"HIV and AIDS is not about 'us' and 'them'. It is about all of us who live and are responsible for a world of isolation, exclusion, poverty, judgment, injustice – and for all of us who work and speak out for community, inclusion, sufficiency, tolerance, justice – and abundant life for all."

Sara Speicher

"Si le nombre important des organes de presse au Bénin devrait être, en principe, un atout pour la lutte contre la stigmatisation et la discrimination, la réalité est toute autre. Beaucoup d'organes et surtout la majorité des organes de presse écrite se contente des comptes rendus en reléguant au second plan des enquêtes et des reportages et pour les organes de l'audiovisuel, la production fait figure de parent pauvre."

Justin Amoussou

"Es urgente en nuestros procesos educativos apostar a una cultura de cambio, cultura de vida, cultura para el desaprender las certezas y abrirnos a la novedad lo cual plantea una lucha permanente contra la exclusión y los prejuicios porque estos son el terreno fértil para la violencia, los extremismos y la muerte de miles de seres humanos"

Blanca Cortés

"The right to information is one of the basic human rights and lack of access to basic knowledge and information about HIV and AIDS is one of the contributing factors to the increase in high risk behaviour. Moreover, easily available information helps in the reduction of stigma and discrimination."

James Rehmat
Why not join the World Association for Christian Communication?

WACC promotes communication for social change. It believes that communication is a basic human right that defines people’s common humanity, strengthens cultures, enables participation, creates community and challenges tyranny and oppression.

Membership of WACC is open to individuals, churches, church-related agencies and media producers, educational institutions, secular communication organisations and everyone sympathetic to WACC’s mission and to its Christian Principles of Communication.

Membership opportunities
Membership of WACC provides opportunities to network with people of similar interests, to learn about and support WACC’s work, and to receive information on global and local issues around communication rights and the democratization of the media.

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Full details can be found on WACC’s web site: http://waccglobal.org/

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IN THE NEXT ISSUE

The hot topic for the 1/2012 issue of Media
Development is freedom of religion and
freedom of belief. What role does the me-
dia play in this challenging debate? How
can objectivity and balance be maintained
when convictions are passionately held?
Writing in the HIV/AIDS media guide (2006) published by the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), Christopher Warren, IFJ President notes, “Journalists have a significant role to play in the HIV and AIDS epidemic by informing the public and holding governments to account.”

Fortunately, many communication-related organizations are rising to the challenge by promoting awareness of HIV and AIDS, educating people about the facts of the epidemic, and calling for responsibility and accountability.

Levels of awareness and knowledge about HIV and AIDS vary widely around the world. Young people are most at risk – those aged 15-24. They are among the most vulnerable, especially when in situations of poverty and abuse.

But beyond lack of information, there is also denial. Many people do not accept that the risk of contracting HIV applies to them. Denial occurs on both personal and societal levels; many believe that AIDS is an issue for “others”.

Equally damaging to efforts to disseminate factual information about the epidemic are the judgemental attitudes of those who believe that people become infected by HIV only through “immoral” behaviour.

The emphasis many place on how the virus was transmitted, rather than on the treatment and support needed by the individual, has strengthened the stigma and discrimination that keep people from seeking information or help.

Such beliefs also promote denial, allowing many in society to distance themselves from the realities of the epidemic and, therefore, consider HIV and AIDS a problem for “them”, not “us”.

Everywhere in the world, women are more at risk from HIV and bear a heavier burden of stigma and discrimination. Because women often lack freedom of choice, they sometimes find it harder to avoid HIV infection.

Many women may be aware of what they should do to protect themselves, but are unable to take precautions because of powerlessness, economic dependence on their partners, or fear of violence if they refuse sex. Rape is also often a reality.

In this context, mass and community and social media can open channels of communication and foster discussion about HIV and AIDS. Tackling the theme in entertainment programmes can also have an enormous impact on societies at risk.

A number of researchers have noted that the Radio Tanzania soap opera “Twende na Wakati” (Let’s Go with the Times), first broadcast in 1993, greatly increased listeners’ willingness to discuss issues related to the virus. In short, the show got people talking.

South Africa’s Sesame Street, known as “Takalani Sesame”, showed that it is never too early to challenge HIV-related stigma. Kami (the Tswana word for “acceptance”) was an energetic golden Muppet with ginger hair, who joined the show in September 2002. Kami also happened to be HIV-positive.

The show included storylines in which Kami had to cope with being ostracized at school because of her status, but overcame the prejudice of her friends and taught them the value of tolerance.

To be effective, messages about AIDS must be both educational and entertaining. These two goals are not mutually exclusive. A number of programmes have served to inform their audiences about the virus while, at the same time, achieving market success.

In India, Doordarshan, the national television service, the National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO) and the BBC World Service Trust joined forces in 2002 to launch the country’s first ever mass media campaign to increase awareness of HIV and AIDS (see Media Development, 1/2010, pp. 37-41).

In Brazil, home of the popular “telenovela” or television soap opera, the TV Globo company placed an HIV-themed serial at the heart of its programme schedule. Malhaçao (Working Out) dealt with issues facing young people in Brazil and captured huge audiences when its teenage protagonist learned that she was HIV-positive.

A move by the Brazilian Government to begin distribution of free antiretroviral drugs was also mirrored in Malhaçao’s storyline.

A key area for media involvement
in AIDS awareness efforts is ensuring that the topic is kept at the top of the news agenda. In recent years, several leading journalists from around the world have found innovative ways to report on the epidemic.

By ensuring that HIV remains “headline news”, media practitioners play a vital role in encouraging world leaders and policy-makers to take the epidemic seriously and provide the resources necessary to fund adequate prevention and treatment programmes.

Last, but certainly not least, what does religion have to say about HIV and AIDS? Do its institutions and churches condemn or support people living with HIV and people living with AIDS? Do they stigmatize or discriminate? Are they failing in their duty to encourage practical and compassionate responses? How do they communicate HIV and AIDS?

On 8 June 2011 the UN General Assembly adopted its Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS: Intensifying our Efforts to Eliminate HIV/AIDS (Document A/65/L.77). Among 104 paragraphs were several related to advancing human rights to reduce stigma, discrimination, and violence related to HIV.

