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# TRAINING WORKSHOP FOR JOURNALISTS AND MEDIA PRACTITIONERS

LIBERIA LAND CONFLICT RESOLUTION PROJECT

DECEMBER 2013

This publication was produced for review by the United States Agency for International Development.  
It was prepared by Tetra Tech ARD.

A project of the Liberia Land Commission and the Liberia Land Conflict Resolution Project. Matt Brown, Consultant, Monrovia, Liberia, November 25, 2013.

This document was produced for review by the United States Agency for International Development. It was prepared by the USAID/Liberia Land Conflict Resolution Project, IQC. No. EPP-I-00-06-00008-00, T.O. No. AID-669-TO-I I-00001.

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## **DISCLAIMER**

The author's views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Agency for International Development or the United States Government.



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# PREFACE

This consultant report and materials were developed by Matt Brown, a consultant and one of the facilitators for a training session in Nimba County for Liberian journalists to enhance their coverage of land issues. The session fulfills one of the illustrative indicators under the activity, “Broaden the reach of local media...strengthening existing capacity to disseminate sensitive and accurate messages about ADR.” The session hosted 30 journalists of the 32 target number, as well as the Land Coordination Center communications staff, who are also part of the Liberia Land Conflict Resolution Project indicator “number of [Land Coordination Center] staff trained in outreach techniques.”



# I.0 INTRODUCTION

## I.1 LAND CONFLICT BACKGROUND

A decade after Liberia's civil war ended, disputes over land remain a major source of conflict and, at times, violence in Liberia. Some Liberians who were displaced during the war have returned to their homes in Liberia to find others occupying their land. Many times, these parties had bought the land through third parties in illegal land deals. To help assuage land disputes and to create an alternative dispute resolution framework, the Government of Liberia created a Land Commission (LC) in 2010 with representation in the counties most affected by these conflicts. The commission has a five-year mandate.

## I.2 PROJECT BACKGROUND

The Liberia Land Conflict Resolution Project (LCRP), a USAID-funded Tetra Tech project working closely with the LC to help it achieve its goals, wanted to conduct a workshop for journalists and media practitioners in conjunction with the commission. The objective of the workshop was to train Liberian journalists from the capital, Monrovia, and five upcountry counties affected by land conflicts in techniques for covering land conflict and ways of transmitting the LC's message.

The theme of the workshop was: "Educate, Inspire, but Don't Inflamm." The LC and LCRP selected 30 journalists from Monrovia and the conflict-affected counties to come to the training in Ganta, Nimba County. The journalists represented both print reporters and radio journalists from community radio stations. Five officials from the LC's county-level administration, the Land Coordination Centers (LCCs), were also represented as well as the LC Commissioner for Outreach and Education and the LC Communications Officer.

## I.3 CONSULTANT'S SCOPE OF WORK

The consultant was responsible for facilitating one or more topics in the three-day journalist training session. The LCRP and Land Commission set the agenda. LCRP was responsible for producing all prepared training materials. For each topic to be covered, the consultant was responsible for creating exercises including objectives and delivery method. The consultant was responsible for reporting on the outcome of the exercises and contributing to the resolution emerging from the workshop. The consultant was responsible for developing recommendations for onward interaction and networking among participants, the LC, and LCRP, which are contained in this final report on the activity.

## I.4 LEVEL OF EFFORT

The consultant was given 12 days with which to complete the Scope of Work. Two days were given to prepare and edit training materials. One day was given for final review of the materials and the agenda. Four days were given for travel. Four days were given for facilitation. One day was given for report writing, review, and discussions.

## **I.5 EXECUTION OF WORK**

After receiving the agenda, the consultant worked for two days on creating exercises for the various topics to be covered. The consultant traveled to Monrovia on November 16, arriving on November 17. On November 17 and 18, the consultant met with team members from LCRP, the LC, and other consultants to discuss roles and responsibilities during the training and to go over specific exercises on the agenda. The team departed for the training site in Ganta, Nimba County, on November 18. The training was held from November 19 to 21.

# 2.0 WORKSHOP

## 2.1 WORKSHOP DETAIL

The journalists and LC members met for the first day of the workshop and listened to opening remarks from local leaders and LC Chairman Cecil Brandy. Chairman Brandy told the assembled journalists that they “are as important as any other sector in our society. You need to help us carry the message of land issues. Be engaged with the Land Commission. Consult the Land Commission so you don’t add fuel to the fire.” This is important as it shows the LC’s commitment at the highest level to making communications and messaging a priority. It will be helpful to remind the LC leadership of this stated commitment when considering implementing some of the recommendations that follow.

