

"Strive for a deeper understanding of modern means of communication as constituent elements of modern culture to seize all opportunities to use mass and group media for evangelization and learn how to do so effectively and in particular to minister to and foster Christian values among men and women working in the media industry."

Resolution 4 of All-Asian Conference
on "Evangelization in Asia Today"
Suwon (South Korea), August 1988

Priorities and Perspectives of Church Communications in East Africa

TWENTY YEARS OF AMECEA COMMUNICATIONS DEPARTMENT

L'AMECEA semble bien être une des premières régions en Afrique - et même au-delà de ce continent - à avoir pressenti et reconnu la valeur et l'importance des communications pour l'Eglise. Ainsi, dès la fin des années 60, elle fit oeuvre de pionnier en établissant des structures intégrées et une planification des communications tant aux niveaux national et régional, notamment à travers la formation de communicateurs et la coordination des projets. Cependant, la lucidité ne doit pas abandonner l'observateur: un renforcement des structures de communications au sein de l'AMECEA est urgent, notamment par un effort soutenu de formation de communicateurs et par la mise en oeuvre d'une créativité et d'une imagination renouvelées nécessaires à leur vitalité.

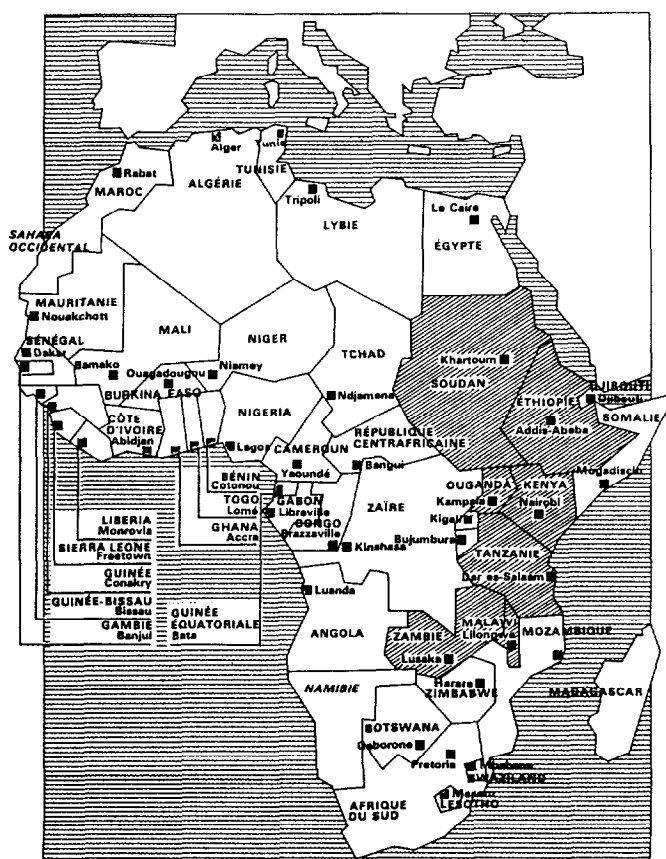
Tumaini Centre, Nairobi, July 25th 1988. Twenty-two persons, among them delegates of the National Communications Offices of the seven AMECEA(*) countries, the Social Communications Secretary and General Secretary of AMECEA, and representatives of the international Catholic Media Organisations and Funding Agencies assembled for the 19th Annual Meeting of AMECEA's Department of Social Communications, chaired by Cardinal Otunga, Archbishop of Nairobi.

The 19th Annual Meeting. This means that in 1989 the AMECEA Office of Social Communications will celebrate its 20th anniversary. A 20th birthday is a somewhat magical and special event almost like a new beginning. A flashback on the past on this occasion can be fruitful and instructive to accept the challenge of the future.

Since its creation in 1970, the Catholic Media Council has maintained close relations with the AMECEA Office for Social Communications, intensively sharing their problems and attending most of their annual gatherings. The forthcoming anniversary meeting however offers the opportunity to take a fresh look at the actual situation and development of communications in AMECEA since its beginnings.