In paragraph 77, Heads of State and Government and representatives of States and Governments committed themselves:

“To intensify national efforts to create enabling legal, social and policy frameworks in each national context in order to eliminate stigma, discrimination and violence related to HIV and promote access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support and non-discriminatory access to education, health care, employment and social services, provide legal protections for people affected by HIV, including inheritance rights and respect for privacy and confidentiality, and promote and protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms with particular attention to all people vulnerable to and affected by HIV.”

How can communicators contribute positively, meaningfully and urgently to these life-affirming tasks? ■

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**Barriers to good reporting on HIV**

Journalists face many barriers to good reporting, from government censorship to prejudice from their own media outlet. The following represents some challenges that media workers come up against.

- Lack of access to accurate information about the epidemic.
- Curbs on freedom of speech and oppressive government policies affecting access to information and freedom to scrutinise policies affecting HIV/AIDS.
- Limited personal understanding about issues, trends and changing dynamics in the epidemic due to lack of training.
- Lack of resources, including money, time and equipment, to travel and investigate HIV stories, leading to an over-emphasis on HIV in urban areas and neglect of rural populations.
- Ethical dilemmas, such as the tension between the need to respect a person’s confidentiality and the need to provide a platform for the voices of people affected by HIV/AIDS.
- Self-censorship, as a response to cultural taboos, such as open discussion of sexual behaviour or analysis of gender roles.
- Competing topics on the news agenda and perceived AIDS fatigue by editors, as well as audiences, resulting in a lack of editorial support.
- The need for new, imaginative approaches to creating AIDS stories and programs appropriate to different media such as community radio.

*Source: Adapted from Panos Institute, Reporting AIDS: An analysis of media environments in Southern Africa. 2005.*
The words we use

Sara Speicher

Many of us have experienced situations where the words we use are charged with meaning beyond their simple dictionary definition. I remember well working on articles related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict where the words chosen, no matter how carefully, would demonstrate to which side of the conflict I was more sympathetic.

Having been writing about HIV and AIDS since I began working with the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance in 2004, I know that my sensitivity has been heightened over the words that are used in speaking about the epidemic and its related issues such as sexuality, poverty, violence and gender equality. “Picky” and “paranoid” might be other descriptions of my sensitivity used by the writers in the Ecumenical Media Team for the international AIDS conferences as I edited their work.

Yet, when it comes to the HIV pandemic, the words we use not only demonstrate our knowledge and sensitivity to the issue, they can either educate and convey respect – or confirm stereotypes and contribute to the stigma experienced by the millions living with or affected by HIV or AIDS.

For the Summit of High Level Religious Leaders on the Response to HIV held in the Netherlands in March 2010, the steering committee reviewed many of the texts for speeches in advance. All along, we were impressed that these leaders, the vast majority of whom have not been directly engaged in the issue, were so willing and committed to do more to overcome stigma and discrimination.

Yet the very words that they were using in these initial texts – which are so common in the way society understands HIV – were shocking and hurtful to those living with HIV. That was certainly not their intention.

This issue highlighted for me the continuing need for those whose profession and calling is communication to have a basic primer of AIDS terminology, and what it might mean when you use one term instead of another.

Avoid using “HIV/AIDS”

Putting the terms together seems to make them synonymous. This might have been more the understanding 30 years ago when it seemed inevitable that a person who contracted the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) would inevitably develop the acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) and die. This is no longer the case. People living with HIV who are able to access treatment continue to live healthy and productive lives for decades.

We need to de-link “HIV leads to AIDS leads to Death” in our minds and in our communications, and use either HIV or AIDS where it is most accurate. For instance, use “people living with HIV” rather than people living with HIV/AIDS (or people living with AIDS, unless they have been clinically diagnosed with AIDS). Use “HIV prevention”, “HIV testing and counseling”, “national AIDS programme”, AIDS treatment, etc.

No one is perfect. The United Nations system itself can’t get rid of the slash mark (see the “2011 Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS”) even though they have the definitive terminology guidelines. However, once you start thinking about which term – HIV or AIDS – is most appropriate in a sentence, you start to educate yourself – and those with whom you are communicating – on a fundamental aspect of the HIV pandemic.

Avoid talking about “victims”

“AIDS victim” is a term I see a lot, referring to people living with HIV, or those who have died from AIDS-related illness. Sometimes it’s used in an attempt to convey care, but to many people living with HIV it seems to imply they are a passive, powerless person and contributes to discrimination and feelings of self-stigma. Especially as people of faith, we need to emphasize hope and strength – and refer to people living with or affected by HIV.

Use “living with”, “affected by” – not “infected”

Sometimes the use of “infected” is just inaccurate, such as “infected by AIDS”. One is infected by the virus; AIDS itself is not infectious. And again, it is more empowering to say, “person living with HIV” than “person infected by HIV”, which helps to
mitigate HIV-related stigma and discrimination by emphasizing life rather than the disease.

**Use PLHIV, not PLWHA**

I hate using acronyms period and personally prefer writing out “people living with HIV”. However, I also know that many PLHIV networks – and UNAIDS – use the acronym to simplify writing. “PLWHA” would be the acronym for “person living with HIV/AIDS”, which we now know (from above) is not correct and that the acronym PLHIV for “person/people living with HIV” is preferred.

**Resist “fighting” AIDS**

This may seem excessive. After all, don’t we want to combat this pandemic? The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria even has it in their name. The trouble is, “fighting” HIV and AIDS has often been heard by those most affected as fighting against them. The “war on AIDS” seems a war on people often already marginalized by poverty, sexual orientation, violence, and more. The preferred term, even if it sounds wimpy, is “AIDS response” or “the response to AIDS”.

