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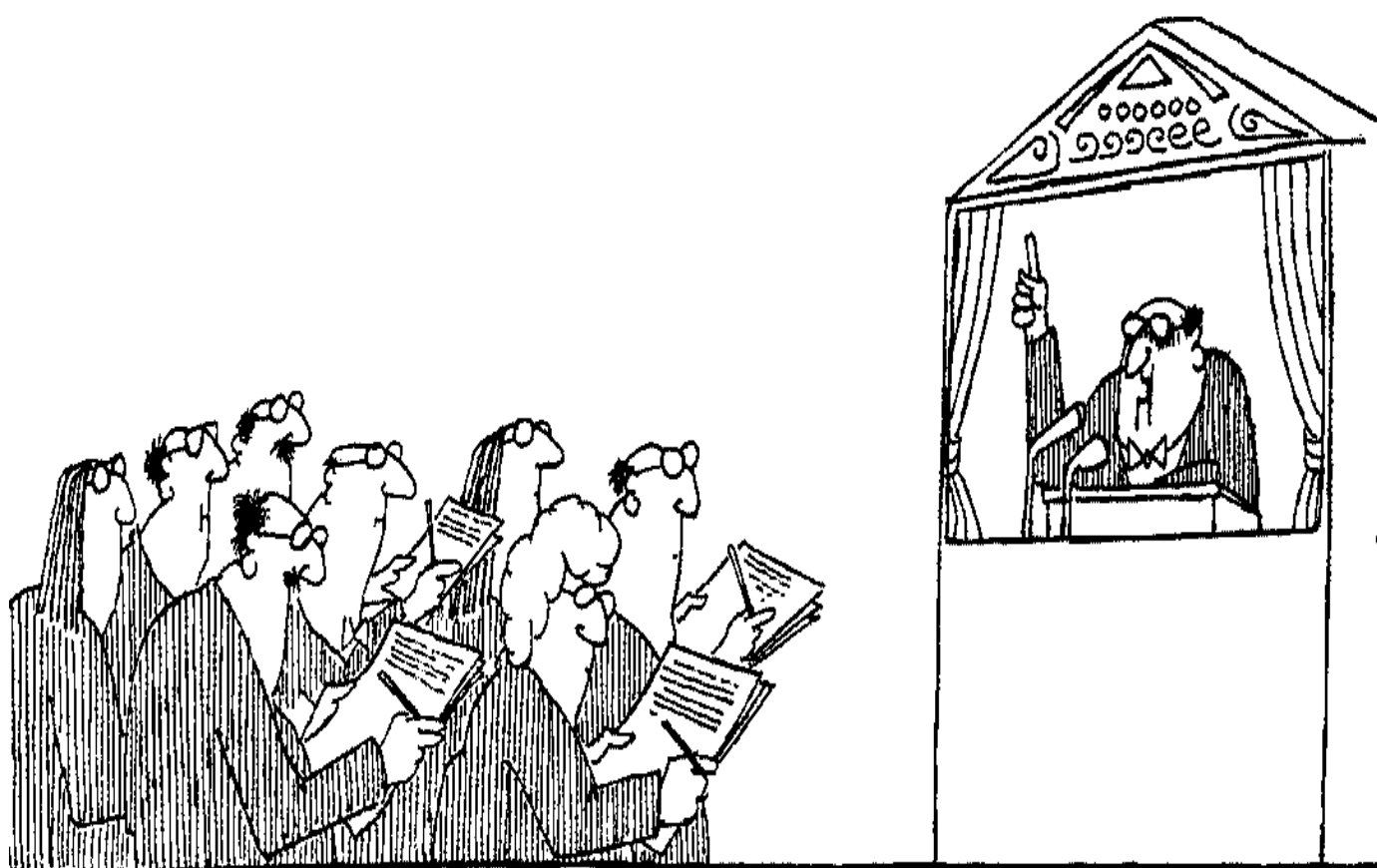
International: Catholic Communication Offices

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Stimulate Promote Harmonise

The Vital Role of Catholic Communication Offices

By Daniela Frank, CAMECO

Since the *Vatican Council II*, the church has strongly promoted the establishment of national Episcopal Commissions on Social Communications and corresponding national (and diocesan) offices for communication (see e.g. the Council's Decree *Inter Mirifica* (1964) 21). Meanwhile – almost 40 years later – in many countries, such commissions and offices have been established. But are they also functioning? In our daily contacts with church communicators in Africa, Asia, Latin America as well as Central and Eastern Europe, we had to realize, that some of these offices exist only on paper. In those which are actually operating, there is often no clear understanding of their tasks neither among the decision-takers nor among those in charge. The staff often feels lost, with vague job descriptions and/or lack of support from their superiors. Therefore, as national communication offices can and should play a crucial role in church communication, the following article offers some orientations on their objectives and activities. (Although we are well aware, that the offices are – or at least should be – closely connected with the national episcopal communication commissions, we will not reflect specifically on the commissions.)

Development of a Communication Strategy

What did the church have in mind when calling for national communication offices? And what are their tasks? After *Vatican II* and its Decree in Mass Communication *Inter Mirifica*, the Pastoral Instruction *Communio et Progressio*, published in 1971, outlines the objectives in more detail (see CeP 169-172). The national office should “stimulate, promote and harmonise Catholic activities in the field of social communications” with particular concern for training (CeP 170). This includes contacts with the professional world of social communications and advice to AV

producers concerning religious subjects (CeP 170f).

The Pastoral Instruction *Aetatis Novae* (1992) specifies „stimulation and promotion“ by stressing the “urgency of a pastoral plan for social communications” (21) which takes into account that “Catholic media work is not simply one more program alongside all the rest of the Church's activities: social communications have a role to play in every aspect of the Church's mission” and therefore has “something to contribute to virtually every other apostolate, ministry, and program” (17).