MAP : THE AMECEA COUNTRIES



(*) AMECEA means "Association of the Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa". This Ecclesiastical Region of the Catholic Church in Africa was founded in July 1961 as the "Interterritorial Episcopal Board of Eastern Africa" including 5 countries Kenya, Tanganyika (now Tanzania), Uganda, Nyasaland (now Malawi) and Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia). The first ITEBEA Meeting held in Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania, from 17-26th July 1961, was attended by 47 Bishops and Apostolic Prefects. Now, after the joining of Ethiopia and Sudan, AMECEA consists of 7 countries and 93 dioceses.

FOUNDATION OF THE AMECEA OFFICE OF SOCIAL COMMUNICATIONS

In September 1967 the AMECEA Plenary Meeting on "Pastoral Perspectives in Eastern Africa after Vatican II", held in Nairobi, recommended that AMECEA should establish an Office for Social Communications. Accordingly, the AMECEA Office of Social Communications was opened in Nairobi in January 1969. The AMECEA Bishops outlined its tasks as follows:

"To assist in the work of AMECEA as an organ of liaison and collaboration between, and of service to the Communications Departments of the National Catholic Secretariats of the AMECEA countries".

In the minds of the Bishops the creation of this specialised Department for Social Communications should aim at strengthening this various efforts of pastoral work through dissemination of information about Church activities in each country. But more than a press office of AMECEA, it should foster coordination and co-operation to overcome isolation of the National Offices, to stimulate sharing and avoid duplication of projects, at the same time providing opportunities to learn from one another about the successes and failures in areas such as pastoral work, education, rural development, etc.

GOALS OF THE REGIONAL COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE

In a document prepared in 1979 by Fr. Ladislaus Mosha, the third AMECEA Communications Secretary, the objectives and goals of the AMECEA Office of Social Communications are presented as follows:

"a) To provide means of contact and a central meeting point for the apostolic and professional activities of Catholics in the field of radio, TV and other allied mass media and audio visual means of communication which have the evangelization of man and his development as their objective;

b) To arouse collaboration among its members and organizations and also among other individuals working at national, continental and world-wide levels; to initiate and foster an understanding and cooperation by means of study sessions, conferences, lectures, workshops, publications and

through an exchange of information, programmes and research materials;

c) To represent the interests of its members at international level; to establish contact with authorized and private organizations which share common goals or are interested in the use of mass media for evangelisation and development purposes;

d) To give within its own sphere, help to dioceses or institutions within dioceses in the training of personnel by organising and coordinating workshops, and training programmes;

e) To promote research in all areas connected with radio, TV and other mass media and sometimes newspapers;

f) To collaborate with institutions of similar aims belonging to Christian Churches of other denominations".

These acknowledged objectives and goals are the *raison d'être* of all activities of the AMECEA office of Social Communications: maintaining regular contacts with all National Communication Secretariats in the region, and with partners worldwide, through correspondence; attendance of important international or regional meetings; visits to the different countries; organisation of annual study sessions and communications meetings; production of a quarterly news-sheet ("AMECEA Information"); promotion and coordination of the training of priests, sisters and lay people in communications; screening and compilation of applications for communications from all seven countries for the Funding Agencies overseas, and thus coordination of the financing of communications projects in the AMECEA countries. Though many of these activities are rather administrative, the vocation of the AMECEA Communications Department is to have a clear concept on communications development in modern society, in a given cultural and social context, to develop vision and strategy, to encourage diocesan and national communications development, to promote and set up multimedia and regional communications ventures and programmes. This creative and animating work is surely more difficult and extremely delicate: it requires from the Regional Secretary a real leadership, i.e. a solid professional background, a great service for interpersonal re-

lations and the capacity of an overall methodological approach.

AN INTEGRATED STRUCTURE FOR COMMUNICATIONS

In accordance with "Communio et Progressio" (No. 168 ff.) as well as the Conclusions and Recommendations of the Pan-African Meeting of the Episcopal Commissions for Social Communications held at Ibadan, Nigeria (November 28th to December 2nd 1973), AMECEA seems to be the first region in Africa - and perhaps in all developing countries to have recognised the value of these recommendations. Very soon already, in the early seventies it started the implementation of coherent communications structures in the AMECEA countries.