**It’s a virus, not a moral issue**

Rev. Dr Christoph Benn, External Relations Director for The Global Fund, was interviewed at the 2004 International AIDS Conference about his former work in medicine and theology, and was asked how faith-based organizations strike a balance between setting a moral example and showing compassion. Benn shared this story:

“When the working group of the World Council of Churches met in Thailand we saw examples of young girls sold by their parents to dealers. They finally ended up in brothels, being infected and then infecting others and when really sick they were sent back to their villages. There is sin at every corner – from their parents who sold them, from the brothel owners who kept them like slaves, from the clients – sometimes sex tourists – who mistreated these women. Then you ask, who is the sinner in all of this? There is a lot of sin in the whole story, but the least one is the girl who is infected” (Ecumenical Media Team, 2004)

HIV, more than any other disease it seems, is one in which so many wish to pass judgment rather than respond with care and support. It shows in how we use our words. We lay “blame” often at the door of the person who is living with HIV – they’re perverts, prostitutes, adulterers, whores, drug addicts – or they’re “innocent victims” which then judges all others when the factors which make people vulnerable to infection are much more complex.

Even beyond the facts that one doesn’t need to “sin” to be infected by the virus, we need to realize that HIV exists because of deep-rooted problems in our society such as poverty, isolation, intolerance, violence, injustice – problems that judgmental attitudes allow to thrive.

Respect the people, share the facts, promote care and support. As participants at the interfaith prayer breakfast held during the UN Review on AIDS said on 10 June 2011, “We must de-stigmatize the language we associate with it. HIV is a virus, not a moral issue” (EAA, 2011).

**Wrestling with jargon**

There’s more. The UNAIDS Terminology Guidelines are 31 pages long. To those of us very immersed in HIV-related advocacy, we run into the danger – as many of us do in closed communication circles – of blurring the line between the politically correct and the jargon, of creating terms that while they brilliantly articulate a complex topic in a few words, are actually only understandable by an “elite” few.

Currently I’m wrestling with the term “vertical transmission” which is now preferred to the term “mother-to-child transmission” because the latter seems to place the blame on the mother without, for instance, the nuance of asking how the mother was infected or recognizing that men have a role in preventing the transmission of HIV to an infant through pregnancy, birth and breastfeeding through their support. “Vertical transmission” of course mystifies more than clarifies – but no one has yet thought of a more understandable phrase.

Among faith groups, many promote the acronym SSDDIM, first coined by Canon Gideon Byamugisha, an inspiring leader in the response to HIV and AIDS. Yet I never can quite remember what the full acronym stands for. Is that Silence, Shame, Denial... what was the “I” for? SSDDIM stands for Stigma, Shame, Denial, Discrimination, Inaction and Mis-
Action. These indeed are the main barriers to ending the epidemic, and so far I have no better term for them.

What I will continue to try to do though – and I hope you will join me – is to be thoughtful in my choice of words, to recognize that especially when it comes to HIV, the words are about people, and about me.

HIV and AIDS is not about “us” and “them”. It is about all of us who live and are responsible for a world of isolation, exclusion, poverty, judgment, injustice – and for all of us who work and speak out for community, inclusion, sufficiency, tolerance, justice – and abundant life for all.

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HIV and AIDS in Ghana and the role of the Christian Council of Ghana

Charles Mawusi

The HIV and AIDS epidemic has become a serious health and development problem in many countries around the world. The Joint United Nations Programme on AIDS (UNAIDS); estimates that 33 million people in the world have HIV and 22 million live in Africa. In other words, 67% of people with HIV live in Africa though the continent is home to just 10% of the world’s population.

The disease is the leading cause of death in Sub-Saharan Africa with approximately 3,600 dying every day from AIDS. More than 21 million persons have already died from the disease since the beginning of the epidemic.

In Ghana today, the HIV and AIDS epidemic is a very serious problem. Already in 2000, about 350,000 Ghanaians were infected with HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. This included 330,000 adults and 20,000 children. In addition, more than 150,000 Ghanaians have died from AIDS since the early 1980s.

In Ghana, the Ministry of Health operates a sentinel surveillance system that provides data for estimating the extent of HIV infection. Each of the ten regions of Ghana has designated two hospitals or health centres to be sentinel surveillance sites. At these selected sites, health workers take blood samples from pregnant women as part of their standard antenatal care. These blood samples are then tested
anonymously for HIV infection.

The HIV Sentinel Surveillance (HSS) has for 18 years provided strategic data on the trend of HIV infection in Ghana. The HSS report provides the primary data for estimation and projection of HIV and AIDS impact in the general population. The report also serves as a reference document for design, implementation and monitoring of programmes within the national response.

Trends in prevalence rate
The national prevalence rate which increased in 2009 to 2.9% after declining for two consecutive years has decreased in 2010 to 2.0%. Before 2004 there had been a steady increase from 2.3% in 2000 to 3.6% in 2003. This year’s drop represents the beginning of a third consecutive declining trend within the period 2000 to 2010.

The estimated number of Persons Living With HIV in Ghana as at 2009 was 267,069, made up of 154,612 females and 112,457 males giving a female: male ratio 1:1.4. In the same year, there were 25,666 children living with HIV and an estimated 3,354 children were newly infected. The annual AIDS deaths were 20,313.

In 2006, the government of Ghana in collaboration with the World Bank, UNAIDS and other development partners came out with the National Strategic Framework to tackle the HIV and AIDS pandemic. The National Strategic Framework (NSF) 2006-10 provided the context for implementing HIV related activities through key intervention areas including research, surveillance, monitoring and evaluation.

In December 2010, the Government of Ghana in collaboration with development partners launched a five year plan to replace the NSF which expired in December 2010. The National HIV and AIDS Strategic Plan 2011-15 provides broad strategies for the implementation of the national response to HIV. The new Plan has been guided by the premise that HIV is a developmental issue and a public health challenge and must be dealt with as such.

The overall focus of this strategy is to reduce by half the HIV infections in the next five years with a virtual elimination of mother to child transmission of HIV as well as sustaining and scaling up the proportion of People Living With HIV who are on treatment. The plan also seeks to leverage treatment as a prevention strategy.

The National AIDS/STI Control Programme of the Ghana Health Service (GHS) provides prevention, treatment, care and support services as well as strategic information for action. As at December 2010, 150 antiretroviral therapy sites had been established by the GHS.