Thus, the central issue of a national communication office can be summarised as developing an overall integrated national communication strategy and policy for the local church and promoting its realization in close collaboration with all those active in church communications.

Communications and Press Office

Looking at the various contact points between church and media, it is essential to distinguish clearly between the national offices for communications and the press office of a Bishops' Conference (or diocese) – although both should of course cooperate closely. Whereas the first are mainly oriented towards the church's own activities in communications, the press office intends to build bridges between the church and the media. Public relations is one aspect of church communications, oriented primarily towards the general public and the secular media. Thus the press office takes care of the relationship with the (secular) media, being an advocate for the church's position in the media and at the same time, being an advocate for the media within the church. The following article from Jim McDonnell explains in more detail the responsibilities and requirements of such an office.

Towards a Pastoral Plan for Communications

The first task of the national office for communications is the development of a pastoral plan for social communications for its local

church. Needs and opportunities differ from country to country, from region to region, therefore it is essential that each office – in close contact with both church representatives and media professionals – formulates a vision and elaborates a concept of the church's own media involvement in this specific context (see more detailed guidelines for designing a Pastoral Plan for Social Communications *Aetatis Novae* 23-33).

Accordingly, its tasks include

“ Assessment of the local situation: Charac-

of the church: printing presses, production studios for audio and video, training facilities

“ Outlining of a Vision and Mission Statement for Social Communications

“ Development of the strategies and guidelines for action:

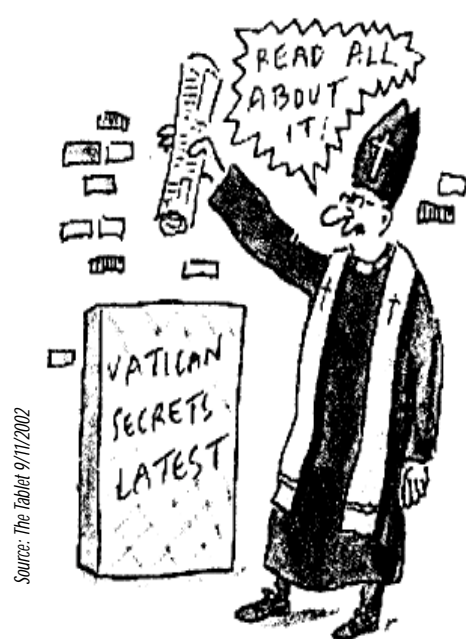
– Answering the question of what to communicate, how and to whom? What are the priorities, the target groups and the possible channels?

and mission statement of the church's involvement in communications also calls for a regular up-date, based on an on-going evaluation of the activities implemented: Did the office succeed with its plans? If not, why not? How can the local church act more effectively? Which new ways does she need to reach her goals? Accordingly, the pastoral planning for social communications should be understood as an on-going process in close dialogue with all actors in that field.

Dialogue with the Broader Public

In a certain sense, a national office for social communications has the role of a mentor. Often, church responsables would agree with the need for communication to put the mission of the church into practice, but their understanding might be a rather narrow one. It's not enough to publish religious messages and assume that everybody would receive them! The church should do her best to ensure that her messages – and there is a great deal which the church has to say! – reach their public. Sometimes, the target group would be the committed Catholics, closely linked with the church. To reach them, other channels and formats should be used than when aiming at a broader and more diverse public. Therefore, the great challenge is to find a method of spreading the Good News in a way effective enough to facilitate a dialogue with the general public: topics which answer the questions of the people and take into account their interests, attractive formats, using media which are able to reach a broad target audience.

Thus, the national office also has the role of raising the awareness within the church for the need to dialogue with society through the media. The local church should aim at a communication concept which integrates her different areas of concern – evangelization, human development, justice and peace, human rights etc. – through a close cooperation with all commissions of the Bishops' Conference, and carefully reflects the media environment and her own opportunities



Source: The Tablet 9/11/2002

“A national office for the communications media should be set up in every country ... It is the mission of the national and diocesan offices to stimulate, promote and harmonise Catholic activities in the field of social communications... Every diocese, all Episcopal Conferences or Bishops' Assemblies and the Holy See itself should each have its own official and permanent spokesman or press officer to issue the news and give clear explanations of the documents of the Church so that people can grasp precisely what is intended. These spokesmen will give, in full and without delay, information on the life and work of the Church in that area for which they are responsible.” (Communio et Progressio, 1971 169-172)

teristics of the country, media environment, situation of the church

“ Identification of the needs for communications

“ Compiling an inventory of the resources available:

– Church media (newsletters, magazines, radio stations, production centres, websites, training institutes etc.)

– Communication activities of church-related groups and organizations

– Access to public media

– Qualified communicators at the service of the church

– Infrastructures available under the auspices

– Definition of the structures needed

– Development of a plan of activities: short-term, medium-term, long-term

– Preparation of a concept for (on-going) training for collaborators: professional communicators, pastoral agents, volunteers

– Preparation of a budget and a concept for financial support

This check-list has to be worked through continually as most of the aspects mentioned refer to quite dynamic processes. The social and political situation of a country is changing continuously – and thus the communication needs in this specific context also do. The vision

