

## RECONCILIATION AND THE WEB: A CASE STUDY OF THE DESIGN AND USE OF LIBERIA'S TRUTH COMMISSION WEBSITE<sup>1</sup>

Michael L. Best

Sam Nunn School of International Affairs & School of Interactive Computing

Georgia Institute of Technology, U.S.A

Email: mikeb@cc.gatech.edu

**Abstract:** We study the design, development and subsequent use patterns for the website of Liberia's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). Three important results emerge from these design activities and subsequent usage analysis. First, the design process underlined the importance of employing participatory methods. These bring together not only the relevant user base—Liberians living in the diaspora—but also institutional representation, that of the TRC commissioners and officers. Second, unlike other sites, the TRC of Liberia website emphasized the process of the TRC's work (testimony, forgiveness, etc.) rather than the organizational structure that drove it. This is potentially useful, as a visitor develops the connection between the purposes of the TRC and his or her own experiences during conflict. Third was the benefit of putting multimedia materials on the website. The findings show the popularity and potential usefulness of such materials.

**Keywords:** Website design, website use study, truth commissions, post-conflict reconciliation, Liberia.

---

<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this paper is due to appear in the *Journal of Religion, Conflict, and Peace*.

## RECONCILIATION AND THE WEB: A CASE STUDY OF THE DESIGN AND USE OF LIBERIA'S TRUTH COMMISSION WEBSITE<sup>2</sup>

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The World Wide Web has become a leading method for information dissemination and interaction. Not surprisingly, truth and reconciliation commissions (TRCs) have increasingly turned to the web to help them publicize their work, disseminate their findings, and (to a lesser degree) interact with their constituencies. Indeed, today's online interactive, social and rich multimedia facilities (sometimes referred to as Web 2.0) seem suitable not only for helping a truth commission distribute information, but also as a tool for assisting their core missions of providing a platform for victims to tell their story and an opportunity for all affected parties to interact and engage with each other in healing dialog.

In a recent related study (Best, Long, Etherton & Smyth, 2011), the authors developed evidence of the post-conflict psychological healing nature of interactive and rich multimedia (such as audio and video material) through a systematic study of Liberians using these technologies under controlled experimental conditions. The main argument of this chapter is that TRC websites that support interaction and rich multimedia offer a powerful environment to facilitate post-conflict reconciliation and healing.

The argument is developed through a narrative case study in the design, development and operation of an interactive multimedia website for Liberia's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The chapter will briefly look at the concept of a TRC and the role of this institution in Liberia. This is followed by an overview of the use of websites by different truth commissions, a description of the process under which a new website for Liberia's truth commission was designed, and how that resulted in a process-oriented interactive multimedia site. The chapter proceeds with an examination of the patterns of use observed on the site and concludes with observations for future work.

### 2. TRUTH COMMISSIONS AND THE TRC IN LIBERIA

Truth commissions are vehicles through which people in a society can together investigate the nature of human rights violations during a period of conflict. This often means allowing all parties to a conflict to offer testimony (in various forms) on what they experienced. This exercise can provide an important outlet for victims and perpetrators alike to share their stories. At times such stories are not secret and the victims themselves may not learn anything new about their specific cases. Instead, truth commissions provide a means of publicly acknowledging the victims' plight, something more powerful than just knowing what happened. This is particularly true where such acknowledgement was denied by authorities in the past (Hayner, 2010). One of the most well-known examples of a truth commission is that of South Africa (1995–2002). This was established as a way for all the people of that country to reconcile the violence and human rights abuses of the Apartheid era.

The overall goals of a commission can include creating a body of evidence to understand what happened, acknowledging and addressing some of the needs of victims, promoting accountability and ultimately creating some measure of closure for the society. Practically, one of the main outputs of truth commissions is a final, publicly available report that documents testimonies received and offers recommendations to meet specific goals.

---

<sup>2</sup> An earlier version of this paper is due to appear in the *Journal of Religion, Conflict, and Peace*.

Truth commissions can complement and inform legal actions in the post-conflict environment and can therefore be an important element in realizing justice. They are, however, not automatically created as part of the criminal justice system and instead often operate outside of that system through a special mandate. In that case, the commission will often have no power to prosecute perpetrators. Some may see this as an attenuated compromise in a post-conflict setting, while others argue that given the reconciliatory nature of these commissions, they are an important way of sustaining peace and forestalling retribution.

To date there have been more than 40 such commissions globally (Hayner, 2010)<sup>3</sup>. While there is still debate about their efficacy and how to assess their impact (Brahm, 2007), they are often viewed as a crucial part of the post-conflict development process by both international and local actors.