HIV & AIDS stigma and discrimination in Ghana
Widespread stigma and discrimination toward Persons Living With HIV in the general population continue adversely to affect uptake of services including HTC, adherence to antiretroviral therapy and access to supportive services. Stigma and discrimination associated with HIV and AIDS in Ghana goes beyond Persons Living With HIV; it affects their families including caregivers, health workers providing HIV services and Most At-Risk Populations (MARPS). Within families, the majority of caregivers for Persons Living With HIV are women who often face stigma and discrimination as they carry out their responsibilities.

AIDS-related stigma has had a profound effect on the epidemic’s course. The Ghana AIDS Commission and the National AIDS Control Programme has on several occasions cited fear of stigma and discrimination as the main reason why people are reluctant to be tested, to disclose HIV status or to take antiretroviral drugs.

These factors all contribute to the expansion of the epidemic (as a reluctance to determine HIV status or to discuss or practice safe sex means that people are more likely to infect others) and a higher number of AIDS-related deaths. An unwillingness to take an HIV test means that more people are diagnosed late, when the virus has already progressed to AIDS, making treatment less effective and causing early death.

Reduction of stigma, therefore, is an important HIV prevention and control activity, but unfortunately, Ghana has no specific laws that protect the rights of Persons Living With HIV. The stigma surrounding issues most at risk populations results from inadequate support from policy makers and the absence of protective legislation and policies. Stigma and discrimination interventions are therefore needed to target individuals, communities, institutions and must seek to establish an enabling environment that addresses stigma effectively. These
interventions must also address key drivers of HIV related stigma such as lack of knowledge, fear and negative cultural norms and practices.

Fighting stigma and discrimination

Though there are no specific laws that protect the rights of Persons Living With HIV in Ghana, there are several laws that address general discrimination and protect the rights of all Ghanaians including Persons Living With HIV. These include the 1992 Republican Constitution, the Labour Act, criminal Code and Social Security Act 1991(PNDCL 247).

Over the past few years, various mechanisms have been put in place to ensure that these laws are implemented including the Commission for Human Rights and Administrative Justice, the National Labour Commission, the Domestic Violence and Victims Support Unit of the Ghana Police Service and the Judiciary have all been trained to have a better understanding of HIV and AIDS so as to better apply the laws as they relate to HIV and AIDS.

Civil Society Organizations are playing important roles in ensuring human rights of Persons Living With HIV are not violated. These include International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA), Centre for Democratic Development (CDD), Human Rights and Advocacy Centre (HRAC) and the Christian Council of Ghana (CCG)

The Christian Council of Ghana is one of the key faith-based organizations that have been working with its numerous members across the country to address the issue of stigma and discrimination. Over the past six years the CCG has actively embarked on community outreach and policy advocacy programmes aimed at guaranteeing the rights and the well being of Persons Living With HIV.

The CCG and the World Association for Christian Communication (WACC)

The partnership between the Christian Council of Ghana and the World Association for Christian Communication began in the early 1980s and the relationship between the two Christian organizations goes from strength to strength.

The HIV and AIDS anti-stigma project began when two staff members of WACC visited the CCG and some project sites in August 2006. Having recognized and discussed the need to tackle stigma and discrimination related issues, the partners identified three districts for a project: Lower Manya Krobo in the Eastern Region, Ga West and Dangme West in the Greater Accra Region.

In July 2007, the project proposal was submitted to the Department for International Development (DFID) in the United Kingdom which received approval after certain revisions. The project unfolded well by targeting and building the capacity of key stakeholders and at the same time relying on these community key stakeholders to embark on the anti-stigma campaigns. Youth, health workers, teachers, media practitioners, traditional and religious leaders all carried out the anti stigma campaign through face to face talks, focus group discussions as well as drama to put their messages across to their respective audiences.

The three year project has significantly changed the perceptions and attitudes of people, especially community members, health workers, religious leaders and many others towards Persons Living With HIV within the project districts. Many people who had received skills training from the project testified about how the programme had enabled them to change their behavior towards Persons Living With HIV.

According to Mr. Samuel Nannor, a school teacher and a key activist of the anti-stigma campaign, drama was important. “The use of drama was very effective because it enabled us to draws attention better and had also helped us to entertain as we revealed the realities of the HIV and AIDS disease to our audience,” he stated.

Mr. Samuel Nannor also disclosed that he had personally derived self satisfaction from the Stigma Reduction project especially the strategies adopted. “In the past many people have gone for funding to embark on various HIV and AIDS project but we don’t see much results and I have personally waited for an opportunity like this to be part of community awareness creation and I am happy this project had offered me the opportunity to do so”, he said.

Religious leaders are now having a change of mind and are now very reflective in their sermons which reveal more acceptance than blame, shame and condemnation of Persons Living With HIV. The General Secretary of the Lower Manya District Council of Churches, Rev. Sylvanus Frederick Kwakye, for his part, admitted that most church leaders were ignorant about the facts of the disease
and, therefore, have taken many wrong decisions in the past. He said, “We were polluted from the beginning and we were also transferring this pollution to the congregations until the WACC project came along.”

Rev. Kwakye also indicated that members of the local council of churches are taking steps to change attitudes and beliefs. “Now skills from the project are helping us to correct our past mistakes and we are very grateful for the project”, he said.

Persons Living With HIV now have confidence in themselves and are living normal lives without fear, rejection or stigmatization. For example, Madam Mary Tetteh who had lived with extreme discrimination and stigmatization for more than seven years is happy that stigma and discrimination among her church members have significantly reduced due to increased awareness and engagement of church and opinion leaders in the Stigma Reduction Campaign. “Education and awareness has not come early, the church and many families have rejected their PLWHs. But I am very grateful that the CCG Programme came to change a lot of people’s attitudes towards us and some of us feel more comfortable and acceptable now than before”, she disclosed in an interview.

Equally encouraging is the fact that the 48 year old mother of two children also strongly believes that her church leaders would not have discriminated against her if they had received the same training from the CCG-WACC programme some years ago. “Personally, I believe if we have a similar case in our church today, they will handle it better because education has come”, she emphasized.