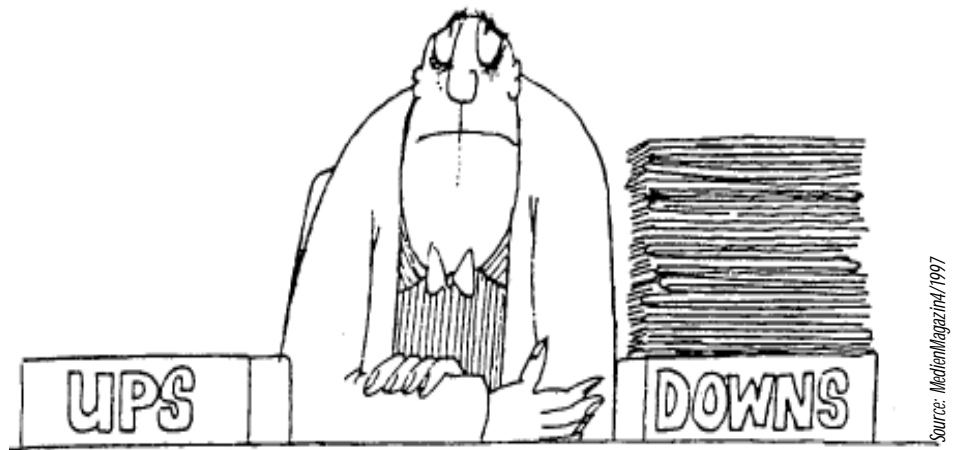
to communicate, taking into account the specific rules the media are following. Such a well prepared strategy could allow the church to be heard much more clearly in her respective context.

Normally, the national office should not provide training, produce programmes or magazines etc... Its central focus is coordination of efforts, thanks to a detailed knowledge of the existing institutions and a clear vision of the needs and perspectives. The office supports a close cooperation among church communicators, also paying attention to contacts with „professionals in secular media and of the church's own media-related organizations, including especially the international and national organizations for film, radio-television, and the press." (*Aetatis Novae* 21)

Experience and Professional Competence

From this description, it becomes immediately clear that a national office for social communications requires a considerable amount of expertise and experience. Those in charge – the national communication coordinator, his/her assistant, perhaps collaborators for specific areas – need to have a broad theoretical and practical communication background and a profound understanding of the pastoral dimension of communications. Only with media competence will it be possible to develop effective strategies, including a workable management, and to be a well-accepted partner to professionals in secular and church media.

A local church which is well aware of the importance of communications understands that competent collaborators are the key to an effective involvement in that field. Therefore, she continuously pays attention to the training needs among the faithful, clerics and church communicators, and looks for ways to respond to these needs – where ever possible in cooperation with existing training institutions. The corresponding efforts will be worthwhile – as many experiences have proved.



Current State and Prospects of the German Media Co-operation

The Catholic Media Council (CAMECO), the Protestant Church Development Service (Evangelischer Entwicklungsdienst, EED) and the One-World-Media Programme of the Protestant Journalism Network (GEP) in Frankfurt hosted the conference *Media and Journalist Support in the German Development Co-operation* held on November 13th and 14th in Bonn. 50 participants from 35 German institutions attended this meeting to discuss the practice and prospects of media co-operation. There was general agreement that the dissolution of media departments at the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation (BMZ), the German Society for Technical Co-operation (GTZ) and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FES) had resulted in a loss of valuable experience and expertise. A

questionnaire answered by 21 German state, church and private development organisations indicated that during the last five years many institutions have reduced the financial means dedicated to media projects (with the exception of journalists' further education). On the other hand the seminar showed that the German media cooperation is characterised by the plurality of approaches and protagonists. It was agreed that there should be a follow-up of this conference to guarantee a continuous information and experience exchange, maybe via a newsletter, an e-mail list or a new meeting on a specific issue within the next two years. A stronger collaboration seems to be necessary not only because of the need to learn from each other and to reflect together, but also for a stronger lobbying for media co-operation. A cross-section evaluation of media projects financed by the BMZ (which will be concluded in 2003) as well as the discussions around the World Summit on the Information Society (to be held in Geneva in December 2003) can lead to expectations that the issue of "media and development" will enjoy more attention in the coming years.

Christoph Dietz

In Practice:

The Press Office

By Jim McDonnell*

The Roles of the Press Office

In the complex relationship between Church and media, the press office has two roles. In dealing with the news media, the office acts as an advocate for the Church's position, explaining the Church's views, correcting erroneous or misleading information and trying to improve the quality of journalists' interpretation and understanding of events or information. We might say that a press office can be seen as doing the reporter's work, gathering the relevant information and translating what the Church has to say into a language that the media, and thus the wider public, can understand.

The second, and potentially, more difficult role of the press office, is to act as an advocate for the media within the Church, relaying reporter's needs, and persuading the Church of the benefits of openness and transparency. The media is always looking for sympathetic and articulate people to interview, and the local media in particular, is usually eager to obtain the views of local Church leaders on matters of local concern. A good press office can be the bridge between Church and media. Its job is to suggest how requests for interviews or comments should be handled, to ensure that Church spokespeople are well trained

and briefed, and are treated fairly and courteously.

The task of a press office is more difficult when reporters wish to write a news story on a topic that Bishops or other Church officials may or may not be ready to discuss. It may find itself on the one hand having to placate demanding journalists, and on the other, trying to persuade irate and reluctant Church leaders that it is best to make some positive comment to the media.

The Job of a Press Officer

Given these tensions, an effective director of a press office needs to have a close working relationship characterised by mutual respect and trust with Bishops and the senior staff of a Bishops' Conference or diocese. The press officer also needs to have a place at the table when important decisions are being made. When an individual Bishop or Bishops' Conference issues a statement, for example, perhaps on a contentious political issue such as on the plight of refugees or a potential war with Iraq, the press office needs to be involved at an early stage in highlighting the likely public and press response. The more preparation is made, the more the media's likely questions and comments are anticipated and considered, the more likely it is that the Church's message will be presented convincingly.