In the case of Liberia, after a long period of conflict in that country a peace agreement was signed in 2003 among the various factions and relevant stakeholders. Among other things, the agreement called for the establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission to promote reconciliation in the country, following similar models elsewhere. In 2005, the interim legislature in Liberia passed the Truth and Reconciliation Act. This detailed the creation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberia that eventually began operations the following year. Its mandate was to investigate human rights violations, causes of the conflict, exploitation of Liberia's natural resources and the experiences of women and children. The remit of the Commission covered the period January 1979 to October 2003.

The TRC was required to provide an opportunity for victims and perpetrators of the conflict to express their views and experiences to the Commission. It was unique in that this opportunity was not only offered to those Liberians in Liberia but also to those living in the diaspora. This is based on the recognition of the impact of the conflict on forced migration, the creation of refugee communities in other countries and the critical role the diaspora played in elements of the conflict and in ongoing post-conflict reconstruction. Participation from the Liberians living abroad was facilitated in part through the implementation of the TRC Liberian Diaspora Project.<sup>4</sup>

Several methods were employed to collect information on the conflict. This included confidential and structured interviews using prepared statement forms; a team of statement takers was trained by the TRC for this purpose. In addition, the TRC hosted hearings across the country and in the United States. These included testimony by victims, witnesses and perpetrators. In addition, the hearings also addressed specific themes related to the conflict such as children, religion and education.<sup>5</sup>

In all, some 20,000 statements were submitted to the TRC from persons in Liberia and the diaspora (the United States and West Africa).<sup>6</sup>

The final report of the TRC of Liberia was released in December 2009. While it was controversial in some respects (for instance it sanctioned the sitting president, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf), it nevertheless remains a crucial part of the reconciliation process in Liberia. What follows is an analysis of one way in which ICTs facilitated some important aspects of the Commission's work.

<sup>3</sup> Also see <http://www.usip.org/publications/truth-commission-digital-collection>.

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.theadvocatesforhumanrights.org/Liberian\\_Truth\\_and\\_Reconciliation\\_Commission\\_Project\\_2.html](http://www.theadvocatesforhumanrights.org/Liberian_Truth_and_Reconciliation_Commission_Project_2.html)

<sup>5</sup> <http://trcofliberia.org/reports/final-report>

<sup>6</sup> <http://trcofliberia.org/reports/final-report>

### 3. TRCS AND THE WORLD WIDE WEB

Truth commissions have been slow to use the internet as a central tool. A 2007 analysis of TRC websites found that some commissions had successfully used the Internet to disseminate reports and information, but none were making full use of the web's interactive features or employing rich media such as video and audio (Muñoz, 2007). Muñoz's study was based on content analysis of nine truth commission websites. The websites were chosen through an exhaustive search of official truth commission sites across the web. Unofficial websites, such as those maintained by international organizations, were excluded from the study. A few websites (e.g., a site from Guatemala<sup>7</sup>) were discarded because of their poor information value and some websites were excluded due to language issues (e.g., a site from South Korea). The remaining nine commission websites were from: East Timor, Ghana, Greensboro USA, Haiti, Liberia (their original commission site prior to the redesign described in this chapter), Peru, Rwanda, Sierra Leone and South Africa. Results of the study are summarized in Table 1 and 2 below. All sites were accessed in July of 2007.

Each website was analyzed for its complete feature set. While dissemination of a commission's final report seems like a basic facility to offer on a TRC website, only four of the eight study sites (excluding Liberia, which at the time had not released a final report) actually provided a link to their report. For example, East Timor had not updated the site to include this document, despite the fact that the report was delivered on July 2005 and the home page states, "We will post information about the final report and these products on this website soon, including details of how you can order a copy of the report."

Many of the websites had sections devoted to media reports, where they provided access to press releases, articles from print and broadcast media, etc. In fact, seven of the nine analyzed sites included some kind of media-related content. Another common feature of these sites was the presentation of information about the members of the commissions. Six of the websites included pictures and biographies of the commissioners, and in the case of Sierra Leone, personal e-mail addresses were provided so that interested persons could contact them. Most sites provided ways to contact the entire commission via email and indeed only two of the websites (Haiti and Peru) did not provide some way of contacting the commission via e-mail. Five of the websites included links to related local or international institutions and other TRC sites.

More advanced features, such as search capabilities and multimedia components, were less common. Only Peru, Sierra Leone and East Timor included search capabilities, that is a box on the site itself that allowed users to search for keywords within the site pages. Only the Peru and Greensboro sites offered some forms of video content. In the case of Peru, the website offered video testimonies of people who told their stories to the commission. Greensboro's website included videos of the swearing-in ceremony of the commissioners, as well as an interview with its research director. In addition, during hearings in 2005, the website provided live coverage via streamed video. Other sites included transcripts, though no videos, from hearings (East Timor, Sierra Leone, Peru, and Greensboro). While video content was rare, six of the websites published pictures from commission hearings, inaugural events and other meetings.

