benjamin Yeaten formerly of the NPFL, the paper failed to end the last sentences with the text hanging and no punctuation marks. Another error recorded from the *Daily Observer* was the failure to apply quotes to **'Priest'** in their headline which read "In Defence of the Krahn Tride: Woman Offered Me Her Child for Slaughtering, Priest Admits Killing Not Less than 20,000." Nevertheless the paper rightly did later in the story citing

E. Layout, Picture/Voice Quality and Fonts Uniformity

Most of the layouts were good but a number of pictures were poor. The *National Chronicle* and *The News* especially had a number of bad photos published during the month of January and February. An example is the February 1 lead story on George Borley, which was very blur. Most of the papers had problems of font size uniformity making reading a lot more difficult. The voice quality of some of the radio stations were poor, especially broadcast on *Truth FM* and *ELBC*. An example is the *Truth FM's* 2 pm news bulletin of February 6 in which there was distortion in the actuality on the TRC news item.

F. Setting the Agenda

The media did not merely enter the TRC process to repeat in its papers or on the airwaves what the witnesses were stating. The media must be an agenda setter, placing

crucial issues up for debate. Overall, much wasn't seen here. Key issues such as the abrupt resignation of Commissioner Bishop Alfred Kulah was simply reported and never brought out for debate by the print media, especially its implication on the process. Of notice also was the near-lost coverage of a reported altercation between two TRC Commissioners in Rivergeee County during public hearings. It has been observed in March that the media has begun focusing this development.

The Commission has been playing damage control while the print media made a late dish effort to seize the moment in scrutinizing the conduct of Commissioners tasked with spearheading a delicate reconciliation process. It appears from their coverage that the media have not utilized the various institutional and legal frameworks governing the TRC. Regarding the alleged fighting incident involving the two Commissioners, the media failed to draw any link with the TRC Act, which explicitly states "Members of the TRC shall be removed for cause, such as misbehavior, incapacity and incompetence...", (Article V Section 14). As an agenda setter, the media should have seized this moment to stir this debate in light of denials from the two officials.

H. Misrepresentation/Facts Telling

A few misrepresentations were recorded during the review. There were variations of spelling of key witnesses, towns by the papers. And sometimes some papers published different and confusing accounts of the same witness' testimonies. In their February 1 editions, both *The Analyst* and *The News* had contrasting accounts in their headlines on a testimony by a witness. *The Analyst* quoted the witness as saying "**I Ate Bucket of Pupu...**", while *The News* quoted the same witness as saying "**I drank Cup full with Pupu**". The News Newspaper under the same caption wrote "**As confessions of truth continues...**" passing judgment that all the testimonies and allegations against the accused during the hearings were true.

Similarly, the *National Chronicle* of February 1 reportedly referred to the Liberia Peace Council as the "so-called" Liberia Peace Council with no such attribution made to other warring factions that participated in the conflict. This was a hint of bias and unfair label. In another incident, the Chronicle in its February 4 edition levied allegation on Senator Prince Johnson cataloguing massacres he allegedly committed during the Liberian civil war quoting an unnamed source document. It was important for the paper to have stated the source of its allegation. Not naming the source places the story in serious credibility crisis. Still on misrepresentation, the Public Agenda in its February 8 edition levied an allegation against the government that it sponsored some citizens from Grand Bassa to appear on a local radio station but fell short of giving relevant details about the claims such as identities of persons in government involved and telling what amount resources was used in sponsoring the citizens

4.1 Recommendations

The Liberia Media Center sees the truth and reconciliation process as the surest way to achieve genuine reconciliation, sustainable peace and mutual coexistence. The process should therefore receive all the required support to ensure its ultimate fulfillment.

Broad Recommendations

The international donor community should provide necessary technical and financial support for the TRC to continue its hearings and final report. The Liberian Government must continue its support to the Commission. And most important, the President of Liberia, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf should seize the moment as pledged in the past, to face the TRC when asked to do so. This in our view will lend further credibility to the process, provide the necessary momentum for its finalization and improve public perception of the TRC process.

Lastly, it is important for the Commission itself to lead by example. News of intra fighting are disturbing and an internal probe to establish the root causes of these squabbles should be expeditiously commissioned, if people must take the Commissioners and their work seriously.