It is also important to ensure that a press office has sufficient authority to co-ordinate the Church's relationship with the press. At a minimum, a press office needs to know as soon as possible who has spoken with the press and what topics were discussed. National and diocesan press offices need to have good close and supportive relationships so that, for example, dioceses are well briefed in advance of important national announcements and the national office knows of significant local stories. Unfortunately, there are still problems in the relationship between national offices and the Vatican, in that press officers hear of too many new Vatican documents first through the media!

On a daily basis a press officer has many tasks:

Managing the day-to-day activities of the press office to keep in touch with, supply stories to and handle inquiries from the media. He may also serve as the Church spokesperson.

• Issuing news releases and organising news conferences.

• Setting up interviews and briefings for the media with church officials.

• Advising Bishops, staff and church representatives on media relations and potential media reaction to proposed actions or statements.

Good press offices build a reputation for providing the media with a quick, reliable and courteous response, even if the response is only a simple promise to return a phone call. These rules are especially important at times when there is a measure of conflict between the Church and the media. At these times there may be a temptation to react to hostile media negatively. This temptation needs to be avoided. Remaining calm and helpful at times of tension can only enhance the standing of the press office. In better times when relations are easier, journalists will remember how they were treated when they



sought information. The object is for a press office to become a trusted resource for the media.

In places where there is a great deal of press hostility towards the Church, the task of a press office is particularly sensitive. In these circumstances the press office can do a great deal of good by building a reputation for calm, even-handed, and honest dealing with the media.

Press Officers are Guides for the Media

One of the major problems between the Church and the secular media (but not only them) is language. So often Church officials and press offices assume that journalists know more than they do. There is the famous story of a journalist in England who once phoned a press officer asking for information about the forthcoming canonisation of the Forty Martyrs of England and Wales. Towards the end of his conversation he asked innocently if it would be possible to interview one of the martyrs!

Much good can be done by press offices which supply journalists with basic information sheets (or web pages) explaining how the Church works, who is who, and what specific terms mean. It is also helpful in providing summaries and explanatory notes on special areas of Church teaching.

Before major events, for example, Papal visits or the release of major documents or statements, "background briefings" can be given to provide journalists with basic facts and figures.

Relations with Journalists

In order to do their job properly, press officers need to establish good relations with reporters and journalists. Press officers need to spend time

with the media. Not only to get to know individuals on a personal basis but also to gain a better understanding of the pressures that affect journalists. When a press officer has some experience of the newspaper news room or the broadcasting studio he or she will be better able to understand the problems reporters have, against tight deadlines, in getting their stories on air or into the press.

Press officers have to recognise that both they and journalists are never "off duty". No matter

news agencies, can be especially important when the press office wishes to ensure that its messages are transmitted in full and objectively. Where difficulties exist between Catholic media and Church press offices every effort should be made to build better relationships.

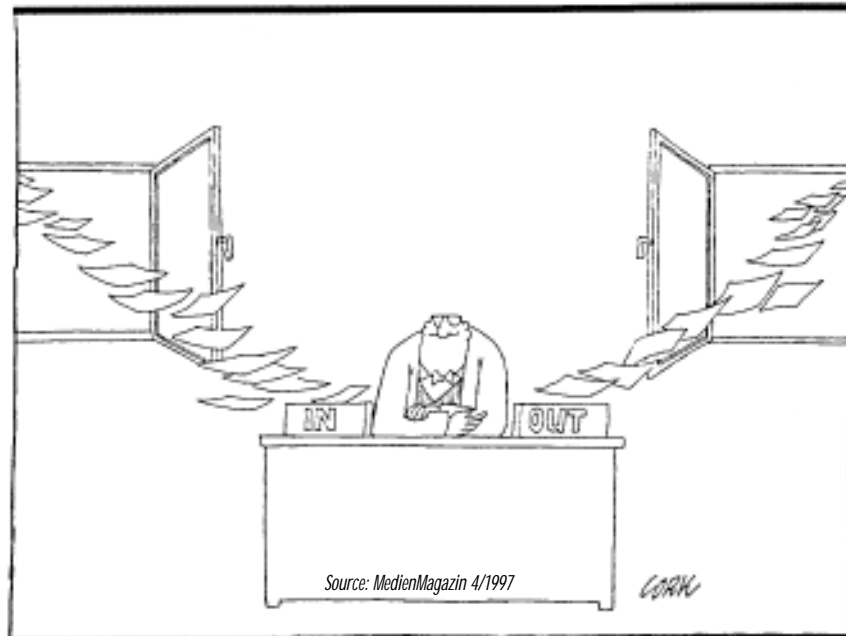
Staffing and Resources

Depending upon the size and complexity of the job, a press office could consist of one person or a team. As a minimum to deal with news, a national

Bishops' Conference would expect to have one Press Officer and an administrative assistant. Depending upon the level of activity envisaged there might be one or more assistant (full or part-time) press officers. If the press function is part of a larger national communications office then there will be other specialised personnel in charge of training, work with radio and TV, Internet and publications etc.

To function effectively the press office must be able to easily impart and receive information. This means at least two fixed telephone lines (with answering machine or voice mail facility!), multi-function fax and email. Today a mobile phone (or a pager at the very least) is essential for 24 hour access.

A modern press office must be able to monitor the news on a daily basis. A diocesan press office, for example, needs to pick up potential stories, good or bad, in its local and regional media which affect the Church or about which the Church may wish to comment, the closure of a local factory or school, for example. Moreover, it may find itself suddenly having to answer queries from local journalists because of something said or done elsewhere, for example, by another Bishop, a



how friendly individuals may be, a natural tension exists between the two roles. It is naive to believe for example, that just because a journalist is a social friend, he or she will not use information inadvertently leaked in advance, for instance, the name of a soon to be appointed Bishop.

Sometimes journalists will request confidential information "off the record". Though most professional journalists will not publish information given in this way, some will. The safest rule is to never say or do anything you don't want to see on the front page of the newspaper the next day.