---

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.odhag.org.gt/INFREMHI/Default.htm>

	Final Report	Commissioners	Hearings	Media Coverage	Related Links	Language
East Timor		X	X	X	X	English, Portuguese
Ghana		X		X		English
Greensboro <sup>8</sup>	X	X	X	X	X	English
Haiti	X					French
Liberia <sup>9</sup>		X		X	X	English
Peru	X	X	X	X	X	English, Spanish
Rwanda						English, French
Sierra Leone	X	X	X	X	X	English
S. Africa				X		English

**Table 1: Review of nine truth commission websites examining distribution of final report, material about the commissioners, reports on the hearings, media coverage, and links related to other truth commission work.**

	Contact Info	Search Engine	Multimedia Features	URL <sup>10</sup>
East Timor	X	X		<a href="http://www.easttimor-reconciliation.org/">http://www.easttimor-reconciliation.org/</a>
Ghana	X			<a href="http://www.nrcghana.org">http://www.nrcghana.org</a>
Greensboro	X		X	<a href="http://greensborotrc.org">http://greensborotrc.org</a>
Haiti				<a href="http://www.haiti.org/truth">http://www.haiti.org/truth</a>
Liberia	X			<a href="http://www.trcofliberia.org">http://www.trcofliberia.org</a>
Peru		X	X	<a href="http://www.cverdad.org.pe">http://www.cverdad.org.pe</a>
Rwanda	X			<a href="http://www.nurc.gov.rw">http://www.nurc.gov.rw</a>
Sierra Leone	X	X		<a href="http://www.trcsierraleone.org">http://www.trcsierraleone.org</a>
S. Africa	X			<a href="http://www.doj.gov.za/trc">http://www.doj.gov.za/trc</a>

**Table 2: Review of nine truth commission websites examining information to contact the commission, a search engine, multimedia features such as video, and the accessed URL.**

<sup>8</sup> Greensboro, North Carolina, USA.

<sup>9</sup> Original website prior to re-design.

<sup>10</sup> All sites accessed July 2007.

In summary, all sites were designed in some ways to disseminate and inform, for instance by sharing information about the commissioners or to distribute electronic copies of their final report (Rwanda was a bit of an exception in not providing any of these features). Most sites also provided some means to connect by offering contact information and email addresses for the commission. However, no sites offered facilities to interact such as discussion fora, places to upload images, or ways to comment publicly on commission material. And, finally, only a couple of sites offered much in the way of multimedia features, such as video or sound.

#### 4. TRC OF LIBERIA WEBSITE DESIGN CASE STUDY

The above content review of existing truth commission websites shows that the full capabilities of the web have yet to be exploited by truth commissions. This chapter will now employ a case study method describing the methods and process used to re-design the Liberia TRC website, along with an analysis of its use after deployment. This case study and usage analysis provides evidence as to the particular role and value of ICTs in post-conflict reconciliation, and details a digital design method particularly appropriate to the post-conflict context.

In early 2007, after meetings with Jerome Verdier, Chair of Liberia's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and other commissioners and stakeholders, the Technologies and International Development Lab (TID) at the Georgia Institute of Technology (Atlanta, USA), under the direction of the author of this chapter, undertook a participatory design exercise with the aim of redesigning, implementing and hosting the Liberia TRC's website. While the Commission had already developed a simple web presence (Figure 1), there was shared recognition that the site failed to meet all of the possibilities of an online rich and interactive online presence. As noted in the previous section, while the original Liberia website could inform and connect visitors, it lacked facilities for them to interact and did not make use of multimedia materials.



Figure 1: Original Liberia TRC website prior to the re-design efforts.

Liberia has very limited internet penetration as well as low levels of computer and print literacy among its population (World Bank, 2012). Thus, it was immediately evident that the TRC website user base would consist primarily of a small elite in Liberia, Liberians in the diaspora, and a broad base of other international and domestic stakeholders in the post-conflict reconciliation process, such as relevant NGOs and international organizations. While this

broad potential user base was recognized, based on consultations with the TRC commissioners, the site first focused on Liberians in the diaspora as the most important user population. This follows from the TRC's overall inclusion of Liberians in the diaspora as a key target group, as mentioned above.