Actually in each of the seven AMECEA countries there is a National Office for Social Communications, with at least one full-time officer, except - for the time being - in Zambia.

Located at the Catholic Secretariats, these National Offices are challenged to animate the communications activities of the Church, to coordinate diocesan efforts, to conduct communications workshops, to serve as a liaison in communication matters with other Churches and the secular media, in cooperation with International Catholic Organisations for Social Communications. They help in media education and awareness programmes, issue news releases and are responsible for media production, especially in the broadcasting sector.

In different countries the National Office is supported by Diocesan Offices of Social Communications and so far, coordinators are appointed in the majority of the dioceses. AMECEA is very much aware of the importance of these Diocesan Offices. During the last Annual Meeting, Fr. Paul Uria, the Regional Secretary of Social Communications of AMECEA, introduced a document on this topic (see next page).

Without any doubt it can be said that in no other region does the African Church have such a great number of people working within the communications structures or enjoy such a variety and number of activities in this field. Yet in AMECEA - as in no other region of the African Church - there remains a serious lack of qualified staff, and diocesan and national com-

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THE ROLE OF A DIOCESAN COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE

by Father Paul URIA, AMECEA Communications Secretary

A Diocesan communications office is an organ of liaison and collaboration between the parishes of a given diocese in collecting and disseminating information on pastoral, social and economic activities of the Church for the development of the people. It animates communications activities at the level of individual parishes and cooperates to establish a network of communications at inter-diocesan and national levels. At the head of the communications office, there is the diocesan communications coordinator/secretary, who is responsible to the Local Ordinary/Diocesan Bishop, in the execution of his duties/office.

The main tasks of the Diocesan Communications Coordinator/Secretary

1. To establish effective channels of communication within the diocese and between the diocese and the other dioceses, and the National Communications office.

Effective communications exposes everyone to information and ideas which help to create a living community of Christians who are aware of issues and are willing to be involved in the life of the Church.

2. To animate the development of information flow and of communication to keep the people of God in the diocese informed about the activities of their Church, what is happening there; what the Church is saying and doing in the country and even around the world; about what other Churches and voluntary agencies are doing; about pastoral priorities and issues within and outside the diocese. This should be done through:

- a) the Diocesan monthly Newsletter
- b) publications of Parochial newsletters - which could be monthly, bi-monthly or quarterly
- c) press releases
- d) posters, charts and any other visual and audio aid materials

3. To make people aware of pastoral and catechetical guidelines as well as social teachings of the Church through the means of communication. There is therefore, the need to provide training in elementary communi-

cations techniques and methods at parochial and diocesan levels. A diocesan communications coordinator would have to organise training workshops in various media - group communication, print and the electronic media. As many people as possible interested in communications media could be involved. The communications office would help in developing models of communication in keeping with the needs and circumstances of the area, which will be at the service of the diocese's pastoral priority, such as building small Christian communities, etc. We need communications skills and media related to the African culture and the local situation.

4. To send news and information to the National Communications office of what is happening in the diocese. Nowadays, a communicator cannot work in isolation. He should collaborate with other communicators in the area, as well as with mass media institutions, radio, press, etc., on behalf of the Church. The Christian Faith and the mandate to bring the Good News to as many people as possible through the communications media should motivate a Diocesan Communications coordinator to dedicate himself to the communications apostolate.

5. Prepare Radio and/or TV Religious Programmes on issues related to the life situations of the people; for example on the role of the laity in the Church, Christian family life, responsibility, peace and justice, etc.

The Church calls for and supports effective communications structures at both Diocesan and national levels. Communications coordinators in co-operation with their Bishops are to maintain the structures through:

- (1) Forming active communications teams in the Diocese.
- (2) Regular meetings of communications teams, to evaluate their work and progress; and to plan for the future.
- (3) Workshops and seminars; and occasional consultations.

munications offices are often handicapped to carry out their programmes and to achieve their goals. The problem of staff shortage is reinforced by the absence of trained personnel on the one hand, and by the reluctance of some Church authorities to release capable candidates for training, or qualified communicators for responsibilities outside the diocese at national or regional level. Finally there is the crucial question of salaries which are mostly below standard, in comparison with those offered in similar functions in the secular field. As a result, many communicators trained by the Church, leave their service for more lucrative jobs in the governmental or private media sectors. Countries like Tanzania, Zambia, Malawi and Kenya were once well-staffed centres but during the last years have had difficulties in filling vacancies in spite of the fact that several candidates had meanwhile been trained to insure continuity.