It is also important that press offices have a good professional relationship with the religious or Catholic media. Catholic media, including

national Church spokesperson, or the Vatican. To monitor the media, the press office will need to keep a selection of newspapers, as well as regularly following radio and TV news, and having access to Internet facilities.

National offices should be providing a daily news monitoring service to their diocesan offices. Most offices provide some form of press clippings service to Bishops, Bishops' Conference staff, diocesan press offices and selected other recipients. Today it is common to send out an e-mail summary of important stories from which recipients may select some items to be posted or faxed to them in full. Use could also be made of the various religious and Catholic news agencies depending upon the resources available.

Once monitored, the important news must be stored and organised for easy reference and use. Care and attention must be given to this humdrum but vital task. Badly organised information is no longer of any use. Whatever filing system is used it must be capable of providing press officers with the information they need with the minimum delay. It is also very important to ensure that past statements and news releases are accessible and properly organised.

These days, almost all journalists use the Internet for some aspect of their research. A web site can provide them with a cost-effective, speedy and up-to-date access to all current and archived news releases. Another possibility is to provide a facility to download high-resolution, print-quality images.

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Towards strategic planning

Elements of a training concept for Church media people in Africa

Analysing the training of media practitioners in Africa leads to paradox results: On one side there exists a tremendous number of institutions offering training in the media field, where the graduates can hardly be absorbed by the market. But at the same time, there is a wide consensus about the lack of qualified staff. This general picture is, unfortunately, also given by the Church media initiatives.

In the Catholic Church too many directors or communication officers, no matter whether they are priests, religious or lay people are appointed without any qualification or at least media experience, although – as stated before – there is no shortage of training institutions in the continent. The CAMECO databank alone lists more than 100 schools of journalism and departments of communications at universities in Africa. However, the quality differs a great deal, and for the majority a recent report by the UNESCO¹ states general shortcomings in the preparation of their graduates.

To counterbalance these shortcomings in the performance of the non- or semi-professionals, there is also a wide range of initiatives offered by Church groups like e.g. the three-month programme by AMECEA/IMBISA² for Church media workers in Eastern and Southern Africa, or the AVEX-Africa programme³. In addition, local and international media organisations, such as AMARC-Africa⁴, Panos⁵, and journalists' associations, organise workshops and conferences which are also open to staff members of the Church media. Trainees are sent to European and

North American training institutions. However, what is still missing, is a joint effort of strategic planning to meet the training needs of the Church's media people in Africa now and in the future.

This article by CAMECO aims at stimulating the discussion by – not for the first time – outlining some general aspects of such a strategy.

Local – Regional – Overseas

Already in 1986, CAMECO published a booklet entitled "Training of Christian Communicators in Africa, Asia and the Pacific". At that time inspired by the so-called MacBride Report⁶, a three-step model was suggested:

- a) Initial and basic training should be conducted locally, in familiar surroundings with the training methodology suited to local conditions, cultural traditions and developmental strategies
- b) Professional and academic training could be applied for at local or regional training centres, offering curricula designed by instructors from the region, and with foreign advisors, only if required
- c) Overseas training should be reserved for advanced practitioners and designated trainers. Candidates for further and specialised studies at professional or academic levels, especially for studies overseas, should have a first – professional and/or academic – background in communication and some working experience. Where applicable, the corresponding education (Diploma, B.A., M.A. in journalism and/or



It is of course, not possible to answer these questions adequately if the Church responsables have no clear concept of the training requirements and needs of the staff. And this process not only deserves a concrete strategic planning of the media involvement but

communication) should be gained locally or in the region.

Although the weaknesses of many local and/or regional training institutions are too obvious, it is still preferable to have a poor basic training than none at all. Besides, about 20 years later, the recommendations of the McBride report are still not taken fully into consideration, especially in Church circles, as many applications for scholarships demonstrate. This three-step model should continue to be a basic principal leading the decisions of where to send the media staff for training.

Collection of resources

A pre-requisite in the development of a training strategy is the collection of information about existing resources and training opportunities, as well as the assessment of their quality. What are the weaknesses and strengths of different training institutions? Can the curricula be considered the state of the art for the respective media environments? Are the technical facilities sufficient? How is the quality of lecturers and trainers? What about the teaching and learning material?

For institutions offering further or mid-career training it has to be asked whether their programmes are really orientated towards the needs of the media people from Africa. Are there sufficient scholarships available for further qualifications, especially for staff members holding responsible positions?

also, at a more specific level, concerning the knowledge and skills required in different positions. However, in many cases, CAMECO learned that people are being recruited without even a proper job description or at least an idea about what their tasks and activities will be.

Analysing training programmes

On the level of existing training institutions, the following shortcomings can be observed:

- Unclear criteria to select a certain training programme: the criteria of admissions to schools and courses are either unclear or not applied to; media people jump into the first training opportunity they are offered instead of searching for the most adequate one according to the requirements of their present or future tasks.
- Inadequacy of the training centres: understaffed, and under-equipped, training institutions too often only replicate the curricula and methods used in Europe and North America; furthermore there is insufficient contact and dialogue between the training institutions and the media world.
- Inadequate programmes of overseas organisations: To attract a satisfactory number of students European schools compete among themselves, and with their African counterparts. Some of the programmes lack a clear profile and might be orientated more to the agenda of the sponsors than to the existing needs of their students. Besides, there is a widespread duplication of efforts and therefore a waste of resources.

- Many training courses are “one-off” sessions, without proper evaluation and follow-ups.