Traditional authorities on their part have recognized the need to join the anti-stigma campaign. Nii Afuaah VII, the chief of Afuaman, a farming community within the Ga West District of the Greater Accra Region, for example, has joined the anti-stigma and discrimination campaign. “With my new knowledge of the disease now, I use every opportunity at every gathering in my community to educate my people about HIV and AIDS”, he emphasized.

The traditional ruler, who was full of praise for the approach and strategies adopted by the project, also testified that the project has personally changed his mind and attitude towards Persons Living With HIV and AIDS. “The message has gone down well with me and I’m very grateful that many people inclu-
La stigmatisation et la discrimination, quelle riposte au Togo?

ALLEY Atsoutsè Jean-Pierre

La stigmatisation et la discrimination demeurent toujours aujourd’hui un obstacle majeur dans la lutte contre le VIH et le Sida. Au Togo, le phénomène est aussi endémique qu’il l’est partout ailleurs. Mais, paradoxalement, il semble plus prononcé dans les Eglises et les milieux religieux qui, de part leur vocation, sont sensés mieux le combattre.

Ce paradoxe s’explique par un certain nombre de pesanteurs dont le manque d’informations sur l’infection, l’ignorance, les fausses idées et les fausses représentations, notamment celles de péché, de punition divine, de condamnation etc., qui sont associées à l’infection. Au regard de la situation, la communication est apparu comme voie royale pour une riposte efficace.

Cette logique de communication, le Groupe Chrétien Contre le Sida au Togo (GCCST) l’a très bien compris et lui a donné une place de choix dans son agenda. En effet, la communication est l’un des axes prioritaires du plan stratégique 2009-2012 de l’organisation, lequel plan lui-même est en cohérence avec le Plan Stratégique National en cours d’évaluation (2005-2010).

Mais bien avant d’aller à l’état des lieux de la stigmatisation et la discrimination ainsi qu’à la découverte des actions du GCCST en la matière et par le biais de la communication, découvrons un peu l’organisation.

Le GCCST est une ONG de développement qui est engagée dans la promotion et la protection des droits humains en général et en particulier les droits des personnes en matière de lutte contre le VIH et le Sida. L’organisation travail selon une approche chrétienne. Elle est au Togo et a son siège à Lomé. Du point de vue historique, l’ONG est née de l’initiative d’un groupe d’amis chrétiens habitants le même quartier « Adidogomé » à Lomé au Togo. Au départ ils rendaient des visites aux malades du quartier tous les dimanches après les cultes en vue de leur apporter assistance morale et matérielles.


Quel est l’état de lieux de la stigmatisation et la discrimination?

La situation n’est pas reluisante, comme nous avons eu à le dire plus haut. En effet, les faits de stigmatisation, de discrimination, de rejet, de violation des droits à la vie sociale et communautaire etc., sont toujours aussi nombreux. Car, mise à part la prise en charge globale, très peu d’ONG et associations interviennent dans le domaine de la communication pour la défense et la promotion des droits humains.

Par ailleurs, au niveau des Eglises et communautés religieuses, il n’y a pas bien souvent une bonne connaissance des questions liées au VIH et au sida, notamment les informations actualisées sur le mode d’infection, les moyens de préventions efficaces, la disponibilité des soins et traitements, les exigences de vie sociale et communautaire en la matière. De façon spécifique et cruciale, on note au sein de cette communauté chrétienne, malheureusement, de graves problèmes de discrimination, de stigmatisation, de rejet, de mise en quarantaine, d’inégalités genre, mais aussi de manque de prévention et d’accès aux soins et traitements.

De ce fait il y a de plus en plus d’infections dans l’ombre avec des décès dans des conditions où le respect de la dignité humaine n’est pas toujours présent. En plus il y a une perception et une représentation, de péchés, de punition divine, de condamnation, et donc de jugement, de culpabilisation sous jacent qui pèse sur les personnes concernées directement par l’infection. Déficit d’information ? De formation ? Désinformations ? Insuf-
Fisances de prise en compte du problème par les pasteurs et les prêtres dans les prêches et homélies ? Toutes ces questions se posent et nous interpellent.

Enfin au niveau des personnes infectées et affectées elles mêmes, le problème se pose en terme de manque d’information, de formation, de mobilisation et de renforcement de capacités à agir pour modifier la donne. De plus, si la problématique concerne à la fois les hommes et les femmes, elle affecte plus les femmes et par elles les enfants. Car elles sont souvent les moins armées pour se protéger et se défendre, au regard des pesanteurs sociales et culturelles, du manque d’information, d’instruction, des moyens économiques et financiers. Les femmes sont donc presque toujours les plus touchées par le phénomène de stigmatisation et de discrimination et malheureusement à travers elles un nombre très important d’enfants sont aussi concernés.

Quelle est l’action du GCCST ?
Au regard de la situation, l’action du GCCST s’articule autour de la formation ou renforcement de capacités, la communication au sein des Eglises et au niveau du monde chrétien, les émissions radiophoniques ou télévisuelles et la prise en charge.

La stratégie est basée sur la communication et l’utilisation des outils de communications et vise le renforcement de capacités à travers la pratique, en amenant à « faire faire » pour « faire prendre conscience » en vue du changement de comportement.

A titre d’exemple, en 2010 grâce au soutien financier de la World Association for Christian Communication (WACC), le GCCST a pu former 56 personnes dont : 30 leaders et responsables religieux, 12 responsables de groupes de jeunes, 2 Députés à l’Assemblée Nationale togolaise, 12 responsables d’ONG et associations de lutte contre le sida, en compétences de communication et l’utilisation des
outils de communication pour réduire la stigmatisation, la discrimination, la négation et les inégalités genre en matière de VIH et sida.

