

Sectoral Meeting of the Consultation Task Force on Reconciliation Mechanisms

Submission by Groundviews.org

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Submission will focus on the following two mechanisms, but the points raised are applicable to all four the CTF is anchored to:

- 1) A Truth, Justice, Reconciliation and Non-Recurrence Commission
- 2) An Office of Reparations

Background

Media is cross-cutting and impacts each of the four mechanisms. Perception is reality. Managing expectations critical. Media as a tool / instrumentalist. Media as entity with agency / activist role. Media, including civic media, as the fourth estate.

Mechanisms will be established and take root at a time when more and more citizens are going online, using social media and use their mobile phone or tablet as the primary communications or computing device.

Indicative figures on Facebook as of June 2016.

- 30% women, 70% male.
- 18 – 24: 41% F, 38% M
- 25 – 34: 39% F, 39% M
- 3.5 to 4 million active users
- 57% in Colombo, Western Province, followed by Kandy, Kurunegala, Galle, Matara and Jaffna
- 68% mobile only
- 38% Android
- Dialog Axiata has most number of fans – 864,900
- Kumar Sangakkara has more than President, PM, Mahinda Rajapaksa or any other politician or political party

Mobile messaging growing exponentially.

Range or spectrum of victims, in their own voice, reflected more in civic media than in mainstream media.

Media survey conducted by Colombo University mid-2015 discovered that,

Table 2: Credibility of media messages

Credibility ranking	No of respondents	%
Highly credible	32	4.0
Fairly credible	344	43.3
Neutral	392	48.9
Not very credible	12	1.4
Totally not credible	20	2.4
Total	800	100

The most trusted types of media

Most respondents said they trusted television the most (56%), followed by newspapers (20%) and the Internet (21%). There is a trend among the young generation to turn to the Internet as a source of news and information. Notably, radio's trust levels are very low among this sample.

Table 3: The most trusted medium

Most trusted media type	No of respondents	%
Internet	169	21.1
TV	448	56.0
Radio	16	1.9
Newspaper	160	20.1
Gossip	7	0.9
Total	800	100

In addition, Table 4 reveals that the most influence medium is television (52%), followed by the Internet (24%). Importantly, the Internet is already more influential than newspapers or radio.

Table 4: The most influencing media

Most persuasive media	No. of respondents	%
Gossip	33	4.1
Internet	195	24.4
TV	412	51.5
Newspaper	133	16.6
Radio	27	3.4
Total	800	100.0

Table 8e: Public Meetings for everyday information

Public Meetings for everyday information	No. of respondents	%
Yes	84	10.5
No	716	89.5
Total	800	100.0

Freedom to express ideas through media

Respondents were asked whether they have an opportunity to express their ideas freely through mass media. A clear majority felt there was no such freedom.

800 respondents, representing Sinhalese and Tamils. June to October 2015, in all provinces. Conducted by Colombo University Palee campus (via <https://www.mediasupport.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Rebuilding-Public-Trust-English-final-version-advance-copy-1-May-20162.pdf>)

Consumption and Perceptions of Mainstream and Social Media in the Western Province conducted by the Centre for Policy Alternatives in January 2016 suggests,

- 42.2% want Government MPs to engage via social media. Younger demographic want news and information around the Minister's work. Older demographic want updates from the events they attend.
- Across the board, what was read online has compelled citizens to find out more about a specific issue
- 61.5% raised awareness amongst family and friends around what they first read online
- Across the board, citizens want more content in Sinhala and Tamil

Via <http://www.cpalanka.org/full-report-consumption-and-perceptions-of-mainstream-and-social-media-in-the-western-province/>

An Office of Reparations

Reparations divide society and mainstream media, and not just in Sri Lanka.

The UN's Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent cited "the persistent gap in almost all the human development indicators, such as life expectancy, income and wealth, level of education, housing, employment and labour, and even food security, among African-Americans and the rest of the US population," and pointed to police killings, zero tolerance policies in schools, the criminalization of poverty, environmental racism, discriminatory voter ID laws and schools' insufficient teaching about the history of slavery as constituting a human rights crisis that must be addressed as a matter of urgency. (See Statement to the media by the United Nations' Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent, on the conclusion of its official visit to USA, 19-29 January 2016,

<http://ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=17000&LangID=E>)

By February 2016, only AP's race, ethnicity and demographics reporter (himself black), wrote it up, the Denver Post ran a news brief and the Christian Science Monitor.