Implement a culture of quality

However, before the training opportunities can be criticised, the Church has to be questioned about her human resource management:

- The majority of Church media staff – including those holding responsible positions, e.g. directors of radio stations or communication officers – have no formal qualification to cope with their tasks; candidates for studies or training courses are not selected on clear criteria; many media outlets offer no opportunities for mid-career training.
- Even those who have received training in communication, are often appointed at the end of their studies and offered responsible positions by the Church, which would normally require many years of practical experience to fill them out professionally. There is hardly any other organisation where careers can be made so rapidly without a proper qualification!
- Finally a “culture of quality and of excellence” has to be cultivated at all levels. Professionals and volunteers, media workers, directors and owners, scholars and trainers– everybody’s job performance has to be challenged and questioned.

Elements for a training concept

The African Church has to clearly define priorities of who has to be trained and with which specialisation:

Major target groups:

According to the present priorities of the Church’s media activities in Africa, CAMECO sees the following groups being in urgent need of training:

- The staff of community media, in particular of radio stations: specific training programmes have to be designed at local and national levels for those collaborators who began their employment without having any previous media training in journalism.



• The executive and senior management of all media: Staff members holding responsible positions are not offered programmes in which management and planning skills can be acquired, although it is precisely these people who will play the most decisive role in the success of the enterprises.

• National and diocesan communication officers: These personnel need further training to fulfil especially their important tasks in the development and implementation of communication plans and programmes. Besides, the communication offices should play a major role in analysing the training needs of the Church media.

In house and mid-career training:

- Each media institution (including community media initiatives) should develop a plan for in-house and mid-career training. The required funds should be a fixed part of the annual budget. However, a correct assessment of the personnel's training needs is the basis for the success of this part of the "human resources management plan".
- In-house training should also be linked to the national and regional training strategy of the local Church, combining short courses on more specialised issues – offered at national or regional levels –, as well as long-term training, including practical and academic studies within the continent. These training strategies have to be based on an identification and in-depth analysis of already-available resources, of the training needs, and on stated goals and objectives of the Church's communication strategy.

Capacity-building:

- The Church's training efforts and initiatives should make primary use of local capacities and resources: for instance local scholars could be invited as trainers, courses could be organised on the premises of existing training institutions in the evenings or during school holidays, etc.
- More emphasis should be given to the training

of trainers: Among church people already holding degrees in communication/journalism, some could be educated as trainers, themselves receiving training in teaching skills and methods. Overseas communication and journalism schools should not offer basic training to Africans, but strengthen their own capacities by the formation of local staff.

Collaboration and Specialisation:

- The management of Church media has to be well informed about available training opportunities in their surroundings, and to be in close contact with the main networks and organisations active in this field; to receive information concerning their programmes and to have access to the courses for their staff.
- Church training programmes, journalism schools and departments of communication at Catholic Universities very often just duplicate the programmes of their State, public or private counterparts. However, it should be asked, what makes them different? What is the "surplus" offered by Church institutions? Why not concentrate their efforts on specific competences, fields and concerns, such as "media culture", "ethical issues", "religious reporting", etc. in which the Church has a special interest, as well as filling gaps with subjects not yet or not adequately covered?

The first steps

It is definitely not an easy task to develop a training strategy for the Church media in Africa.

However, it seems the only way to strengthen the initiatives, to reduce the dependency on outside sources – and most of all – to better reach the readers, listeners and viewers.

CEPACS⁷ and the regional offices for communication (IMBISA, AMECEA, CERAQ, AECWA, ACEAC, ACERAC, CERNA, and CEDOI⁸) should take the initiative. They shall push national and diocesan communication coordinators to identify the training needs (according to stated priorities). SIGNIS⁹, UCIP¹⁰ and CAMECO could support them in the development of the structured procedures of this continuous information gathering and interpretation. CAMECO and the international media organisations could contribute to the establishment of an (annotated) data base on already-existing training facilities for media practitioners in and from Africa.

Here it should be made clear that: African colleagues should take the initiative. They should start to gain control, to formulate adequate strategies, needs and perspectives to become equal partners in the dialogue with European and Northern American supporters. However, a precondition will be to accept that only a high qualification of Church media staff will enable them to reach their social public. Otherwise there is a danger of curling up in a state of in-house communications. (aj/df/ph)

⁷Communication Training in Africa: Curricula revisited. These model curricula are supposed to be used as reference by journalism and communication training institutions in African countries. The document is available on Internet as pdf file at http://www.unesco.org/webworld/publications/com_training_en.pdf and http://www.unesco.org/webworld/publications/com_training_fr.pdf

⁸AMECEA – Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa ; IMBISA – Inter-Regional Meeting of Bishops of Southern Africa

⁹Programme run in Western Francophone Africa in relation to the Lyon-based Training Center CREC-AVEK

¹⁰World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters

¹¹European NGO, specialised in communication for sustainable development

¹²Many Voices, One World, the MacBride Report, Unesco, 1980.

¹³Comité Episcopal Panafricain des Communications Sociales

¹⁴CERAQ : Conférence Episcopale Régionale de l'Afrique de l'Ouest ;

AECWA : Association of Episcopal Conferences of Anglophone West Africa ;

ACEAC and ACERAC : Associations des Conférences Episcopales d'Afrique

Centrale ; CERNA : Conférence Episcopale Régionale du Nord de l'Afrique ;

CEDOI : Conférence Episcopale des Iles de l'Océan Indien

¹⁵The World Catholic Organisation for Communication

¹⁶UCIP : Union Catholique Internationale de la Presse



A vessel adrift

By Michel Egger*

In view of the *World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)*, the *Swiss Coalition of Development Organisations* together with the two church agencies *Catholic Lenten Fund* and *Bread for All* founded in October 2002 the *Swiss Platform for the Information Society*. The Platform aims to strengthen civil society interests at the Summit. Egger, who has already participated in the 1st *WSIS Preparatory Committee (PrepCom1)* as civil society representative within the Swiss Government Delegation, gives a critical insight into the unsatisfactory preparatory process. He raises three principal questions about the prospects of the *WSIS*, which are of general interest, not only from a Swiss perspective.