After introductions, the workshop began in earnest with an overview of the LC. This included five separate presentations: “The Mandate of the LC, and Role of the Education and Outreach Program”; “The Role, Functions, and Achievements of the LCCs”; “The Media Strategy of the LC”; “Messages Developed by the LC and LCRP”; and “A Primer on Land Issues in Liberia.” During these sessions, journalists asked basic questions such as the size and budget of the LC, and the number of cases in which the LC has engaged. It is clear from the lack of basic knowledge of the LC that either outreach efforts have so far failed to reach this group of journalists or this group of journalists has not done research and reporting on the LC in the past. Either way, there is room for improvement.

After lunch, the consultant led a session on “How Different Styles of Reporting on Land Issues Affect People’s Behavior.” The session looked at two styles of journalism: conflict, or war, reporting; and peace reporting, with emphasis on the latter. The session was adapted from an Institute for War and Peace Reporting module on peace reporting training. The participants learned about the two differing styles of reporting, and were taught that peace reporting goes beyond the traditional hallmarks of war reporting by looking more at the causes of conflict and efforts to achieve resolution. This is the preferred style of reporting on the land conflict issue, as it will incorporate the LC’s message. The participants were taught about fair and balanced reporting and what to avoid in reporting in order to avoid inflaming the conflict. The participants were shown two examples of stories on land conflict taken from the Liberian press and were asked to critically analyze them. The participants then were given specific tools to help craft peace reporting-style stories. Finally, we looked at an example of a well-reported and written story on land conflict in Liberia, and reviewed all the tools used by the writer.

Day 2 began with a recap of Day 1, followed by a presentation by Maureen Sieh from the media development nonprofit IREX. Her presentation buttressed the consultant’s session from Day 1, and continued to train participants on the tools of fair and balanced reporting in the context of the Monrovia/county divide. She focused on helping participants to think about more in-depth stories and investigative pieces. She stressed the need to verify facts gathered on the ground. Her next session explored the need for a code of conduct in the newsroom, with an emphasis on ethical reporting. This sparked an interesting discussion between participants and facilitators about the ethical ramifications of accepting payment for stories. It is apparently a common practice in Liberia for a journalist to accept money from a politician or person in power in exchange for a favorable story on air or in print. This practice is rare in the west and would result in a journalist’s immediate termination, as it erodes the public’s trust that the media is a fair, impartial watchdog of those in power. The fact that many workshop participants attempted to justify the practice by complaining of a lack of resources and the lack of a livable wage for Liberian journalists points to a much wider problem in Liberia’s media, and is beyond the scope of this project. However, it is clear that this problem needs to be addressed at the level of media ownership in Liberia.

In the afternoon, the facilitator led a discussion about ways to forge a partnership between the LC and the Liberian media. The participants were polled on the various tools they use in their reporting, and, more specifically, on the LC media platforms with which they have had contact. This informal poll revealed that most of the journalists have access to the Internet and use it daily in their work. About half of the participants said they use Facebook, including for work, and about a third said they are on Twitter. Approximately two-thirds said they have worked on a land conflict story; however, asked if any of the journalists had visited the LC website, only three said they had and that they found the information unhelpful. None had visited the LC's Facebook page. About one-third of participants, mostly Monrovia-based journalists, said they had been to an LC press conference, and none reported receiving an LC press release. Few had heard an LC jingle or advertisement. Strategies to fix this are addressed in the Recommendations section to follow. The participants then were placed into groups and came up with strategies that the LC can implement to better communicate with the media. Those are also listed below.

In the final session of the day, Maureen Sieh and the consultant conducted a mock press conference based on a script adapted from a real land conflict story on the Liberian press. Participants were instructed to pay attention to the facilitators, who played the roles of a local Police Commissioner and a Land Coordination Center official, as they read a statement and then took questions from the journalists. They participants were then instructed to write a story based on the information given. The stories were to utilize all of the tools taught over the past two days. As motivation, participants were told the writer of the best story would win a digital recorder.

Day 3 began with a recap of the second day. This was followed by a discussion of the previous day's assignment. Most of the journalists turned in stories of varying quality, though some showed a clear understanding of the principles taught during the workshop. The writer of the best story was awarded the prize followed by a dissection and discussion of his piece. The participants then worked on drafting a resolution for the workshop, which is included here. Closing remarks were followed by a presentation of certificates to all participants.