It is not just in Sri Lanka that identity colours one's approach to reparations.

A vast majority of white Americans say there should not be reparations for African-American descendants of slaves, but more than half of blacks say it's a good idea and Hispanics are almost evenly split, according to a poll conducted in May 2016. (See <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/b183a022831d4748963fc8807c204b08/poll-millennials-more-open-idea-slavery-reparations>)

Media coverage of reparations shows that it is not enough to be asked to participate in a debate. Even in such a forum, it is often the media's approach that slants coverage against supporters of reparations. In the book *The Debt: What America Owes to Blacks*, author Randall Robinson comments on the media's often detrimental influence on Americans' views, noting that what Americans "know" is "distilled, shaped, edited, and ultimately permitted by news industries in private hands."

Prime Minister of Barbados Freundel Stuart said "the reparations issue is not based on a

diplomacy of protest, but on a diplomacy of engagement”. Media in this sense have an important part to play to report on reparations sensitively and impartially.

This is an issue not just in Sri Lanka but globally – most recently in America, when Bernie Sanders was quizzed on reparations, and said he would not support such a process as he believed it would be too divisive. In the rush to report this story, the media neglected to focus on Hilary Clinton, who also side-stepped the issue of reparations and spoke about charity rather than on justice:
<http://www.rawstory.com/2016/01/hillary-clinton-also-has-a-race-and-reparations-problem-but-the-media-isnt-talking-about-it/> In doing so, the media have set back the reparations process, by not holding both candidates responsible for their comments, and by choosing to be respectful to one candidate while attacking another. This illustrates how easy it is for coverage on transitional justice processes to lack nuance or for media to get side-tracked to attacking political parties or candidates, rather than issues.

Impartiality is needed, too, in recording violations which require restitution such as reparation – “Fairness and feasibility should be emphasized and every measure taken to avoid political favoritism and exclusion,” the International Centre for Transitional Justice noted: <https://www.ictj.org/sites/default/files/ICTJ-Global-Reparations-Practice-2007-English.pdf>. Here the media has a role to play in reporting on reparations – and ensuring not to play into nationalistic sentiment, or to highlight one conflict-affected group as more worthy than another.

How much, by whom, over what time, through what mechanisms are debated, but rarely feature voices of victims esp. when related to ethno-political conflict

Who controls the mainstream media is important, especially in Sri Lanka, when ownership is often a thinly veiled front for partisan political agendas. The need to move beyond such agendas and looking at the reparation process through an impartial lens, rather than simply thinking of the next day’s headlines is important for the media to consider.

A Truth, Justice, Reconciliation and Non-Recurrence Commission

Pushing out information: The large media contingent included national and international representatives, and filled to overflowing the room provided for them. By the end of the week, awareness of the work of the Commission had burst upon the newspapers, television screens and radio broadcasts in a way that began to change the perceptions of millions of people.

Raising awareness: The media and communications staff assisted with leaflets, banners and press releases.

Transparency: Steps were also taken to ensure that members of the media were given full access to hearings and were positioned so they could report fully on the proceedings.

Via VOLUME FIVE, Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report, <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/report/finalreport/Volume5.pdf>

Liberia's TRC embraced web based media. One system used to target Liberians in their own country was called MOSES, for Mobile Story Exchange System. It consists of an interactive computer kiosk which allows users to browse through videos recorded by other Liberians and to record videos of their own. The system serves areas with no communications infrastructure and caters for people who have never used a computer before, are print illiterate, and do not generally have opportunities to engage in national dialogue.

(See <http://www.gsdr.org/docs/open/hdq1184.pdf>, via <http://www.gsdr.org/publications/social-media-and-conflict-management-in-post-conflict-and-fragile-contexts>. Academic paper at http://mikeb.inta.gatech.edu/uploads/papers/MWC4_3.paper.pdf)

Given the fault-lines in the mainstream media, hard to imagine especially over Sinhala, the public imagination captured by progressive ideas around reconciliation.

