cameco+

*Communication Consultancy for
the Common Good*

A needs assessment of the
National Episcopal Commissions
for the Media in Francophone Africa

By Mambulu Ekutsu

Aachen, August 2022

Concerns over organisational challenges

Dissatisfaction regarding general working conditions, the lack of operational budgets, audiovisual working tools and competent staff, and the urgent need for training and capacity building for better organisation, project planning and access to funding: These are the main challenges identified in a survey conducted in 2021 by **CAMECO**, targeting the heads of **National Episcopal Commissions for the Media in Francophone Africa**.

A long research journey

Between January and March 2021 CAMECO's Francophone Africa desk organised a data collection amongst the heads of the National Episcopal Commissions for Media in Francophone Africa. The motivation for the survey was to enable CAMECO to better understand the current organisational challenges of the commissions after more than 20 years since the establishment of the secretariats of these commissions, in a new context where communication and the media play a major role in Church life.

The survey involved the distribution of an online questionnaire to the secretaries of these commissions and the carrying out of online group discussions with the same secretaries as well as the respective bishops.

A total of nine commission secretaries responded to the questionnaire (each commission has one secretary), eight of whom participated in the exchange of experiences, three of which were conducted with the bishops responsible. The following countries were represented: Benin, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Guinea Conakry, Mali, DR Congo, Rwanda, and Togo.

The findings included several organisational weaknesses within the commissions that participated in the survey.

cameco+
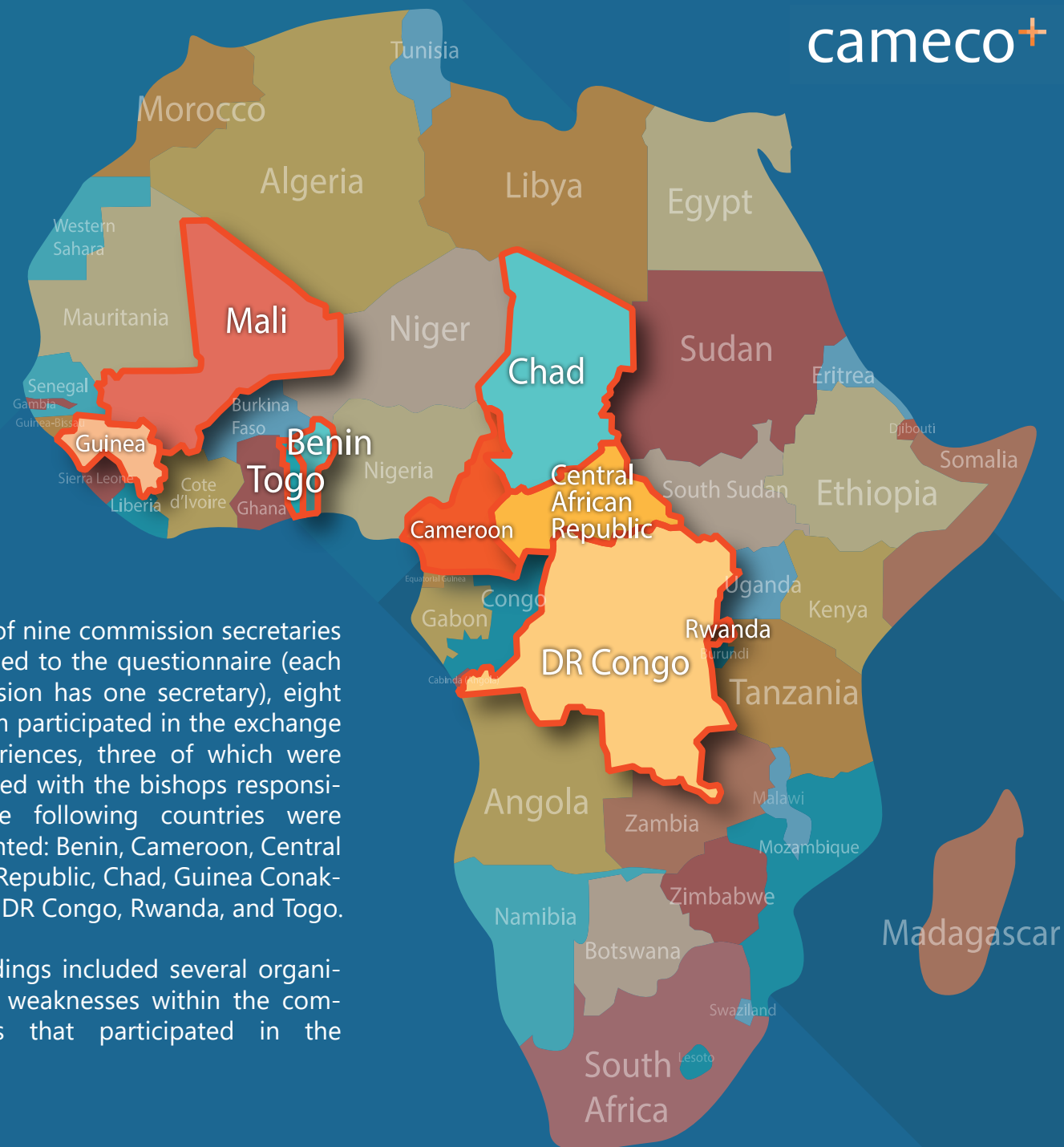
# The high level of dissatisfaction regarding working conditions