## **2.2 RESOLUTION**

The participants resolved to forge a media partnership with the Land Commission through the following strategies:

- Engage in direct partnership with media institutions across the country;
- Empower the media to engage in regular radio/TV programs, or newspaper columns on land issues;
- Carry out information-sharing through LC publications and other documents;
- Hold local press conferences;
- Provide training and logistics to media institutions within the limited resources;
- Develop memoranda of understanding with partner media institutions;
- Network with LCC outreach offices; and
- Use flyers, billboards, brochures, jingles, and dramas to disseminate messages.

## **2.3 RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **2.3.1 Recommendations for the Land Commission**

Besides those strategies listed above, the consultant suggests that the Land Commission should:

- Change the structure of information dissemination.
  - The Land Commission has a top-down system for disseminating information to the press. The Chairman is said to be the only person who can speak to the media or can delegate a spokesperson. This system should be modified to give a designated spokesperson or persons more authority to speak directly to the media.
  - At the local level, LCC officials should have more liberty to reach out to the media, speak to the media, and appear on local radio broadcasts.
- Implement a more robust media outreach strategy if the LC is serious about getting the message out through the media.
  - The LC website, [www.landlib.org](http://www.landlib.org), needs more content in order to be useful. More background on the LC should be posted there, including the LC's founding documents, information on the budget, make up and staff of the LC, a map of the counties in which the LC operates, a fact sheet on number and status of cases, and an updated media page that includes press releases, stories, and press contacts.
  - The LC should take advantage of social media as an effective way of reaching journalists. The LC's Facebook page needs more frequent updating, and the LC should take advantage of Twitter as another platform to reach journalists.
  - Press releases should be distributed more frequently and by email. The workshop captured the email addresses of 30 journalists. They should be the start of an email list, which can be utilized whenever there is information to blast out to the media.
- Consider bringing on a short-term international media consultant to help ramp up the LC's media outreach strategy.
  - The consultant would be able to pitch and receive coverage for land conflict issues in international media outlets as well as local outlets.
  - International attention could help spur local outlets to cover the issue.

### **2.3.2 Recommendations for the Liberia Land Conflict Resolution Project**

From the positive feedback we received, the workshop was perceived to be well-organized, -executed and -received. If the LCRP undertakes future journalist trainings, it should:

- Bring the facilitating consultant in earlier.
  - The workshop would benefit if the facilitator had input on the agenda. In this case, the agenda was set before the consultant was contacted, and the pre-planning in the consultant's Scope of Work constituted the two days prior to leaving for Liberia.
  - Understanding that budget limitations may only allow for two days of preparatory work, a future Scope of Work could stipulate that this work be done one or two weeks before the workshop (during the agenda-making process) and the remainder of the Scope of Work could be fulfilled during the workshop.
- Include more sessions aimed at building journalist capacity.
  - The first two days of the workshop were very well-planned and full of material. Day 3 of the workshop, however, was relatively light and mostly consisted of crafting the resolution.

- More time on Day 3 could be dedicated to tools and techniques of the journalist trade.
- Invite community members who have been involved in a land conflict.
  - It would be helpful for the journalists to interview residents who have been through a land conflict in order to understand the issue from a first-hand source.
- Encourage the LC to invite more female journalists.
  - Only one of the 30 journalists in attendance was female. Greater gender diversity could be achieved.

# APPENDIX

Attached are the presentations the consultant gave during the workshop. Included here is a discussion of the exercises, their purpose, and the technical approach used.

## **PRESENTATION I. HOW DOES THE STYLE OF REPORTING ON LAND AFFECT PEOPLE'S BEHAVIOR?**

The objective of this presentation was to give participants an overview of the different styles of reporting on a conflict. The styles discussed were war reporting and peace reporting. An emphasis was given to peace reporting, as the principles of peace reporting lead to reporting that informs but does not enflame.

The presentation was given in a lecture format. The facilitator presented the topics and led a discussion in light of any comments or questions. The presentation contains a list of things to avoid in reporting on conflict. Two examples of stories from the Liberian press were given, and the participants were asked to analyze them and give examples of where they could be improved.

The presentation contained an analysis of conflict. The presenter facilitated a discussion on the possible outcomes of conflict and asked for answers to the question in the orange tree story.

The presentation then got into the specific tools for peace reporting on conflicts. An example of a well-written story about a Liberian land dispute was presented, and the facilitator led a discussion on why the story was good and what tools the writer used in the piece.