The countdown has started. The first phase of the *World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)* will take place on 10–12 December 2003 in Geneva and the second is scheduled for 2005 in Tunis. An important topic: information and communication technologies (ICTs) – the Internet

first and foremost – are not only the drivers of economic and financial globalisation, but also powerful vehicles for ideas and images that are shaping our vision of the world and our consumption patterns. Hence the substantial stakes involved, in terms of access (digital divide), power (concentration of the media), democracy (freedom of expression), and cultural diversity (macdonaldisation). These issues become even more crucial considering the great chasm between the info-rich and the info-poor, and that information as a commodity most often wins out over information as a human right or a public good.

Yet, one year before the Summit, the mix still seems all wrong. States are lacking in political will, enterprises are just beginning to wake up, civil society is struggling to mobilise beyond specialised circles, and media professionals on the whole are spectacularly indifferent or apathetic. It is as if the Summit were coming too early or too late. Too early because the political terrain is still lying fallow and public awareness is almost non-existent. Too late, because the sector is in the grip of an economic downturn and the positions of strength of certain groups and countries – such as *Microsoft* and the United States – well established.

Three questions now arise concerning the Summit. First, will Geneva 2003 be anything other than a major curtain-raiser for the Tunis Summit in 2005? The Swiss and Geneva authorities, which have been keen to hold this high mass and plan to invest SFr. 20 million in it, are obsessed by the fear that it could turn out to be just that. Yet the risk is real, for there is no true leadership, no strong emblematic organisation or figure capable of galvanising energies and

embodying a forward-looking vision. The United Nations agency responsible, the very technically-oriented *International Telecommunication Union (ITU)* has neither the requisite stature nor capabilities. The upshot is that in the absence of a real brain, the Summit looks like a many-headed hydra – the *ITU*, the host country secretariat and the Summit's executive secretariat – each with its own perspectives and agenda. The result is a somewhat paralysing strategic vagueness and institutional complexity. Alarmed by the situation, Switzerland finally spoke out at the European Preparatory Conference held in Bucharest from 7 to 9 November. The head of the delegation and Director of the *Federal Communications Office (OFCOM)*, Marc Furrer, shook things up somewhat, at the same time berating the «scepticism or even sarcasm» of some European countries.

Second question: what will the Summit be discussing? According to the official discourse, it should focus more on content rather than channels. The reality is much less clear. Bearing the marked imprint of the *ITU*, the official documents thus far published place more



Jill Valkenberg for CAMECO

emphasis on infrastructure development (for the South) and potential markets (for the North) than on the rights and real needs of human beings. Most often reduced to ICTs, the vision of the information society strangely overlooks the media. As States are on the whole poorly prepared, much more substantive work will have to be done if the Final Declaration and Plan of Action are to be any different. Switzerland, precisely, has decided to concentrate on some topics that are yet to be determined amongst the federal offices, which do not always speak the same language. The *OFCOM* specifically mentions access, cultural diversity and freedom of expression, the Swiss *Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)* speaks of the fight against poverty, and empowerment. By comparison the United States is interested primarily in the growth of telecommunications, IT training and security on Internet (fight against terrorism).

Third question: Will the Summit be of a „new kind“ – as has been trumpeted for the last year – in other words open to greater civil society participation, amongst other things? The answer is almost certain: no. To quote Daniel Stauffacher, the delegate for the Federal Council, „NGO hopes have been raised too high and some governments have been made overly fearful.“ In fact, it is only the large enterprises that could gain influence thanks to their privileged links with *ITU*. This is not preventing civil society from organising and putting up a fight, having been galvanised by the *CRIS (Communication Rights in the Information Society)*** international campaign and strongly supported by *UNESCO*.

* This is a slightly shortened version of an article published in the *Swiss Coalition News*, Nr. 33, December 2002. The full article is available online in English at <http://www.swisscoalition.ch/english/pagesnav/H.htm> and in French at <http://www.swisscoalition.ch/francais/pagesnav/H.htm>

** For more information on the *Campaign Communication Rights in the Information Society (CRIS)* see <http://www.crisinfo.org/>

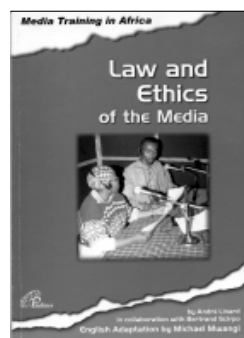
BOOK - REVIEWS

Media Training in Africa

André Linard in collaboration with Bertrand Scirpo, *Law and Ethics of the Media* (English adaptation by Michael Mwangi) 144pp.

Gérard Ponthieu and Pierre Barrot, *The Art of Journalism. Thirty Questions and Answers*. (English adaptation by Kizito Sesana) 144pp.

These two manuals are the third and fourth volumes of the series *Media Training in Africa* by Paulines Publications Africa, 2002 and cost US\$ 8.00 each. They are adaptations from French originals which were published by GRET, Paris in 1998.



Law and Ethics of the Media gives an overview on the legal contexts and institutional status of the media referring to particular national differences and settings. In addition,

a variety of rules and principles as well as values – reflecting the ethics – which journalists are confronted with in their daily work are presented.

In five chapters the authors focus at aspects like the “freedom of information”, its “ethical” limits, and restrictions, “standards of professional conduct” a balance of power (conflicts between the press and the public authority, the judiciary, economic interests etc.) as well as the function and role of media regulatory bodies or associations. Finally, concrete examples of (union) organisations and professional associations who defend the freedom of the press are given. Their respective addresses can be found at the end of the book.