Two thirds of the participants expressed a high level of dissatisfaction with their working conditions (see the graphic below), though an equal number also stated that they feel a certain degree of satisfaction with the functions they are tasked with.

How do you rate the adequacy of the means available to you (technical equipment, staff and funding) for the success of your mission?
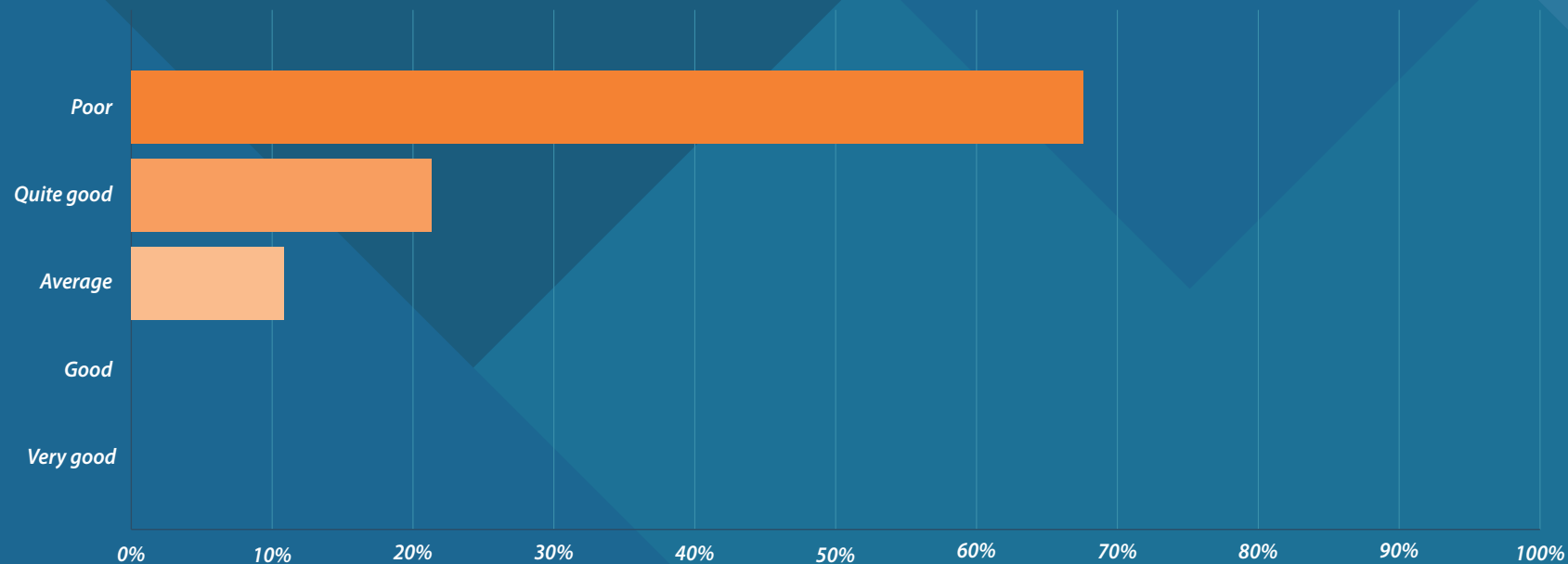
Not all secretariats have an annual budget