TRAINING : FIRST PRIORITY... BUT WHICH RESULTS ?

Right from the beginning, the AMECEA Communications Office in Nairobi was charged with the primary task of developing a training programme for Church personnel: priests, religious, sisters and lay people.

Considering the amount of applications for scholarships introduced during the last 20 years, there must be quite a number of trained people in the AMECEA countries. At the same time however, a decrease in scholarships and in the number of candidates actually sent for professional and more advanced training has to be noted. This professional training cannot be replaced by the many sessions and workshops on communications which are organised at diocesan and national level. At this junction one wonders whether this preliminary training is used to select valuable candidates for a career as a Christian communicator? The organisation and management of qualified personnel needs a long-term strategy, which - so far - is not defined, though AMECEA showed a pioneer spirit.

Right from his appointment as AMECEA Communications Secretary in 1969, Fr. Joe Healey gave highest priority to the training of African priests, sisters and lay people, in order to

place the development and management of Social Communications in the AMECEA countries into the hands of local people as soon as possible. This was Father Healey's guiding principle when strongly promoting a vast training programme in Eastern Africa at regional and national level.

Already during the first years of office he began looking for trained African priests to succeed him. Fr. Joe Mukwaya, the Communications Secretary of Uganda, accepted to do so. He officially began working in the Office of Social Communications at the AMECEA Secretariat in Nairobi in July 1973. His actual assignment however, began with a nine-month counterpart training programme. This experience was shared with a wider audience through a documentation published as CAMECO Service Paper in 1976.

In the field of training, the AMECEA Office of Social Communications has played a significant role in arranging various communications courses for individual candidates, as well as workshops and seminars at different levels. 3 priorities are prevailing :

- * First, training in journalism and information to produce parish and diocesan newsletters, pamphlets and other materials designed for the grassroot level. Here again, one could stress the great number of workshops conducted by the National Communications Offices to train people in the use of communications media in order to help spread the Gospel message in pastoral and developmental tasks of the Church.

- * Secondly the production of radio and TV/video programmes for broadcasting on national, mostly government-controlled stations.

- * Thirdly, the promotion of traditional forms of communication in Africa (drama, songs, story-telling, etc.) as scheduled by the coming "Symposium on Grassroot Communication" organised by the AMECEA Communications Office in collaboration with SONOLUX on 20-26th November 1988 in Lusaka, Zambia.

In addition to these general training programmes, one must stress the different pastoral communications workshops for Bishops, conducted in the different AMECEA countries around

1973-75 by the Communications Department of the National Secretariats, in cooperation with the AMECEA Communications Office. The purpose of these workshops was to promote proper understanding of the role of media in today's society, and their value as apostolic means. But a real follow-up to this so important initiative has not yet been made.

OVERALL INTEGRATED PLANNING AND APPLICATIONS STRATEGY

Once a year, representatives from the National Offices for Social Communications meet on the AMECEA level to coordinate their efforts, exchange ideas and programmes, make plans for the future and review the communications development in Eastern Africa, especially on the national level in each country. During this annual meeting, the delegates screen and

finalise a package application for funding, containing all applications from the seven countries, for the coming year.

These annual meetings as well as those of the Screening Committees are meant not as a simple juxtaposition of reports and topics, but as a mutual sharing and research into planning and strategies. There is an ongoing concern to improve their operation and effectiveness.

The AMECEA experience has proved to be a workable model for the establishment of communications structures and constitutes a certain guarantee for an overall planning, coordination and cooperation on regional and national levels. The different notes and guidelines prepared in the past by the AMECEA Office are in fact very useful - not only to improve the actual situation of

AMECEA again and again - but also for other regions where such procedures are not yet implemented.

