



SUCCESS STORY

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission Practices What It Preaches

Justice and accountability are twins — neither is an option



USAID/OTI/LIBERIA

Signs explain the purpose of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission at its headquarters in Sinkor in Monrovia.

USAID/OTI's BRDG-Liberia program was initiated in September 2006 to support the political transition prompted by the free and fair election of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the first democratically elected female head of state in Africa.

The Building Recovery and Reform through Democratic Governance (BRDG) program assists the Government of Liberia and other key actors to further the following political objectives:

- *Improving capacity in such areas as planning, budgeting, communication, and coordination with relevant counterparts*
- *Mounting effective responses to high-visibility issues*
- *Strengthening the Mano River Union by supporting cooperative regional activities*

The USAID Mission in Liberia, USAID's Africa Bureau, and the Office of Democracy and Governance are key players in the coordination of the BRDG program.

June 2007 – The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was established pursuant to the 2003 Comprehensive Peace Agreement that formally ended the civil war in Liberia.

Tasked with setting up the TRC, the Economic Community of West African States received support from the Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) in 2005 to form the selection committee that established the TRC nomination and vetting criteria and procedures with input from the Liberian public. The establishment of the TRC and selection of its members came on the heels of the first national survey of Liberian views on transitional justice. A key finding of this OTI-funded survey indicated that a majority of those questioned wanted a documented record of past crimes and atrocities committed by all of the warring factions so that, as one respondent said, “we wouldn’t repeat them.” During its short existence, however, the TRC’s work has been hampered by challenging administrative and fiscal constraints.

In order to devise a roadmap for ensuring that the TRC serves as a mechanism for national healing, a joint International Contact Group for Liberia/TRC Working Group was established. One of the group’s first actions was to call for a review of the TRC’s funding and internal control procedures.

OTI funded the review, which provided recommendations to the TRC for resolving outstanding roadblocks associated with transparent fiscal management at a time when the public is increasingly demanding accountability in government, civil society, and the private sector. By submitting to this financial review, the TRC showed the public that it is willing to practice what it preaches: accountability is not an option, it is an obligation. And by opening its books and providing reviewers with access to its staff, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is fulfilling its role as a moral compass for the new Liberia.