Sector-Specific Recommendations

TRC Media Unit

- The TRC Media Department must follow-up with previous work done together with local partners in defining future media strategies for the TRC process in Liberia. The TRC Media Unit decision to accredit journalists to cover the process in contravention of written and spoken opposition from partner organizations, illustrates that it was out of touch with those discussions or deliberately chose to disregard those views, which were essentially centered on promoting citizens' rights to access to information and free expression.
- The Media Unit will need to effectively factor broader independent media coverage of the TRC hearings in rural Liberia and support to ensure journalists are transported and facilitated under arrangement should also be explored.
- If not already being done, it is crucial for the TRC Media Unit to conduct its own periodic review of the media coverage to inform policy decisions to be taken by the Commission.

- Aside from facilitating coverage of events, the TRC Media Unit, should avoid be seen as facilitating the practice of investigative journalism. Investigative reporting should be demand driven and supported by media institutions themselves so as not to compromise the integrity of their investigation;

Media Sector

- The media should keep its focus on the TRC hearings, maintaining consistency in its coverage of the process and ensure the integrity of its investigation by avoiding a repeat of the Sundaygar Dearboy scenario where journalists were facilitated by the TRC to conduct an investigation;
- Media outlets should strive to contact sources mentioned by victims in their publications. Where such attempts did not materialize, the paper should clearly indicate such;
- Broadcast media outlets, especially *ELBC Radio* and *Truth FM* should work around consistency in their news broadcast;
- Editors should seek information beyond the floors of the hearings and strive to provide multiple angles to stories;
- Publishers of newspapers should consider improving the quality of their printing (font size uniformity problems) as it poses serious problems for reading;
- Editors and reporters should familiarize themselves with all the legal and institutional frameworks governing the TRC;
- Editors should also ensure that articles are thoroughly backgrounded, using other available resources on transitional justice eg. ICTJ and the BBC World Service Trust Handbook on reporting TJ, to place testimonies and stories into context;
- The media should not merely report the hearings but serve as an agenda setter by raising debates and cross examining issues as and when they arise;
- Newspapers should develop space to readers' for comments either in the form of letters or commentaries on the ongoing process;

- All media institutions should adhere to both spoken and written rules concerning the coverage of the TRC and outlets should refrain from publishing “gruesome pictures”;

Press Union of Liberia

- The Press Union of Liberia should continue its oversight on media coverage of national issues including the TRC and consistently call into questions transgression of ethics and standards;
- The Press Union of Liberia should engage the TRC on the need for effective factoring of independent media coverage of the TRC hearings in rural Liberia;

ICTJ and Others

- ICTJ and other partners should ensure that the TRC Reporters Code of Conduct is made accessible for media and representative of civil society following the media’s coverage of the TRC process in Liberia;
- ICTJ and other partners should assist the Press Union of Liberia and the broader media community in conducting in-process training for the media during the conduct of the TRC hearings;
- ICTJ and other relevant NGOs should support the expansion of this initiative to cover other transitional justice development in Liberia especially the ongoing trial of former President Charles Taylor so that the link with the TRC process will be explored.

Appendix I. About the LMC

The Liberia Media Center exists as a legally registered non-for-profit media and communication firm that fosters local development through the utilization of communication and information sources. LMC exists to assist media and civil society with professional services in wide range of areas, including research, training, outreach and mass communication.

It was officially commissioned on August 26, 2005 and currently provides journalists, media organizations, youths, students and the broader civil society improved access to basic IT (Computer and Internet) and secretariat resources at its office complex in Monrovia.

LMC exists also to provide a forum for the periodic assessment of media coverage of significant national and international events; facilitation capacity building programs for civil society and journalists; and rendering professional services to media and civil society groups.

With a staff strength of fifteen, LMC is currently the biggest registered specialized communication and media firm in Liberia and is partnering with the Radio Netherlands Training Center (RNTC) to support the development of community radio in eight of the fifteen leeward counties in Liberia. LMC will in the next three years assist with the infrastructure, technical and professional development of fifteen small scale radio stations in the broader context of enhancing freedom of expression, public participation in national decision making, good governance and economic growth and development.

LMC has most recently worked with a number of international organizations in several projects including UNESCO, UNDP, IREX USA, Open Society Institute, Freevoice (Netherlands), International Media Support, International Center for Transitional Justice, and the University of Boston in Massachusetts.