As Beyer & Holtzblatt (1998) note, identifying the principal end-user population is a critical first step in the redesign of an online portal such as that of the TRC. Members of the TID Lab at Georgia Tech employed participatory design methods with representatives from this end-user group to develop and refine usability and design elements. The representative end users consisted of Liberian expatriates from the Atlanta area, where Georgia Tech is based. The design team also consulted TRC officials, and on one occasion received advice from visiting Liberian dignitaries. This follows the participatory design approaches outlined, for example, by Schuler & Namioka (1993). In total, eight meetings took place with this set of informants, to cover the requirements of the gathering, user analysis and initial design evaluation phases (Best, Smyth, Serrano-Baquero & Etherton, 2009). This series of meetings began in the first quarter of 2007. Based on information gathered from these meetings the TID Lab formulated an initial list of requirements for the site, which included:

- Support for online entry of formal written statements to the commission;
- Repository of multimedia content resulting from TRC activities;
- Communication channels with the TRC;
- Moderated discussion forum and collaboration space for discussion and interaction;
- Secure, encrypted storage of submitted official statements and prominently displayed security guarantee;
- Linkages with other TRCs as part of the global TRC movement.



**Figure 2: A preliminary re-design employing original site's basic structure and imagery.**

During these initial sets of meetings the TID Lab members brought to the user group some very preliminary design sketches that explored new imagery and color palates while still maintaining



the original site's organizational structure (Figure 2). These early design sketches were used to facilitate dialog and elicit reaction and response from the end-user informants. This process quickly established an important over-reaching design principle; namely, the expatriate informants stressed that the original TRC website (and the initial re-designs) was too reliant on the bureaucratic structures of the commission itself as an organizing principle. The original site was organized around the offices of the commissioners, the various commission departments and so forth. Based on the above review of websites, this structure is, in fact, the standard for most institutional sites. In contrast, the end-user informants argued that the TRC site should instead be structured around the TRC's reconciliation process and the various constituent goals of this process.

Following these focus group findings, the next site mock-ups were structured around the core set of reconciliation processes and goals identified in the user meetings: speaking the truth, forgiveness, reconciliation, and justice. Figure 3 shows a preliminary design mock-up featuring this process orientation; the four goals are presented on the left side of the page under the heading "Our Process."



**Figure 3: First design mock-up to feature a reconciliation process orientation.**

The focus groups also revealed that the choice of the site's visual imagery would be both critically important and difficult. While visually conveying the ideals and "Liberian-ness" of the TRC was essential, finding appropriate and broadly acceptable images was difficult, given Liberia's ethnic and linguistic diversity. Avoiding bias toward any one group was critical. These considerations affected choice of color scheme, visual icons, and other decorative imagery.



For instance, when asked “What is Liberian?” the user group members agreed only on the Liberian flag. Based on that answer, some suggested use of the flag colors of red, white, and blue for the site, while others felt that this would make the TRC, an independent commission, appear too closely aligned with the government. Still others pointed out that in traditional cultures red is commonly associated with blood, war and violence.

Based on these at-times conflicting user inputs, the TID Lab developed a new design mock-up that implemented both the process orientation and inputs on color and imagery (Figure 4). This new design had an overall green palate, which was seen as neutral and comforting. The TRC logo was deemed an important branding element so it was included, and the Liberian coastline was integrated into the head banner. This coastline represented Liberia to the user-group without associations to a particular politic or narrow identity. The reconciliation process was encoded in the original four steps with accompanying iconography:

- *Speak the Truth* was represented by a palava hut<sup>11</sup>;
- *Forgive With an Open Heart* was represented by the sharing of cola nuts;
- *Justice* was represented by scales;
- *And Reconcile* was represented by two clasped hands.



**Figure 4: First design mock-up to implement the full set of inputs from the user participatory design meetings including process orientation and new color palate and esthetic.**

<sup>11</sup> In Liberia, a “palava hut” is similar in concept to a town hall, where people in the community come together to discuss local issues.