The latter figures are consistent with the other information that emerged from the survey: Four out of nine secretaries stated that they manage secretariats without an annual budget (see the graphic); seven out of nine expressed the need for being provided with audiovisual production equipment, and eight lacked office technology and tools. Two out of nine also indicated the need for an office secretary and a vehicle.

Does your department have an annual budget?

No

Yes

cameco+
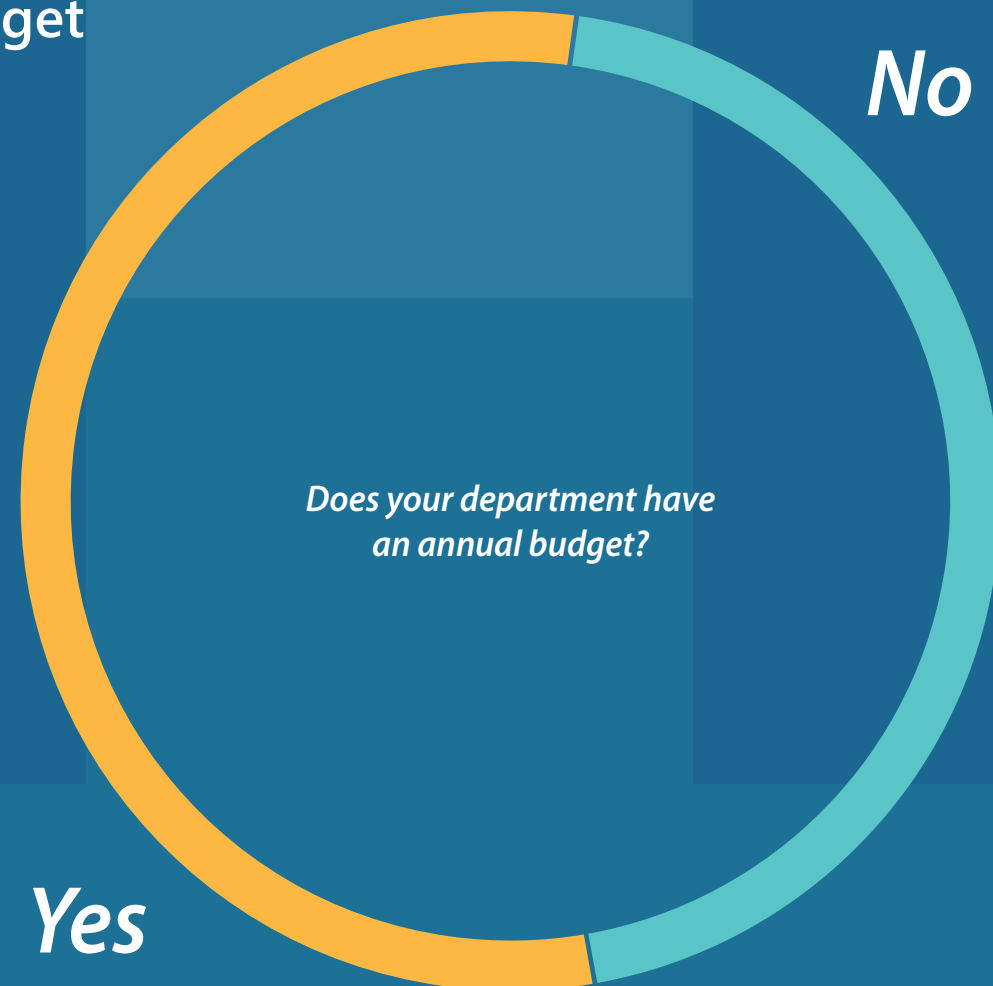
The role of Pontifical Mission Society subsidies in the funding strategy