As noted in *Rebuilding Public Trust: As Assessment of the Media Industry and Profession in Sri Lanka* (<https://www.mediasupport.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Rebuilding-Public-Trust-English-final-version-advance-copy-1-May-20162.pdf>), CSOs, advocacy groups and academics should intensify their engagement with the mainstream media and monitoring their performance. This could happen at various levels: contributing content, participating in electronic media programmes, advising the industry on raising professional standards, providing deliberative platforms at the grassroots, and through the monitoring of media content.

Observations



Recognise that social media literacy is essential for the meaningful establishment and conduct of each of the four mechanisms.

Over the duration of the time considered for the implementation of each of the four mechanisms, and their social, political and digital after life (i.e. enduring role and relevance in policy making long after institutional mandate is over) that distinctions between social and old media, new and social media will be erased. It's just media, either through broadcast, electronic means, digital or print.

Media literacy is critical to strengthen in the public.

Surveillance undermines engagement. It is unclear to what extent the state continues to monitor conversions of civil society especially around inconvenient truths.

Media can help widen and deepen conversations around truth across four, loosely defined typologies.

- Official truth - public, official accounts
- Narrative truth - personal stories, by definition subjective
- Social truth - dialogical and interactive
- Restorative truth - that which can transform, shape perceptions

What is today considered social media can inform and influence key demographics. In 2015, Shashi Tharoor during an Oxford Union debate, demands reparation payments from UK for colonial rule. Viewed 3.3 million times to date on YouTube alone.

Mainstream media required to be critical. Government media must be strengthened to engage critics. Government cannot use mainstream media, esp. State media, as the vector to deliver partisan content.

Key mechanisms, and the institutional frameworks to accommodate them, need to seriously consider media relations outside the traditional focus on press releases, copywriting and website updates.

All media relations positions, across all mechanisms, need to,

- 1) Embrace new forms of expression geared to, and arising from, key demographics (e.g. memes, short form video, long form journalism, multimedia storytelling and audio content)
- 2) Use data driven journalism, basing content as much as possible on factual evidence
- 3) Open source journalism, where the sources as well as the data around a story are opened up and presented to the public, preferable in ways they too can use and engage with
- 4) Using Right to Information legislation to strengthen reportage around the four key mechanisms in terms of their constitution, mandate, financing, logistics and planning, as well as decisions around policy making, to the extent possible under the law
- 5) Engage, not just inform, so as to raise awareness

- 6) Context over raw metrics, so as to develop understanding
- 7) Be sufficiently empowered to engage with the media without red-tape
- 8) Be sufficiently financed and staffed, with continuous training
- 9) Embrace solution-based journalism, highlighting good practise, rather than solely focusing on highlighting injustice/problems

Demystify and explain, leaving little room for spoiler dynamics to take root and initially shape the public consciousness around key issues

Embrace working in all three languages, with sufficient emphasis and resources around timely, effective translations of key messages and content

Embrace working with telecoms companies, and see them as media companies more than just dumb pipes. Explore the options around SMS broadcasts, subsidised or free hotlines using Interactive Voice Responses (IVR) to guide citizens around the issues that frame the four mechanisms (and TJ processes in general), mobile optimised content packaging and websites (using HTML5 responsive design, plus Unicode for Sinhala and Tamil), leverage their reach even to the remotest areas of the country, piggyback on the enhanced communications made possible by new undersea links, Google Loon.

Serve the mechanisms in a twofold manner – one, to push out information. Two, to get in information. Both will require strategic, systemic investments and human resources with domain expertise around media monitoring, digital archival and big data analysis.

Use new technologies like Emojot - <https://emojot.com> - to conduct widespread citizen response exercise, to gauge interest in, opposition to, engagement with or apathy towards key issues, ideas, submissions, mechanisms and the setting up of institutions. Flag the marginal and peripheral for a fuller record, making all stories accessible by archiving for posterity. Engage the National Archives in this regard and significantly boost their capacity to document these processes and conversations.