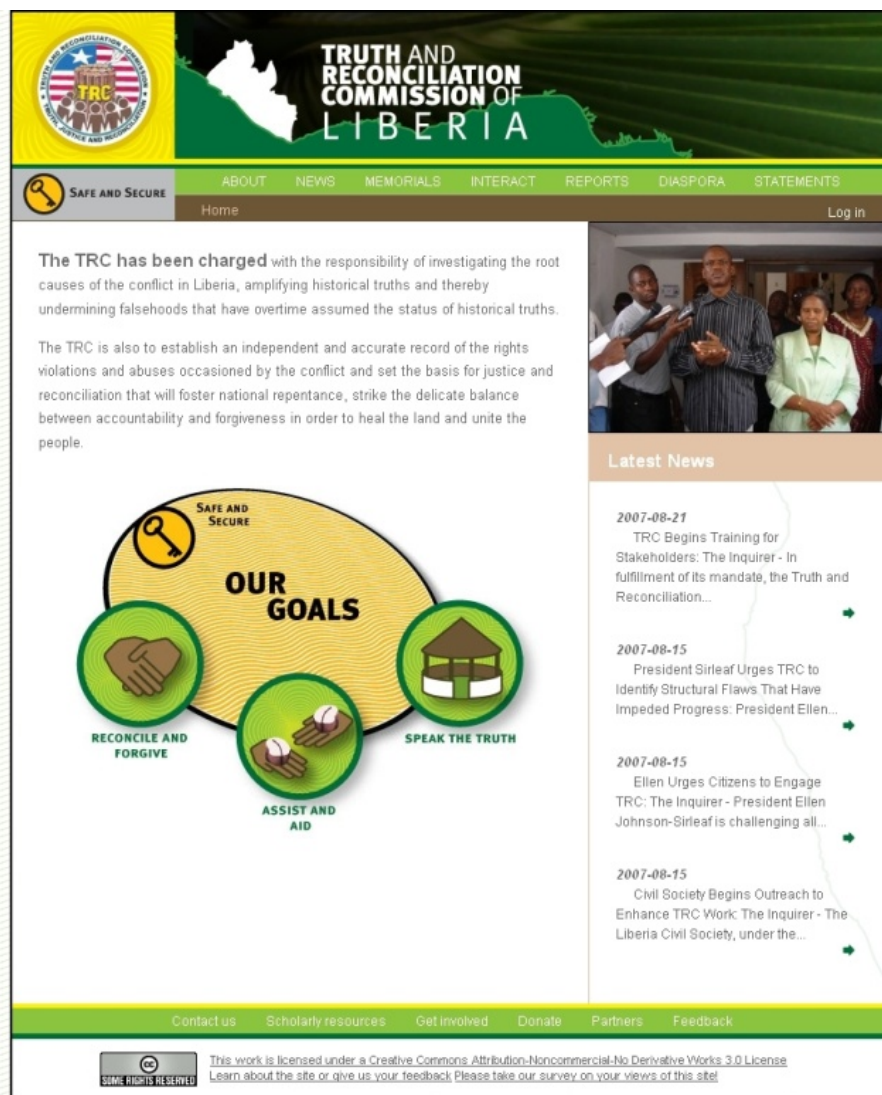
The home page also had facilities for a slide show, news items and navigation facilities.

In addition to the Liberian coastline as an element in the title banner, the initial design included a photograph of the white *Strophanthus Gratus* flower, a selection made on the advice of a botanist at New York's Museum of Natural History who claimed that the species was endemic to Liberia (Figure 4). However, at a subsequent focus group meeting the choice of the flower was rejected by the Liberian informants who claimed to have never before seen such a flower. This finding demonstrates how domain experts, such as the botanist, can never fully represent actual user populations. In the end, the flowers were replaced with a familiar image of palm fronds.

Another result of the focus group engagements was a call for the inclusion of several interactive multimedia content areas, including photo, audio and video galleries. Other areas for interaction were also added, including discussion fora, means to contact the commissioners and a facility to offer sworn sealed testimony over the internet. This would be the first time that a truth commission had accepted sworn official testimony over the internet. Finally, some of the more traditional TRC web components were kept, including areas for reports, details on the commissioners, the TRC schedule of programs and so forth.

In addition, based on user input, a fifth process element was added to the four already in place, highlighting web material that explained how the site was Safe and Secure. A skeleton key icon represented this concept. This was an important element, especially given that the site allowed for direct user contributions and included an area where visitors could provide sworn testimony.