Therefore we would like to give here some of the salient characteristics of the way in which AMECEA communication projects are handled:

1. The National Communications Secretary submits to the Central Screening Committee of AMECEA an activity report with a financial statement of the past year, exposes his plans for the coming year and the estimated budget, as well as a first draft of applications.

2. The applications are evaluated by a National Screening Committee composed of representatives of each media section and from the dioceses, and presented to the Annual National Communications Meeting.

3. The National Office revises the applications according to the comments from the Screening Committee, respectively the Gene-

TABLE : THE CATHOLIC COMMUNICATIONS SCENE IN AMECEA COUNTRIES							
	ETHIOPIA	KENYA	MALAWI	SUDAN	TANZANIA	UGANDA	ZAMBIA
A. GENERAL INFORMATIONS							
Pop. (millions)	43,35	20,33	7,06	22	21,73	14,96	6,41
% of Catholics	0,7	26,4	25,3	6,9	28,2	49,6	29,4
Nr. of dioceses	8	18	7	8	29	14	9
Radio receivers per 1000 inh. (1)	184	78	245	251	89	22	30
TV receivers per 1000 inh. (1)	1,66	4,9	n/a	51	0,5	5,8	14
Circulation daily news per 1000 inh. (1)	n/a	13	55	5	5	2	177
B. CHURCH COMMUNICATIONS							
National Communications Secretary	yes	vacant	vacant	yes	yes	yes	vacant*
Staff Communications Department	3	6	3	1	2	2	0
Nat. News Bulletin	yes	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	?
Diocesan Coordinators	no	yes (8)	yes (most)	yes (few)	yes (17)	yes (most)	yes (most)
Nat. cath. paper	no	yes	no	no	yes	yes	yes
Dioces. bulletin	2	7	yes	1	13	10	?
Radio Program (minutes/week)	no	yes	yes (90')	no**	yes	yes (270')	yes
TV programs	no	yes	(no TV)	no	(no TV)	yes	yes
printing presses	1	3	2	2	3	4	2
Recording studio	no	1	1	no	1	2	1
A/V prod. centre	no	no	no	no	yes	yes	yes
Video production		yes					yes
Communications training centre		1			1		1

* A National Communications Secretary is just appointed recently.

** Except in special circumstances, e.g. Christmas and Easter

(1) Figures from the "Unesco Statistical Digest", 1987. They are for 1985.

ral Assembly, and submits them to the Regional AMECEA Communications Department in Nairobi, respectively to its Screening Committee, which normally meets just before the Annual AMECEA Social Communications Meeting.

4. The AMECEA Screening Committee prepares an overall financial report and budget, together with a one-package application, after the General AMECEA Assembly for Social Communications has given its final advice.

5. The General Secretariat of AMECEA then submits the one-package application to the Funding Agencies.

The package system aims at "uniformity and systematic planning, facilitated by regional cooperation". The different projects are endorsed if:

- deadlines are strictly observed;
- national planning is reflected in the communication work of the country;
- co-responsibility between national and diocesan offices is given evidence;
- the annual budget is within the terms of the overall planning;
- the annual report covers diocesan activities, workshops, and refers to the concerns of the entire country.

It is highly advisable that members of the Screening Committees are competent people, selected from the different media sections, being sufficiently independent from the projects submitted, in order to give objective advice.

Contacts with the overseas Catholic Funding Agencies also have certain priorities which should be considered by the applicants:

- The highest possible local contribution is expected in financing any given project.
- Running costs are not normally borne by Agencies, but have to be taken care of by the local project holder. Only under very special circumstances can such expenses be considered in a project, and only for a limited period. Agencies usually provide help which leads towards self-reliance.

- The Screening Committee should give detailed information on the criteria of its decisions. The credibility of its work lies in the professional reasons put forward in favour of a project or for its rejection. When evaluating a project the Screening Committee should seriously consider the future development, for example financing and staff requirements, to guarantee its continuity.

STILL A CHALLENGING EXPERIENCE ?