Après la formation, les différents bénéficiaires ont été accompagnés et ont pu implémenter les apprentissages à travers la réalisation pratique par eux-mêmes de 5 émissions radiophoniques et/ou télévisuelles, la production et la distribution de 1000 prospectus, 200 affiches d’information et 1000 gadgets (T-shirts, casquettes, mouchoirs). L’évaluation finale du projet a indiqué que les résultats sont largement au-delà des prévisions :

» Il (le projet) a permis de toucher directement et indirectement, à travers ses activités notamment la formation, les émissions radiophoniques et télévisuelles, les sensibilisations, les clubs anti-VIH, les homélies et prêches, la projection de films, au moins 1/20 de la population de Lomé et ses environs (estimée à plus de 2 000 000 habitants), soit 100 000 personnes contre 30 000 prévus » (Rapport final projet WACC/GCCST, 2010)

En effet comme l’indique le rapport final, au terme de la formation, 10 cellules anti-VIH ont été formées aux niveaux de 10 paroisses de 10 Églises par les bénéficiaires des formations. Avec l’appui des responsables et leaders religieux, ces cellules sont devenues de véritables plates-formes de « communication » (formation et informations) sur le VIH et le sida en général et en particulier sur la stigmatisation et la discrimination.

Le Révérend pasteur, KPOGO Jacques, un membre actif et dynamique de la cellule anti-VIH dans son Église témoigne dans un entretien au mois de juin 2011 :

» Chaque deuxième mercredi du mois, à partir de 18 heures, il est organisée l’enseignement sur l’approche biblique de la problématique du VIH en général et en particulier celle de la stigmatisation et la discrimination. C’est vraiment intéressant et prometteur. De plus en plus de fidèles sortent de l’ombre, car ils comprennent davantage et surtout se sentent acceptés. Pour cette année 2011, j’ai déjà référé deux fidèles au GCCST pour la prise en charge... »

Enfin, comme l’indique le témoignage du Révérend Pasteur KPOGO Jacques, à la suite des informations, des sensibilisations et des enseignements au niveau des Églises ou ailleurs, lorsqu’une personne infectée se manifeste, il est impératif de lui offrir une prise en charge médicale, psychologique, social et nutritionnelle de qualité pour ainsi encourager les uns et les autres en vue de « joindre le geste à la parole ». Car sinon, cela sera contre productif et détruirait la stratégie de communication.

Dans la mesure du possible, le GCCST assure au niveau de son centre de prise en charge l’accompagnement des personnes séropositives identifiées. Sur la demande de celles-ci ou lorsque les conditions ne le permettent pas, elles sont référées vers d’autres organisations de prise en charge.

En somme la stigmatisation et la discrimination restent toujours des boulées importantes qui pèsent négativement dans la riposte contre le VIH et le sida au Togo. Beaucoup de choses sont faits, mais le chemin est encore long. Au regard de la situation, la communication reste une voie royale pour une réponse efficace et durable.

La WACC a subventionné ce projet sous son programme « VIH et SIDA, communication et stigmatisation » en association avec le Service des Églises Évangéliques en Allemagne pour le Développement (EED) – une institution des églises protestantes en Allemagne.

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Le rôle des médias et de la communication au Bénin

Justin AMOUSSOU

Le Bénin fait partie des pays à épidémie généralisée de faible prévalence. Mais il n’est pas à l’abri d’une explosion de l’épidémie si les mesures rigoureuses de prévention telles que l’information et la communication ne s’intensifient pas rapidement. Mieux, à l’instar d’autres pays africains, le pays dispose depuis 2006, d’un instrument juridique qui en principe, doit faciliter les interventions de lutte contre le Sida, et offrir la protection dans l’approche genre aux groupes les plus vulnérables tout en réprimant la stigmatisation et la discrimination. Il s’agit, en effet, de la promulgation de la loi N°2005-31 du 05 avril 2006 portant prévention prise en charge et contrôle du VIH/Sida en République du Bénin. Le succès dans le vote et la promulgation de cette fameuse loi a-t-il vraiment comblé les attentes liées au traitement des informations sur le VIH/Sida?


Conformément aux dispositions des articles 24, 142 et 143 de la Constitution, la HAAC a pour mission de garantir et d’assurer la liberté et la protection de la presse ainsi que de tous les moyens de communication de masse dans le respect de la loi ; de veiller au respect de la déontologie en matière d’information et l’accès équitable des partis politiques, des associations et des citoyens aux moyens officiels d’information et de communication ; de garantir l’utilisation équitable et appropriée des organismes publics de presse et de communication audiovisuelle par les institutions de la République, chacune en fonction de ses missions constitutionnelles et d’assurer le cas échéant les arbitrages nécessaires.

A tout cela s’ajoute le Code de déontologie de la presse béninoise adopté par les acteurs des médias le 24 septembre 1999. Ainsi, selon la décision N°11-003 de la HACC en date du 19 janvier 2011, les organes de presse écrite se présentent comme suit: 98 quotidiens, 10 bihebdomadaires, 30 hebdomadaires, 7 bimensuels et 11 mensuels. Par contre, on dénombre 73 radios et 6 chaînes de télévisions dont 5 privées, soit 235 organes de presse sans compter les télévisions captées par système MMDS. Ces chiffres ne prennent pas en compte les nombreux titres parus à l’occasion des élections.

En général, les média peuvent jouer un rôle essentiel dans la création d’un environnement habilitant et de soutien dans lequel on peut aborder des questions jugées tabou. Les média peuvent créer une plus grande conscience publique du VIH/Sida. Le rôle des média est absolument essentiel si on veut s’attaquer au VIH/Sida de façon efficace. Ceci a été parfaitement saisi par l’ancien Secrétaire général de l’ONU, M. Kofi Annan, qui affirme :

« Quand on se bat contre une urgence grandissante et désastreuse, on doit utiliser tous les outils dont on dispose ... Les média de la radio et de la télévision ont une influence et une portée énormes, en particulier auprès des jeunes, qui représentent le futur et sont essentiels à toute lutte efficace contre le VIH et le SIDA. Nous
devons donc chercher à engager ces puissants organismes comme partenaires dans la lutte pour arrêter le VIH et le SIDA par la prise de conscience, la prévention et l'éducation.