# How does the Style of Reporting on Land Affect People's Behavior?

Conflict Reporting or Peace Reporting?

# Which Statement is True?

**1. JOURNALISTS ARE NOT  
DIRECTLY INVOLVED IN THE  
CONFLICTS THEY COVER;  
THEY ARE SIMPLY  
OBJECTIVE REPORTERS OF  
EVENTS.**

**2. THE MEDIA PLAY A KEY  
ROLE IN EVERY CONFLICT,  
DRAMATICALLY  
INFLUENCING EVENTS ON  
THE GROUND.**

# Conflict Journalism

- Journalism about conflict that has a value bias towards violence and violent groups.
- Usually leads audiences to overvalue violent responses to conflict and ignore non-violent alternatives.
- Focuses only on physical effects of conflict ignoring psychological impacts.
- Biased toward reporting only the differences between parties, rather than similarities, previous agreements, and progress on common issues
- Ignores causes and outcomes.
- Assumes that one side's needs can only be met by the other side's compromise or defeat.

# Peace Journalism

- Developed from research that indicates that often news about conflict has a value bias toward violence.
- It also includes practical methods for correcting this bias by producing journalism in both the mainstream and alternative media.
- Also known as conflict solution journalism, conflict sensitive journalism, constructive conflict coverage and reporting the world.
- Involves broadcasting calls for non-violence policies into the public sphere.
- Aims to shed light on causes of violence as they impact upon the lives of people in a conflict arena.
- Frames conflicts as consisting of many parties and pursuing many goals rather than simplifying.

# Role of the Media in a Conflict

- Provide unbiased reporting on the conflict.
- But is the reality ever so simple?
  - Belligerents in every conflict set out to deliberately use the media in achieving their aims
  - Events in a conflict, especially a violent one, are often created to lure the media into inadvertently promoting the goals of one side or the other
- Question everything.

# Know Your Audience

- Multiple Audiences
  - Counties
  - Monrovia/nationwide
  - Liberian diaspora
  - International community
- Never assume audience knows background of conflict.
  - Add as much background as possible to every piece.

# Practice Professionalism

- We are all defined by many labels
  - Gender
  - Family/clan membership
  - Ethnic identity
  - Religion
- When reporting, remove those labels. Be defined as a journalist.

# Editorial and Journalistic Decisions

- Never fully objective
- We choose who to quote, what to photograph
- Lose the assumption that “news is news”, that news is “natural” and we are just following events
  - EXAMPLE: In Rwanda, events on the ground initially seemed to many international reporters to be simply “ethnic violence” and “chaos”, but after a time, it became clear that an organised genocide was taking place.
- Looking deeper is a sign of experienced professionalism
  - This is not a license for propagandising

# Responsibility of Journalists in Society

- Our jobs are important because of the influence the media can have.
  - We cannot then turn around and at the same time say, “we don’t have anything to do with this conflict”.
- What we say/write matters to people’s lives.
  - Consider the professional and ethical ramifications of our work at all times when reporting on conflict.
- We have a responsibility to:
  - Report properly and accurately
  - But also to take into account the impact of our own reports.

# What to Avoid in Reporting

- Hate speech
- Incitement to violence
- Dehumanising language
- Propaganda
- Avoid these things both in your reporting and in reporting the words of others
  - Don't be used as a mouthpiece for any group.
  - We are responsible to our readers, not to any group.

## **Example 1.**

**From: Front Page Africa, 05 August 2013**

SDI Warns Liberia Land Commission Executive

**Monrovia** - The Sustainable Development Institute has refuted recent statement made by the Land Commission Vice Chairman Walter Wisner, terming the SDI and the Friends of the Earth fact sheet reports on Sime Darby as a bunch of lies.

According to SDI Program Manager Nora Bowier, Commissioner Wisner made a number of serious accusations calling the recent fact sheet published by SDI and Friends of the Earth as lies before a gathering of locals in Grand Cape Mount County.

“The SDI has been the subject of a campaign of misinformation in the press and through public statements made by Mr. Walter Wisner, Vice Chairman of the Land Commission,” Bowier said.

Madam Bowier said, the statement from Commissioner Wisner is an attempt to tarnish the credibility and reputation of the SDI.

“We strongly refute his comments and express our concern at the implication of a senior civil servant attempting to cause harm to the reputation of a Liberian civil society organization without providing any evidence of wrongdoing,” Bowier said.