Recently, the Center facilitated a “Media Reach and Penetration Study” targeting three counties with the objective of determining how far media was reaching, who were consuming media products and what attitudes were consumers showing toward those products and their preferences.

In the natural resources sector especially forestry, LMC was the lead organization in a consortium competitively selected by the Forestry Reform Monitoring Committee to communicate proposed legal forestry amendments and facilitate public outreach for a set of core regulations and standard contracts under the new forestry law of 2006.

LMC has a nine member Governing Board chaired by the President of the Press Union of Liberia. The management team is headed by an Executive Director assisted by a deputy and several program officers.

Most Recent Activities

Activities	Date	Location	Source of Funding	Contact Person
LMC – Phase I (incl. recruitment of personnel and acquisition of equipment and furniture)	March 2004 - August 2005	Monrovia	IMS/OSI/ IREX	Tom Hughes, IMS/ Lawrence Randall, LMC
Working groups on Reform of Media Laws and Policies	May 2005 – Nov 2005	Monrovia	UNESCO/ IMS	Edetaen Ojo, UNESCO/Lawrence Randall, LMC
Computer Assisted Reporting/Internet Training (for media and members of the Federation of Liberia Youth	November-January 2005	Monrovia	UNESCO	Lawrence Randall, LMC
Media Review Roundtable on the 2005 elections	February	Monrovia	LMC/UNMIL	Lawrence Randall, LMC James Wolo, UNMIL
Free three months Internet Access for the media	February 2006-April 2006	Monrovia	LMC	Lawrence Randall
Coordination of International Media Partnership Delegation return to Liberia	June 4-11, 2006	Monrovia	LMC/IMS	Lawrence Randall Thomas Hughes
Media and CSOs roundtable on reporting the budget and corruption	July 15, 2006	Monrovia	LMC	Lawrence Randall
Information delivery, vetting and data collection on proposed forestry laws and regulations	July-February 2007	Liberia	Environmental Law Institute/FRMC/ LMC/FDA/PUL /CEMESP	Lawrence Randall Bruce Myers Robert Simpson
Photojournalism Training	January- February 2007	Monrovia	FREEVOICE	Lawrence Randall Jan Williem Gast
Internship Placement and Vocational Training	November 2006-January 2007	Monrovia	UNESCO	Lawrence Randall Edetean Ojo

TRC Media Training and Team Reporting/Monitoring	January-April, 2007	Liberia	IMS/ICTJ/TRC	Lawrence Randall Paul Allen Juliane Weshtphal
Future Search Conference and Needs Assessment for Community Radio Support	January- March 2007	Liberia	Radio Netherlands Training Center	Lawrence Randall Leon van Dan Boogerd
Transitional Justice Reporting	August 2007	Monrovia	BBC World Service Trust	Julia Crawford, Lawrence Randall
Setup of Training Center for at the Liberia Media Center	March-June 2007	Monrovia	Radio Netherlands Training Center	Lawrence Randall Leon van Dan Boogerd

Appendix II: Terms Definition

1. **Media Monitoring**- generally refers to a selected method of checking, verifying, investigating or collecting information about certain issues or situations being covered or reported by the media.
2. **Item/Story**- the portion of a news story that is related to the issue being monitored.
3. **Bulletin**- refers to the title of the news or radio program being monitored. E.g. News Half Hour.
4. **Diversity**- this refers to the various sources the medium contacted in ensuring balanced or the media ability to prove check stories. Diversity may either be Exhaustive, In-Exhaustive or Not Applicable.
5. **Subject**- refers to the more specific issue on which the news items being monitored falls in the categorizations. This Categorization is formulated from the combination of the topic code and the specific issue code.
6. **Mentioned Sources**- refers to those involve in a news story.
7. **News Agency**- refers to the originator of the news story being monitored, e.g. whether sourced by a reporter of the media being monitored, or culled from other news sources.
8. **Available Space in number of pages**- the aggregate of the total number of pages in a particular local daily.
9. **Available Space in square inches**- refers to the cumulative of the length and weight of a particular local daily.
10. **Relevant Space in number of pages**- the summing of only the pages of a newspaper that is related to an issue being monitored.
11. **Relevant Space in square inches**- the summing of the length and weight of only that which is related to an issue being monitored in a newspaper.