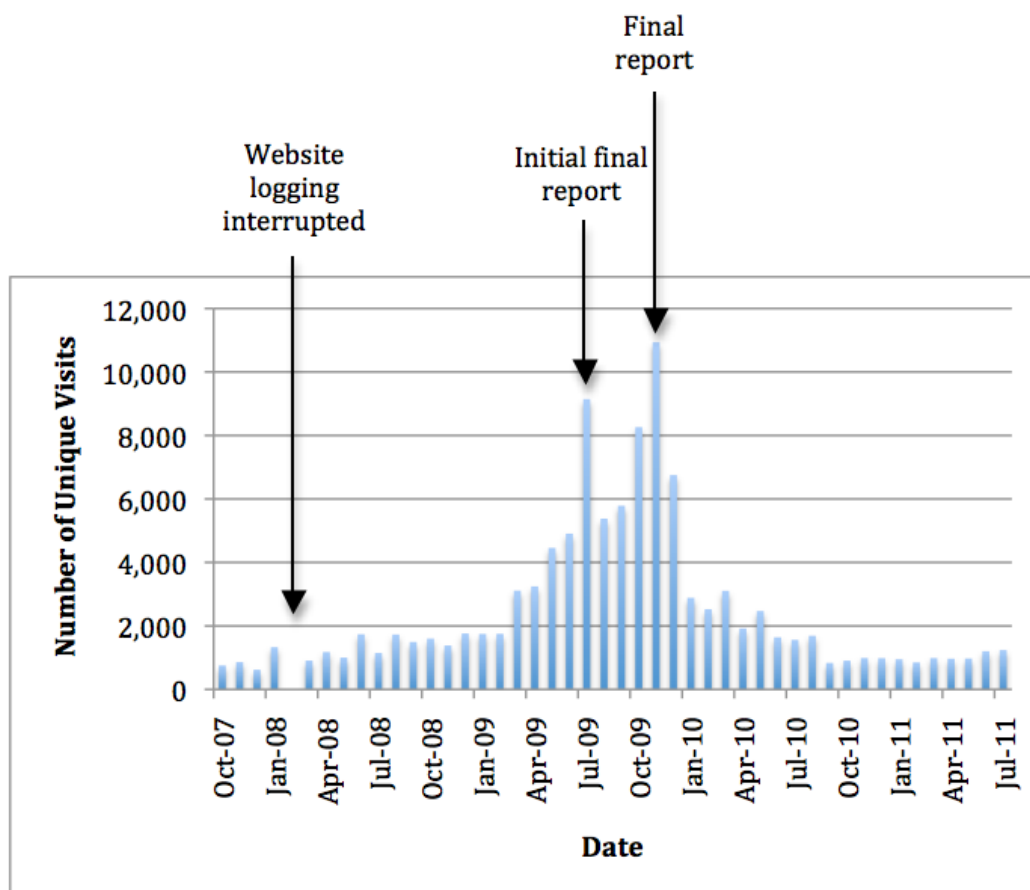
The final step prior to launching the new site was to work with the TRC commissioners and chair to ensure that the design met with their approval. These interactions resulted in one significant change, namely the removal of the Justice process icon. Cllr. Verdier noted that the TRC's mandate focused on transitional justice measures but stopped short of formal justice. Thus, the inclusion of justice as an element of the process was inaccurate and inappropriate. Figure 5 shows the final home page for the site, which was finalized, tested and launched in October 2007.



**Figure 5: Final design with process elements now in an oval, the inclusion of the Safe and Secure icon, and the removal of the Justice icon.**

## 5. USAGE PATTERNS OF THE WEBSITE

The new site was launched with special instrumentation that recorded all visits to the site and accumulated data on each visit, such as exactly which pages were visited, how long a user stayed on a page, where the visitor was located, etc. Note that this data does not personally identify the individuals accessing the site but instead only accumulates generic information such as their general location. This data allows for some evaluation as to the reach and impact of the site. A simple figure of merit for the website's impact was the number of unique visitors the site attracted. The web visit analysis tool distinguished between the raw total number of visits, which counts repeat visits from the same person as separate impressions, versus the number of unique visits which tries to count the number of actual individuals to visit the site. Figure 6 graphs this number of unique visits per day from the initial site launch till August of 2011.