Madam Bowier said Commissioner Wisner’s comments and series of newspapers articles directly related to SDI advocacy and public statements regarding the Sime Darby concession. She said, SDI has been critical of Sime Darby’s early behavior in Liberia, as well as the concession agreement it holds with government.

# Other things to Avoid

- For TV, don't simply go for the most sensational pictures
  - have respect for the victims on all sides
  - understand the emotive power of such images and the further violence they could spark
- For print, be careful about following TV news:
  - TV news focuses on the immediate
  - Print needs to dig deeper, provide broader contexts to the readers
  - Don't simply continue TV's sensationalism

## **Example 2.**

**From: The New Dawn,** 09 October 2013

### **1 Killed In Fresh Nimba Land Dispute**

At least one person has been killed in Nimba County following a long-standing land dispute between citizens of Kpowin and Sahnquoi Town in Sacleapea-mahn District, Nimba County.

Report gathered by this paper from the county, indicates that there has been a land dispute between citizens of Sahnquoi and Kpowintowns since 1964. The 250 acres of land in question was reportedly purchased by one Pa- Dolo in 1964, but was later turned over to the people of Kpowin Town.

Our Nimba County correspondent said the long-standing dispute has led to the killing of a 49-year-oldman, Harrison Saye, who was said to be a resident of Kpowin Town.

The victim had reportedly left town for his farm to get reefs, which were packed in the bush, but unfortunately, on his way he was allegedly attacked by a man identified as Alfred Wonlatoe, a citizen of Sahnquoi Town. The incident, which occurred on 5 October, has created panic among villagers.

An eyewitness narrated that the late Harrison Saye abandoned the transporting of the reefs but later returned on his farm to get cassava for his family, and while on his way back in Kpowintown, Alfred Wonlatoe reportedly attacked him, chopping several parts of his body before slicing his throat.

Another eyewitness, Kou Dolo, said prior to the incident, she had advised the suspect and the victim to abolish the conflict between men. The New Dawn Nimba County Correspondent said suspect Wontlatoe has turned himself over to the Liberia National Police in Saclepea.

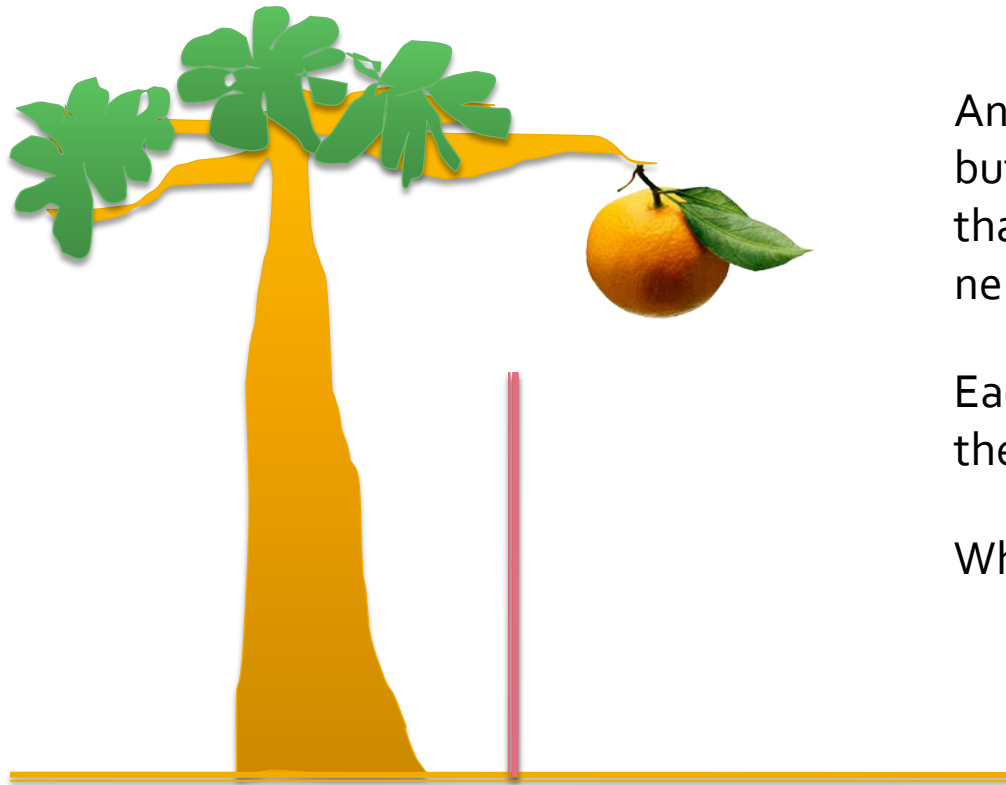
# Understanding Conflict

- Understand the roots of your conflict from all sides
  - know the grievances of the various communities
  - Even perceived grievances are important
- Understand conflict analysis and conflict resolution generally
  - study outside conflicts
  - study outside peace processes
  - comparisons to other conflicts make readers realise they're not alone