Ainsi, des animateurs et directeurs de radios ont été formés pour réaliser des émissions interactives, des magazines et des documentaires au profit des populations couvertes. Comme acquis enregistrés grâce aux actions des médias et de la communication dans la mise en œuvre du cadre stratégique national de lutte contre le VIH/SIDA/IST 2001-2005, il y a l’amélioration des connaissances des jeunes de moins de 25 ans : 85% en 2005 contre 48% en 2002 ; 74% sont intéressés de connaître leur statut sérologique ; l’implication plus accrue des médias à travers le partenariat de plusieurs acteurs avec les médias et la création de centre multimédia animé par les jeunes pour les jeunes; l’élaboration de plusieurs documents éducatifs spécifiques sur le VIH/SIDA/IST au niveau du système éducatif formel; et l’utilisation des vedettes et des chanteurs traditionnels pour véhiculer les messages à travers les sketches, les théâtres, les contes et la musique.

En outre il y a le renforcement de l’implication des communautés à travers la formation d’une masse critique de pairs éducateurs et de relais communautaires dans tout le pays par tous les projets et programmes; le témoignage des PVVIH à visage découvert pour passer des messages au sein des communautés à travers des causeries; les causeries intitulées «5 minutes pour sauver la vie» sur le VIH/SIDA/IST avant le démarrage effectif des cours dans certains établissements secondaires; la mise en œuvre de plans d’actions de lutte contre le SIDA par des groupes religieux de tous ordres (chrétiens, musulmans, couvents et dignitaires); la mise en place du matériel audio visuel pour des interventions spécifiques sur le VIH/SIDA/IST en direction des femmes au niveau des centres de promotion sociale; la mise en place des centres d’écoute et de conseil sur le VIH/SIDA au niveau de certains centres de jeunes et de loisirs; l’installation des clubs Anti-SIDA animés par les élèves, enseignants et parents d’élèves; l’existence d’un programme de marketing social du préservatif masculin.

La sensibilisation et le renforcement remplissent leur rôle

Le renforcement de la communication par les médias et les canaux traditionnels a aussi permis de sensibiliser les employeurs et les travailleurs au sein des Ministères/Institutions/ Préfectures/collectivités locales et dans les plus grandes entreprises privées du Bénin au point de vue des effectifs; renforcer les capacités des mandants tripartites (pouvoirs publics, employeurs et travailleurs) à mettre en œuvre la Déclaration Nationale Tripartite de Lutte contre le VIH/SIDA en milieu de Travail; organiser des ateliers pour élaborer des stratégies sectorielles en Communication pour le Changement de Comportement (CCC).

Mieux, le Bénin dispose d’un Cadre national de communication sur le sida couvrant la période 2009-2011. Il a été développé autour de cinq axes stratégiques que sont: le renforcement de la Communication pour le Changement de Comportement (CCC) ; le plaidoyer pour une législation renforcée du contrôle de la pandémie du VIH/sida par des services et produits accessibles pour la sécurisation des financements ; l’appropriation de la problématique du VIH/SIDA et ses impacts sur le développement du pays, le marketing social des services et Produits de lutte contre le Sida au Bénin; la gestion/coordination et Suivi - Evaluation harmonisées et décentralisés ; l’institutionnalisation de la surveillance épidémiologique (SE) et de la recherche en CCC.

La collaboration avec la radio nationale et les radios de proximité s’est poursuivie en 2008 et 2009. Le CNLS, à travers le PNLS a établi un partenariat avec 46 radios de proximité dont 11 commerciales et 35 communautaires. L’objectif de ce partenariat est de réaliser et diffuser des émissions radiophoniques sur le VIH/SIDA avant le démarrage effectif des cours dans certains établissements secondaires; la mise en œuvre de plans d’actions de lutte contre le SIDA par des groupes religieux de tous ordres (chrétiens, musulmans, couvents et dignitaires); la mise en place du matériel audio visuel pour des interventions spécifiques sur le VIH/SIDA/IST en direction des
siste à impliquer les leaders d’opinion (notables, religieux, chefs de village, élus locaux) qui bénéficient de séances de plaidoyer pour accompagner la mise en œuvre des activités, ce qui permet d’en améliorer l’efficacité.

Par ailleurs, des films documentaires audiovisuels ont été diffusés sur les chaînes de télévision publiques et privées. Des panneaux géants ont été mis en place sur le littoral ciblant la population générale et les populations mobiles. En 2009, 12 radios de proximité en partenariat avec le Programme Multisectoriel de Lutte contre la Sida 2 ont réalisé environ 288 émissions aussi bien en français qu’en langues nationales.

Le projet Amour et Vie de PSI/ONG a organisé des émissions radiophoniques interactives sur 13 radios privées ou communautaires pour les jeunes et par les jeunes. Il en est de même pour le magazine Amour et Vie, un design jeune qui répond aux besoins en information des jeunes en matière de santé sexuelle. Pour la période considérée (2008 et 2009), 219 comités sont installés dans les collèges, 194 émissions radio ont été réalisées et 180.000 exemplaires de magazines ont été distribués.

La faiblesse de la presse écrite et des émissions

Mais si le nombre important des organes de presse au Bénin devrait être, en principe, un atout pour la lutte contre la stigmatisation et la discrimination, la réalité est toute autre. Beaucoup d’organes et surtout la majorité des organes de presse écrite se contente des comptes rendus en reléguant au second plan des enquêtes et des reportages et pour les organes de l’audiovisuel, la production fait figure de parent pauvre.

Dès lors, pour promouvoir des publications et des émissions à des fins bénéfiques, il urge d’organiser des campagnes d’information du public et des débats communautaires visant à promouvoir la tolérance, la compassion et la compréhension, et à évacuer la crainte, la stigmatisation et la discrimination; encourager davantage la participation des personnes vivant avec le VIH/SIDA aux campagnes d’information du public ainsi qu’à la formulation des programmes et politiques relatifs au VIH et surtout amener les médias à parler du VIH/SIDA d’une façon responsable et non discriminatoire.

Mais il reste à préciser que la radio reste l’un des moyens de diffusion les plus populaires pour transmettre de l’information et mobiler des populations nombreuses dans toutes les parties de la société. La radio est capable de motiver ses auditeurs en faisant valoir des traditions orales musicales et de mieux stimuler l’imagination que la vidéo ou la télévision. Les émissions radiophoniques ne coûtent pas cher et se produisent rapidement et facilement et les récepteurs de radio sont largement disponibles, bon marché et portables, ce qui les rend commodes pour les auditeurs.