**Figure 6: Histogram of over three years of number of unique visits per day to website.**

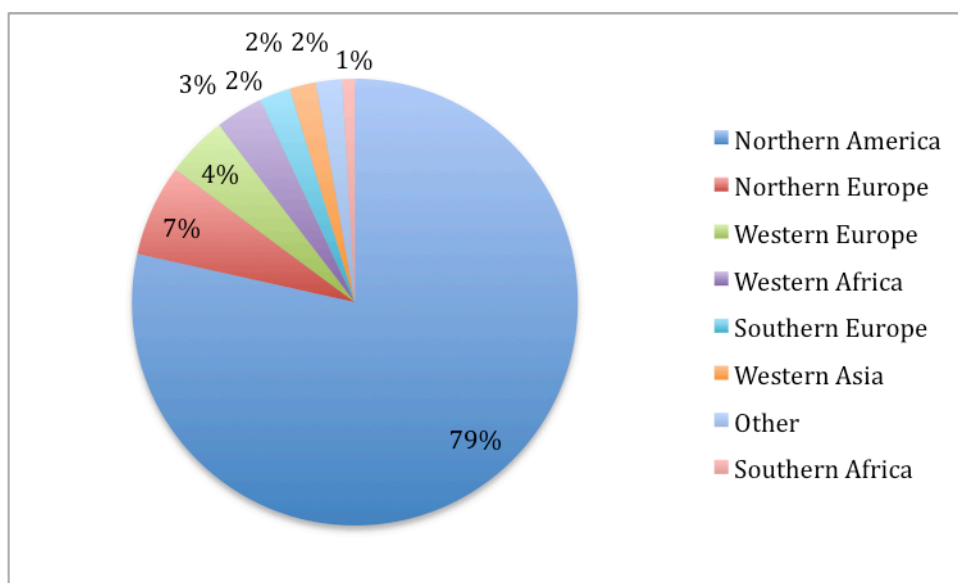
The histogram shows some interesting dynamics in the number of unique visits to the website over its initial years. At the left of the graph, during the month of March in 2008, zero visits were logged. In fact, during this period there were indeed visitors to the site; however, due to an error in the logging tool installation, all visits during this month were lost. Ignoring this short period without any visitor data, on average the site received nearly 2,500 unique visitors per month. Starting in mid-2009, monthly visits to the website increased steadily. This continuous growth in interest spiked with the release of the preliminary final report in July of 2009, and spiked again with the release of the final report at the end of the year. Indeed, during the month when the final report was released, November 2009, the site experienced 10,935 unique visits. The number of visits then fairly quickly dropped off. This pattern makes sense: as public hearing activity builds and anticipation of the final report grows, one sees the steady rise in visits, culminating in a dramatic number of visits for the final report and then a fairly rapid decline back to about 1,000 unique visits a month.

Beyond the raw number of unique visitors to the website, the logging tool accumulates information about each visit, including a rough attempt at geographically locating each visitor. This process is not precise, and many visitors from Liberia (and other African countries) will be logged as coming to the site from other locations, due mostly to the technical realities of routing all international internet connectivity via satellite gateways. With that caveat in mind, Figure 7 shows the estimated percentage of visits by sub-continental region. Nearly 80 percent of visits are logged as from North America. Northwest Europe accounts for close to 11 percent of visits. (Visits from Liberia might be logged as coming from North America or Europe.) Next is West

Africa with 4 percent. This is the largest region of Africa, with South Africa accounting for less than 1 percent and East Africa even smaller. Western Asia, or the Middle East, account for about 2 percent of visits.

The technical challenges to these visit logs notwithstanding, it seems clear that the large majority of visitors came from North America, specifically the USA (with 40 times more visits than Canada). When this data is broken down by city, the most significant traffic comes from cities with large Liberian diaspora, with 17 percent originating from New York City, 3 percent from Miami, 3 percent from Minneapolis, 2 percent from Chicago, and 1.5 percent from Washington DC.

These results seem to confirm the initial design principle that the website would be visited mostly by people in countries with substantial Internet infrastructure and penetration, such as in North America and Europe, and would be used significantly by those Liberians in the diaspora.



**Figure 7: Percentage of visits by sub-continental region.**

Finally, the traffic analysis counts not only total visits to the entire website but also isolates each part of the website, counting the number of visits for each. This data highlights those parts of the site that were of most interest to the visitors. Table 2 lists the twenty most visited areas of the website; these are either specific pages or groups of pages that are coherently related. By far the most visited were the video homepages and video search areas. These locations are not the pages with specific videos but are instead the homepage and navigational and search facilities where visitors are able to locate specific videos they are interested in viewing. The site contains over 1,000 videos available for playback, nearly all of which document the public hearings conducted by the commission. While the general video navigation facilities are the most visited part of the site, the eighth most visited page (with 1.1 percent of all page views) is the video of Prince Johnson's hearing. Prince Johnson was a notorious rebel force commander during the civil war. He is now a politician in Liberia. Beyond Prince Johnson, certain other videos also enjoyed significant viewership. For instance, the 15th most visited portion of the site contained videos from the diaspora hearings held in the USA.

After videos, the second most popular page on the website was the home page, ([www.trcofliberia.org](http://www.trcofliberia.org), and as depicted in Figure 5 above) with 13.4 percent of all page views.

The third most popular area of the website was the page where visitors could download the final report. This area attracted 4.4 percent of all visits to the website.

In summary, Table 3 underlines how popular and potentially impactful the rich media material of the site was. Videos were by far the most popular materials.