# Conflict Analysis

- Conflict is not violence necessarily
- Conflict is natural and common
- Conflict is especially seen in situations where:
  - resources are scarce
  - power or wealth are unevenly distributed
  - past grievances exist
  - communities do not realise their interdependence
  - communities do not or cannot communicate

# Possible Outcomes of Conflict



An orange tree is located in one garden, but the orange is hanging from a branch that reaches over a fence into the neighbouring garden.

Each neighbour believes he should have the orange.

What are the possible outcomes?

# Outcomes of Conflict

## **1. One side wins**

- a) Might makes right. Neighbours fight for the orange
- b) Legal resolution. Property law determines who gets the orange
- c) Chance. Neighbours flip a coin over the orange
- d) Compensation. One gets the orange, but pays the other.

## **2. Withdrawal**

- a) Walk away. Both parties turn their backs on the orange.
- b) Elimination. They destroy or give away the orange
- c) Delay. They put the orange in the freezer

## **3. Compromise**

Divide the resource. Parties agree to cut the orange or squeeze it and share the juice.

## **4. Transcendence**

Innovative solutions. Cut the seeds out of the orange, plant them and start a plantation – new business, new income, more resources

# Covering Conflict

- Obtain journalistic balance.
  - Don't only presenting the views of "both sides"
  - Looking beyond the easy descriptions of the actors in a conflict
  - Uncover all groups and sub-groups in all sides
- An aggressive approach to balance naturally assists peaceful resolution
  - Presenting the widest range of views is a professional duty
  - By actively maintaining such professional balance, you actually assist peace
  - Remember what we know about conflict:
    - more sides means...
    - more complexity, means...
    - more possible combinations of efforts to achieve peace
    - because new political formations are possible apart from "Us vs. Them"

# Look Closer

- Look at both the extremists and moderates in a conflict
  - extremists too often grab all the headlines
  - moderates are usually in the overwhelming majority on the ground but receive less coverage
  - aim to represent the relative weights of actors and opinions truthfully

# Specific Tools

## Story Selection:

- Like structural issues in the media, elements of content are a key factor in the specific tools of peace reporting.

EXAMPLE: In one weekend during the Israel/Palestine conflict, several events happened.

1. There were five Palestinian suicide bombings in three days, killing nine Israeli citizens and wounding dozens of others;
  2. Israeli security forces sealed off many Palestinian towns, which means thousands of Palestinians could not get to their work;
  3. Palestinian Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas and Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon met, agreeing to hold further talks in future.
- Now, imagine you're the editor of a daily newspaper: which story should get the top headline on the front page of Monday's paper?

# Specific Tools

Story Selection continued:

- Reporting resources are always limited, so you cannot cover everything
  - Editors make choices of where to send reporters
  - Journalists make choices as to where to point the microphone or camera
  - Essentially, these are **subjective** decisions
- Always expand the number of angles for your coverage of the conflict
- This is good story selection and good reporting

# Specific Tools

## Word Choice:

- Find neutral terms that avoid taking sides:
- Words like “terrorists” or “freedom fighters” are loaded terms
  - use “armed fighters”, “insurgents”, “rebels” or “guerrillas”
- Requires active editorial hand and editorial mentoring of journalists

# Specific Tools

Framing the conflict:

- Avoid short-cut terminology
  - avoid them-us definitions of a conflict
  - if the situation is complex, be fair to your readers and let them know it is complex
  - always explain the multiplicity of parties involved, not the simplistic “A vs B” framework
  - don’t let belligerents define a conflict for you
  - avoid the inaccurate terms international media use even when trying to appear balanced

# Specific Tools

## Balance:

- Report good and bad on all sides, including human rights violations
  - allows for balance as human rights are universal
  - not based on ethnicity or political beliefs
  - applies same rules and standards on all sides
  - emphasises human suffering
  - shows what unites people rather than what separates them

# Specific Tools

## Report from the ground

- Use real people as subjects, not just experts and leaders
- Show the damage done to all parties in violence
- Show how no one is winning by the continuation of open violence
- Use real voices that people can relate to
  - even those who have perpetrated violence but now regret it

# Specific Tools

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Report resolution efforts

- Look at resolution efforts of outside conflicts
- Investigate efforts to resolve the conflicts that you cover.