The AMECEA communications structures are a visible result of the Vatican II Decree "Inter Mirifica" and of the spirit of the Pastoral Instruction "Communio et Progressio", which was still in preparation at that time. "For years, East Africa (AMECEA) was an example for the other regions and continents as to how Church communications structures should be efficiently established" (cf. Information Bulletin 1/88 pp. 1-5: "The Dilemma of Categorical and Global Communications Policies").

AMECEA is affected by the ambiguous reality induced by the teachings of Vatican II: the juxtaposition of the Commissions and Offices of the Bishops' Conferences dealing with the whole field of media on one side, and the three International Catholic Media Organisations each dealing with their special interest fields on the other side. So far in Africa, the continental branches of UNDA, OCIC and UCAP are subordinated to the national and regional offices. Because of the lack of personnel, very often the different functions are occupied by one and the same person. In the AMECEA countries priority is given to the structures proposed by Communio et Progressio but a balanced integration of both its aspects, in an overall regional and national planning, is still wishful thinking.

Perhaps Africa in general, and AMECEA in particular could adopt a pioneering role in developing appropriate communications strategies and structures in the Church, integrating the communications offices of the Bishops' Conferences and the categorical branches of the international media organisations UNDA, OCIC and UCIP. To this effect, the AMECEA countries should strengthen the staffing of their communications offices at all levels, from the local to the regio-

nal, and find its institutional models for coordination and cooperation with the national affiliations of UNDA, OCIC and UCIP. Some research should be done about the own profile and identity of both, and the tangents for joint ventures. Besides money and funds for training and salaries, this needs strong support from the local Church authorities.

More fundamentally perhaps, the AMECEA communications set-up must prove its capacity to avoid the pos-

sible trap for all organisations of this kind: to put too much emphasis on administrative tasks and routine procedures which are more reliable and comfortable, and to overlook the spirit of pioneering and of creative thinking which should animate the whole of the body. That means that at each level, from the grassroots to the regional structures, men and women are needed who are not only administrators or technicians, but talented Christian communicators and leaders.

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PROFILE OF A CHRISTIAN COMMUNICATOR

Extracts from the opening address delivered by Cardinal Otunga at the 19th Annual Meeting of AMECEA's Department of Social Communications in Nairobi 25th July, 1988

...The power of the communications media is undoubtedly very great and it depends on you as Christian communicators to guarantee that they will always be instruments at the service of truth, justice, peace, honesty, moral decency and true human development.

Every year among the priorities put by the AMECEA communicators after the Annual Meeting, training and intensification of communications work appear. The Bishops accept them and always try their best to provide for well trained individuals in the fields of press, radio, television, video and group communication, who can present clearly the teachings of the Church and respond to questions concerning Christian faith and morality including issues on social justice, social and economic development. Progress has certainly been made in that direction and what the Bishops ask for from those already trained and assigned to communications tasks are integrity of character, dedication and loyalty to duty; communicators who are well informed, responsible, honest and sensitive to the needs and complex nature of local situations. Ideally, a Christian communicator always acts responsibly; he is service-oriented, with integrity and credibility.

...Christian communicators are there to communicate, through the media, the message that unites people, rather than what would put them apart... He should always strive to communicate and emphasise what pro-

motes truth, justice, peace, brotherhood and equality among people; honesty that builds the bridge of credibility and interdependence, what brings true change of heart and human development; express people's needs and aspirations, and suggest solutions to their problems.

...Catholic newspapers, magazines, newsletters, information bulletins, posters, charts, etc., should be well planned and adapted with the specific need in mind, the need to inform and educate people on those important documents. Right information correctly given will help to form mature and authentic Christians! The documents are not to be merely duplicated but using your expertise in communication, be summarised to give the basic message for training.

Nowadays there is a stress that African Christian communicators have the duty to bring to the people through the traditional communications media, material and information that is qualitative and relevant. They have to make people aware of the powers and strength of the traditional media: story-telling, use of riddles and proverbs, and group theatre in bringing change. Your communications activities need to be at the service of local Christian communities first and foremost. Group communications should be encouraged and developed at all levels. This is one of your main responsibilities: Training of communicators at the grassroots levels... You are to help people become creative com-