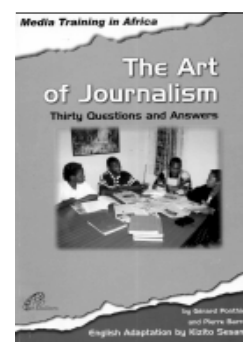
Written in an accessible style the aspects addressed in this practically-oriented book are frequently illustrated by examples from around the world while paying special attention to the media situation in African countries. A glossary and short bibliography round off this guide which is of use for all journalists interested in an introduction towards a “responsible” journalism.

The Art of Journalism. Thirty Questions and Answers

This clear structured reference book covers thirty questions on practical aspects of journalism.

Following the journalist’s intermediate position between the information source and the recipient, the first 10 questions refer to how recipients can be attracted towards newspaper articles or radio programmes. The construction, language code and quantity of an article or programme are discussed here. After this introductory chapter

the authors proceed towards the collection of data, addressing the journalist’s efficient self management, like interview techniques and optimal note-taking procedures. Consequently, the third



chapter focuses on the style and appropriate means of how to sort out, arrange and shape the collected data, in order to convey the intended news item. In the final chapter the presentation itself (e.g. what is a good photo, headline?, etc.) is assessed.

The range of practical tips which are often enriched by examples from the African context make this handbook especially recommendable for “greenhorn” journalists, but could also be used by more experienced journalists to check their own performance. Additionally, a list with basic technical terms and an overview of schools of journalism in Africa are given at the end of the book.

P I N - B O A R D

News on EU available to CEE journalists. A multilingual service for journalists reporting on European Union (EU) affairs was launched recently, supported by the *International Federation of Journalists (IFJ)*. The *CrossLingual II Network* will provide news and other information on the EU. According to IFJ, during the next two years, the online network will develop the technology and content model of the *EurActiv* portal in collaboration with partners in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), giving CEE journalists access to information on EU activities in their own language. *EurActiv* was already launched in 2000 and is presently available in English, German and French language. For further information see: <http://www.euractiv.com>

New webpage to free Belarussian journalists. *Belarus online* has recently launched a web page "dedicated to unjustly convicted independent journalists in Belarus" which provides users with a news service and documentation on violations of press freedom in Belarus. Available under: <http://belforum.ecn.cz>

Télécentres communautaires : les recettes de l'autosuffisance. Les centres multimédia communautaires (CMC), promus notamment par l'UNESCO, se veulent une réponse à la fracture numérique qui se creuse entre le Nord et le Sud. L'idée est d'associer radio de proximité et infrastructures classiques d'un télécentre (téléphone, fax et photocopies ; ordinateurs connectés à l'Internet, services d'e-mails). Ainsi quelques radios communautaires au Burkina Faso, au Mali, au Sénégal ont été sélectionnées comme CMC pilotes ; d'autres CMC ont été également établis au Mozambique et au Sri Lanka. Cet usage des nouvelles technologies de l'information et de la communication au service du développement et des communautés

pourrait utilement inspirer d'autres radios communautaires et confessionnelles ainsi que des départements diocésains de communication à la recherche de services innovants et pertinents. Intéressé ? Alors un petit tour sur les sites <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001230/123004e.pdf> - <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001230/123004f.pdf> permettra de télécharger un manuel sur le sujet: « Les recettes de l'autosuffisance : Comment créer un télécentre communautaire polyvalent en Afrique » - « *The Telecentre Cookbook for Africa: Recipes for self-sustainability* ». Cette publication se veut un guide étape par étape pour la création d'un tel centre, et propose des exemples d'infrastructures, des lignes de réflexion qui guideront utilement tout initiateur d'un tel projet.

Community Radio: Two manuals on line. Comme relevé ailleurs dans ce numéro de Media Forum, les manuels de formation adaptés au contexte des pays en développement, et notamment africains, ne sont pas légion. Raison de plus pour mentionner l'existence de deux publications consacrées à la radio communautaire et disponibles sur Internet : Un « *Manuel de la radio communautaire* » de l'UNESCO : ce manuel de radio communautaire a pour but de montrer que toute personne, même un agriculteur sans connaissances techniques, peut concevoir, organiser, gérer et produire des programmes de radio en ne dépendant que très peu d'une aide extérieure. http://www.unesco.org/webworld/publications/community_radio_handbook.pdf et http://www.unesco.org/webworld/publications/community_radio_handbook_fr.pdf

The second handbook, "*The Africa Community Radio Manager's Book*", is produced by AMARC. Many people can tell community radio operators

what they need to do but not exactly how they should do it. In this workbook, no one tells what or how, but it does deal with things happening in a community radio station. It proposes many useful examples, making it a friendly-reader manual. This is a Word document which can be loaded down from http://www.apc.org/english/capacity/training/community_radio.shtml The Webpage also offers many other useful training materials on community radio as well as on numerous other topics like computers, Internet, web design, telecentres, etc.

Le Cierro change de nom... Et de mission ? Créé en 1978, le Centre Inter-Africain d'Etudes en Radio Rurale (CIERRO), s'appellera dorénavant le Centre de Formation de l'URTNA - Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso). Pendant vingt ans (1978-1998), le Centre a assuré au personnel radio des pays africains francophones, une formation sur les techniques de radio rurale. Sous son nouveau nom le Centre assure maintenant la formation dans tous les domaines de la radio/TV en faveur du personnel de tous les organismes membres africains de l'URTNA appartenant à tous les groupes linguistiques. Mais il n'est pas encore clair si ce changement d'appellation signifie aussi un changement de programmes de formation et l'abandon de la spécialisation en radio rurale.

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