Percentage of Total Pageviews	Number Pageviews	Site Location
16.0%	108487	Video Homepages
13.4%	90753	Homepage
4.4%	29673	Final Report
2.4%	16088	Photos Homepage
1.9%	12671	News
1.5%	10438	Hearings Homepage
1.1%	7526	Prince Johnson Video
1.1%	7370	Commissioner Bios
1.0%	6877	Press Releases
1.0%	6857	TRC Mandate
1.0%	6508	Final Report Press Release
0.8%	5481	Statement Submission
0.5%	3409	About the TRC
0.4%	2918	USA Hearing Videos
0.4%	2754	Scholarly Resources
0.4%	2745	Contact the TRC
0.4%	2673	Women Children Homepage
0.4%	2666	Hearing Transcripts
0.4%	2498	Reports Homepage

**Table 3: Twenty most visited areas of the website.**

While these facilities focus on informing visitors on the activities of the commission, related research work has demonstrated that viewing-rich media can be effective in processes of national reconciliation and healing (Best, Long, Etherton & Smyth, 2011). The second most popular facilities on the site were information delivery of primarily textual materials such as the final report, news, information on the commissioners, etc. The third most popular type of facility were the components that connected visitors to the commission or allowed for interaction. The interaction page for submitting formal statements accounted for 0.8 percent of all visits to the website. Another 0.5 percent of visits were to the page with information on how to contact the commission. However, the interaction pages allowing visitors to contribute public material such as pictures, or the discussion fora of the website did not receive many visits at all. So while some elements of connection and interactivity were appreciated, they enjoyed considerably less traffic compared with the rich media facilities and the more traditional informational pages.



## 6. CONCLUSION

During the period when the TRC was active, analysis of the site's usage data points to its significance in supporting several functions of the Commission. Understanding the site's design and the main points in its development suggests ways that future truth commissions can harness the web for similar goals. This is relevant in improving our overall understanding of some of the ways in which ICTs can be used to support processes of reconciliation in a post-conflict setting.

In particular, analysis reveals three important results from this usage analysis and design activity. First, it underlines the importance of employing participatory methods. These brings together not only the relevant user base—Liberians living in the diaspora—but also institutional representation, that of the TRC commissioners and officers. Second, unlike other sites, the TRC of Liberia website emphasized the process of the TRC's work (testimony, forgiveness, etc.) rather than the organizational structure that drove the commission. This is potentially useful as a visitor develops the connection between the purposes of the TRC and his or her own experiences during conflict. Third, the multimedia materials on the website were popular and potentially useful for users. Given related work demonstrating the healing effect such rich media can offer in post-conflict settings, this further underlines the impact and value rich online media can have in processes of truth and reconciliation.

This study also underlines a wide area for potential future study. In particular this includes a deeper examination of design approaches and elements for online and rich media use in post-conflict reconciliation. In addition, this research measured impact of the website primarily through usage statistics. New or enhanced measures of impact are indicated, as attention primarily to usage figures probably misses some important aspects of the materials impact.

With publication of the final report, the TRC website has now transitioned to a static site that will be hosted by an external web company for at least 10 years.

## 7. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author thanks the track chairs and the helpful anonymous peer reviews. The author would also like to thank the commissioners and employees of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberia and the significant team of Georgia Tech students and associates who contributed to the ICT work of the TRC. In particular this includes Arkadiusz Banasik, Fully Dickson, Stephanie Emling, John Etherton, Itonde Kakoma, William Long, Parker McGee, Benjamin Powell, Daniel Serrano-Baquero, Thomas Smyth, Keith Watson, and Calvin Yu.

## 8. REFERENCES

- Best, M. L., Smyth, T. N., Serrano-Baquero, D., & Etherton, J. (2009). Designing for and with diaspora: A case study of work for the truth and reconciliation commission of Liberia. *Proceedings of the 27th international conference extended abstracts on Human factors in computing systems* (pp. 2903–2918). ACM.
- Best, M. L., Long, W., Etherton, J., & Smyth, T. (2011). Rich Digital Media as a Tool in Post-Conflict Truth and Reconciliation. *Media, War & Conflict*, 4(3), 231-249.
- Beyer, H., & Holtzblatt, K. (1998). *Contextual design: defining customer-centered systems*. San Francisco, Calif.: Morgan Kaufmann Publishers.

- Brahm, E. (2007). Uncovering the Truth: Examining Truth Commission Success and Impact. *International Studies Perspectives*, 8, 16–35.
- Hayner, P. B. (2010). *Unspeakable Truths: Transitional Justice and the Challenge of Truth Commissions* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Muñoz, J. A. (2007). *The use of Internet in Truth and Reconciliation Commissions: a missed opportunity?* Georgia Institute of Technology, School of International Affairs, Atlanta.
- Schuler, D., & Namioka, A. (1993). *Participatory design : principles and practices*. Hillsdale, N.J.: L. Erlbaum Associates.
- World Bank. (2012). *World Development Indicators & Global Development Finance*. Washington D.C.: The World Bank.