As for the financial strategy of these secretariats, the data collected show that, apart from the contribution of the Episcopal Conferences, the national commissions rely secondarily on subsidies from the Pontifical Mission Societies in Rome (see the graphic)

N.B. This graphic represents the results of the responses to an open-ended question. The secretaries were given the opportunity to indicate multiple sources of funding for their budget.

> *Bishops' Conference*

> *Internal Random Funds*

> *Grants from Rome and the Pontifical Mission Societies*

> *External (to other Bishops' Commissions) and internal sales of services*

If yes, how is this budget funded?

The need for better management skills

The need for training and capacity building to overcome the skills gap and to create more opportunities to access external funding was mentioned by two thirds of the secretaries, along with recruiting competent personnel as another major challenge of the secretariats. This is consistent with the fact that only one secretary considered himself as sufficiently competent in project planning; similarly low is the experience in terms of setting up budgets, while none had experience in project monitoring. Only one third of the secretaries stated that they work based on a strategic plan (see the graphic on the right).

Furthermore, it seems useful to underline the pragmatism with which the bishops choose staff for the national secretariats. Most of them elect personnel coming "from the field", with practical experience acquired in the media world, and radio in particular, which remains the most prominent medium. More than half of the respondents (five out nine) claimed to have at least a bachelor's or master's degree in Media and/or Communication. Of these, four said that they came to their position as national secretary after working in the media, and one after working in the communication sector. Most of the secretaries who participated in the survey also indicated to have better knowledge and skills in relation to radio, print media and TV but only weak to average skills and knowledge related to online media, social media and multimedia production.