### Example 3.

From: IRIN, 20 May 2013

#### The Changing Face of Land Disputes in Liberia

MONROVIA - The Liberia Land Commission, which was set up in 2009 to help settle land disputes between returning refugees and their neighbours, is making significant headway, say land experts, but non-conflict related land disputes are increasing, most of them as a result of weak land laws.

Tens of thousands of Liberians were displaced during the 1999-2003 civil war. Many returned to their villages to find their land had been sold on or taken over by neighbours. [Disputes over land](#) occurred all over the country, but were mainly concentrated in Nimba, Lofa and Bong counties, which had high levels of displacement.

Since 2009 many of the neighbour-neighbour disputes have been resolved without too much difficulty, given that the conflicting parties already had an established relationship, and thus a shared interest in negotiating. said Gregory Kitt, project manager with NGO Norwegian Refugee Council, which has helped resolve hundreds of land disputes over the past decade.

In recent years, such disputes have reduced slightly, said Kitt. "This is an indication of the progress Liberia has made to become more stable."

Land reform was identified by the [Truth and Reconciliation Report](#) as one of the priorities for boosting long-term stability.

"We've made a lot of progress over the past three years. We've sorted out at least five dozen cases," Cecil Brandy, chairman of the Land Commission, told IRIN. But dozens of cases continue to come in each month, he added - many of them related not to displacement but to weak land ownership laws that insufficiently respect people's property rights and can lead to corrupt practices. "On a daily basis we are intervening in land fights across the country. Our files are filled with too many cases. Families are at loggerheads. It is hectic."

## **Parallel laws**

Land ownership in Liberia is based on Common Law which requires an owner to have a title deed. But a parallel system of traditional law, based on verbal agreement, is also prevalent, creating widespread confusion over who owns what. Landowners as a result, often sell to multiple buyers, opening up room for conflict.

During the civil war, fraud was rife with many illegitimate land-related documents registered. "This criminal practice must stop. They make fraudulent transactions without the involvement of the real landowners. Because of this, now as Liberians return from Ghana, Sierra Leone and Guinea, they are facing major problems with their land," said Brandy.

The Commission is trying to set up a better land registry system so citizens can more easily access land ownership documents, and at least know what their legal ownership status is. And it has submitted a criminal conveyance bill to the Liberian legislature to deal with suspected criminals involved in multiple land sales. Brandy hopes the bill will soon become law.

The [Liberia Land Commission](#) is an autonomous government body, with a staff of 25 civil servants, set up to shape land reform policy in Liberia.

Ciapha George, 45, is currently battling another family for ownership of his plot of land in the capital, Monrovia: unbeknown to him, the land had been sold to someone else before he bought it.

The case went to court and the judge recently ordered him to demolish his house and turn it over to the former owner. "The seller misled me. Right now I am the loser. All my efforts have been in vain," he told IRIN. George's family is currently living in an abandoned building in the capital.

But the governance bodies set up to protect these laws remain weak, said Kitt, and until they are strengthened, civil society groups will continue to have to step in to try to resolve disputes before they end up in court.

The Land Commission must be more proactive in tackling this problem of multiple ownership, said Monrovia resident Prince King. "I have seen lives and properties destroyed because of land disputes. Liberia is just from war and we need to put these things behind us."

Some vulnerable families have never been given formal access to their land, said Brandy, who pointed out that one of the Commission's priorities is to make ownership more equitable by re-examining how deeds are distributed.

## **Communities versus investors**

According to environmental NGOs, including Friends of the Earth Liberia, the local authorities and [landowners have sold](#) more than 1.5 million acres (607,028 hectares) of land to palm oil companies in Liberia over recent years, seriously threatening some communities' property rights.

"Over the past year and a half we've seen an increase in land conflicts between communities and investors trying to develop natural resources. It is clear that challenges are emerging," said Kitt.

# Summary: Six Duties

- Duty to understand conflict.
- Duty to report fairly.
- Duty to report background and causes of conflicts.
- Duty to present the human side of conflict.
- Duty to report on peace efforts.
- Duty to recognise our influence.

# Questions?

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## **2. Forging Partnerships between the Land Commission and the Media**

The objective of this Day 2 presentation was to lead a discussion on ways the Land Commission can better transmit its message to journalists so that the journalists will cover land conflict stories.