Does your service operate based on a multi-annual strategic plan?
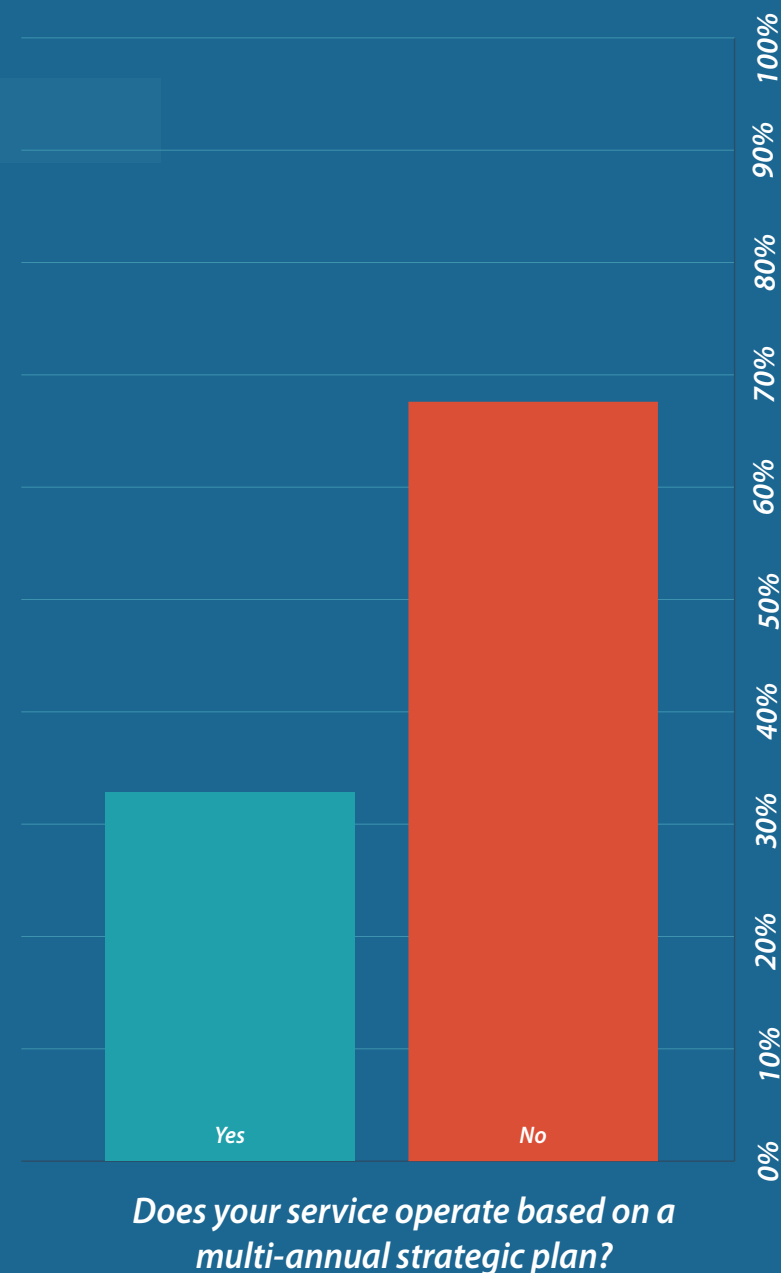
Online and Social Media capacity building as a challenge

This deficit in the field of online and social media is in contrast to the rise of these new media in Sub-Saharan Africa. Having or acquiring a high level of knowledge and skills in online and social media should probably be a key criterion for the development of the teams of national Catholic media and communications offices.

The challenges also concern contractual aspects: three out of nine secretaries say that they work only part-time. This information raises concerns: The size of the task (national coordination) rather needs a full-time commitment from all secretaries.

Regarding the operational aspects, the secretaries affirmed that the organisation of conferences and training seminars were the major tasks to which they dedicated the resources at their disposal, one third of them emphasised that they also invested resources in "press officer (and communication) activities" of the respective Bishops' Conferences.

The variable size of the teams of the secretariats

The focused group discussions that followed the survey were an important opportunity to gather further qualitative information to understand other contextual and organisational aspects, e.g. that the role of the press (and communication) offices of the Bishops' Conferences, played by the secretariats of the commissions, is mainly seen in the management of the Bishops' Conferences' websites or social networks and the maintenance of the relationship with the press, but also by producing content of national scope (TV programmes for example) to be broadcast by national public television stations. Some commissions are planning to set up national radio or television stations for the Bishops' Conferences. These discussions also allowed the gathering of information regarding the size of national secretariats, which employ on average two to five people for their daily activities.

These focused discussions were also important moments of exchange and knowledge of some good practices and a source of inspiration. An inspiring example here is the reform of the Episcopal Commission for the Media of the Cameroonian Episcopal Conference established by Bishop Sosthène Léopold Bayemi Matjei, Bishop of Obala.

The recommendations of the heads of the National Episcopal Media Commissions

The results of the research were presented in a virtual feedback meeting organised in July 2022, where participants expressed three main needs and recommendations.

Promotion of networking and exchange of best practices between national commissions

Promotion of capacity building for leaders and members of national commissions, in organisational development strategies and in project planning and monitoring

Establishment of regional commissions for media and social communication in francophone Africa as part of the regional episcopal associations such as *ACERAC - Association of Episcopal Conferences of the Central African Region*, and *ACEAC - Association of Episcopal Conferences of Central Africa*