The method used was discussion. Since Day 1 focused on lecture-style presentations, Day 2 was a time for more participatory learning. Journalists were made to come up with ways that they like to receive information.

The session began with an ice breaker to warm up the brains and get the participants to start thinking.

Next, the facilitator led a discussion on the various outreach methods that the Land Commission has used so far. Participants were asked which of the methods they are familiar with. For example, participants were asked if they have been to the Land Commission's website or if they had covered a press conference.

Then the participants were broken into groups and asked to come up with innovative strategies for the Land Commission to employ to better communicate its message with journalists. The reports from each group were captured and shared with Land Commission officials.

# Ice Breaker

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1.

A man is driving with his son. They get into an accident and the man dies. The son is rushed to the hospital, and when he arrives for emergency surgery the doctor says "I can't operate on this boy, he is my son!"

**How is this possible?**

2.

A farmer has to get a fox, a chicken, and a sack of corn across a river. He has a small boat, and it can only carry him and one other thing. If the fox and the chicken are left together, the fox will eat the chicken. If the chicken and the corn is left together, the chicken will eat the corn.

**How does the farmer do it?**

3.

You have a jug that holds five liters, and a jug that holds three liters. You have no other containers, and there are no markings on the jugs. You need to obtain exactly seven liters of water from a faucet.

**How can you do it?**

# The Land Commission and The Media

Forging A Partnership

# Land Commission Outreach

- Does it work for you as a journalist?
  - Web site
  - Press Conferences
  - TV/Radio jingles
  - Social media
  - Press releases

# Some Helpful Tools for Journalists

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- What do you need that the Land Commission could provide to make your job easier?
- Make a list.

# Issues Journalists in Liberia Cover

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- Make a list

# Journalist Groups in Liberia

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- Make a list

# Strategies for Partnership

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- Group Work
  - Media groups
  - Land Commission groups

# Report out from Groups

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### **3. Putting It All Together**

This Day 2 afternoon session worked on using all the tools learned in the workshop. Facilitators staged a mock press conference based on a story of a land conflict in the Liberian press. A statement was read to participants and they were given a chance to ask questions of the facilitators. They were then told to take the information and turn it into a land conflict story using all the tools learned. They were to turn in the stories the following morning, and the writer of the best story would receive a prize.

Many good stories were turned in, and the best one was displayed on the projector and analyzed by the participants.

# Police Suspect Land Dispute in Nimba Murder

By Garmonyou Wilson

Police in Nimba County say that a man named Harrison Saye was allegedly murdered by another man, Alfred Wonlatoe over an allege land dispute dating back to 1964.

Nimba County Police Commissioner, Johnson Dolo said that 49 years old farmer, Harrison Saye's throat was slit with a cutlass allegedly belonging to suspect Wonlatoe.

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Commissioner Dolo asserted that the allege murder weapon has been sent to the Liberia National Police (LNP) central office in Monrovia, to match blood samples with that of the deceased.

Commissioner Dolo stated, "Suspect Wonlatoe is currently in police custody in Nimba County."

He continued that the incident occurred on November 19, 2013 "may" have erupted over a long standing land dispute between the towns of Kpoewia and Sanquoi in eastern Nimba.

The Nimba County Police Commissioner stated further that the LNP in Nimba are working along with the Land Commission's Local Land Coordination Center (LCC) to help in the investigation.

The local coordinator for the LCC in Nimba, Zoe Gwengale said that the LCC got involved with Kpoewia and Sanquoi towns about a year ago when protest over land broke out between the two towns.

Madam Gwengale further stated that in 1964 Kpoewia purchased 250 acres of land in the area. She did not emphasize whether the land was purchased from the people of Sanquoi but she did acknowledge a dispute between the two towns.

Moreover, the LNP in Nimba have increased their presence in the Kpoewia and Sanquoi area to avoid further violence.

Nimba County has been at the helm of most of the country's land disputes, a Special Presidential Task Force was at one time sent to the County to mediate in a land conflict between two tribes.

A representative from the Ganta City Mayor's office in recent time said, "Most of the land disputes that occur in Nimba are in Ganta."

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) that was established after the country's 14 years of civil war named land conflict as one of the concerns that the West African nation has to manage to ensure lasting peace.

In response to the TRC recommendation the Government launched the Land Commission in 2010 to study the country's laws on land and improve them to reflect modern day concerns.

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