La radio peut atteindre des populations isolées par la langue, la géographie, les conflits, l’analphabétisme et la pauvreté. Elle peut aussi atteindre les personnes qui ne se rendent jamais dans des dispensaires en raison du coût, de la distance ou de l’embarras : elle peut communiquer, à un public élargi, les expériences acquises par le personnel médical présent sur le terrain. La radio est susceptible de créer une demande en services. Par exemple, si un auditeur pense être atteint d’une maladie sexuellement transmissible, il pourra se rendre dans un centre de santé afin d’y recevoir un traitement en toute confidentialité.

Dans de nombreuses parties du monde et particulièrement au Bénin, le Sida continue à être l’objet de graves erreurs d’appréciation, d’une grande ignorance et de la crainte. Il y a donc un besoin urgent et constant de présenter les réalités du Sida d’une manière claire et inéquivoque afin de réduire les craintes, la stigmatisation et la discrimination qui entourent cette maladie et de fournir des conseils pratiques sur les moyens de minimiser le risque d’en être atteint et de soigner et réconforter les sidéens. Les médias et la communication doivent jouer un rôle vital dans ce dessein d’éducation et de protection de la vie humaine.

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Entre el desafío y la esperanza
Blanca Cortés

Discernir el aporte de los medios de comunicación en la ineludible tarea de reducir la estigma y la discriminación contra el VIH y SIDA desde la realidad Nicaragüense es un desafío y una esperanza.

Somos un país con 5 millones de habitantes de los cuales el 50% es población joven menor de 18 años. Un 51% de esa población son mujeres. Es decir es un país con rostro de mujer joven. Otro elemento a destacar en el contexto nicaragüense es el ser una sociedad altamente religiosa. Y como en el resto de América Latina, Nicaragua se encuentra ante el fenómeno del surgimiento de nuevas denominaciones religiosas de las cuales emergen nuevas formas de practicar la religiosidad. La sociedad cada día se abre a nuevas formas de concebir la fe en búsqueda de sentido a su realidad.

La pandemia del VIH/Sida en nuestro contexto
Hasta julio 2010 los casos acumulados de VIH en Nicaragua eran de 5,124 casos.1 De los cuales 3,602 eran personas con VIH, 610 casos de Sida y 861 fallecidos por el VIH Sida. La relación hombre-mujer continúa acercándose pasando de 2.2 hombres por mujer en el 2008 a 1.5 en el primer semestre del 2010, lo cual evidencia una constante feminización de la epidemia. La Epidemia continúa concentrada en los grupos de 15 a 39 años, representando el 78% de casos de VIH.

Por otro lado, es preocupante observar que se están incrementando los casos de VIH en niñas y adolescentes en las edades menores a 19 años. Es muy preocupante esta tendencia pues con ello se puede proyectar un posible incremento en la transmisión vertical, incrementando así la vulnerabilidad de niñas, niños y adolescentes.

Factores que agudizan el problema
Las investigaciones han demostrado la relación entre la epidemia del VIH y factores socioculturales como la cultura adultista, sexista y patriarcal reflejados en problemas de comunicación a nivel familiar y altos índices de violencia de género.

La deficiente educación integral sobre la sexualidad desde la familia, la escuela y la iglesia, constituye un factor clave para explicar el incremento del VIH en población adolescente y joven. Padres, maestros y líderes religiosos juegan un papel determinante con relación a la formación y comportamiento sexual de adolescentes y jóvenes para la prevención del VIH Sida.

Desde el ámbito religioso, el predominio de la lectura que se ha hecho de la Biblia desde la óptica del varón ha incidido en la construcción de las desigualdades de género. A las mujeres les ha correspondido ser invisibilizadas, menospreciadas y silenciadas, pasando siempre a un plano secundario, de inferioridad o de sumisión al varón.2 Esta afirmación es evidente en el campo de la salud sexual y reproductiva de las mujeres donde quedan con poco o ningún control sobre su sexualidad.

Existe un número creciente de mujeres casadas que se están infectando con el VIH porque sus maridos tienen relaciones sexuales fuera de su casa. En tales circunstancias, los mensajes tradicionales de prevención carecen de significado, ya que el uso de método seguro es menos probable donde el nivel de autonomía de las mujeres es muy débil. Las cifras de mujeres amas de casa que han sido infectadas sigue en aumento.

Las mujeres portadoras del VIH cargan el peso del estigma, culpabilización y silencio se aplica plenamente en una sociedad permisiva con las prácticas machistas en la sexualidad, el uso del poder y la violencia y en las tomas de decisiones en todos los ámbitos incluyendo en el campo de la salud sexual y reproductiva.

El Centro Intereclesial de Estudios Teológicos y Sociales (CIEETS) durante el periodo de 2008 - 2011 inició un proyecto educativo de concientización con líderes de iglesias. El objetivo de esta iniciativa “Iglesia: Compromiso y Solidaridad ante el VIH Sida”3 ha sido crear un espacio formativo-educativo para contribuir al desarrollo de una teología que ponga como centro de su reflexión la vida humana con toda su problemática. Una reflexión teológica que ayude a la comprensión de la misión de la iglesia dentro de la sociedad en el contexto.
de la Epidemia del VIH Sida y a la concretización de la práctica de fe en el amor por la vida.

El desafío en el que se inscribió esta propuesta está planteado en el hecho que la epidemia del VIH plantea a la Iglesia evangélica nicaragüense opciones teológicas claras, en lo concerniente a temas fundamentales como la misericordia, la dignidad, la Gracia que ahora tienen que ser analizados a la luz de esta epidemia. El papel de la Iglesia como cuerpo de Cristo es un aspecto que urge ser revisado y actualizado “si una parte del cuerpo sufre, todos sufren. (1 Cor. 12:26) implica que el dolor es compartido y esto no da lugar al temor, al estigma ni a la discriminación.

El flagelo del estigma y la discriminación: La situación de marginalidad y de fragilidad de quienes viven con el VIH, nos coloca en un discernimiento serio y profundo sobre el significado del mensaje de Dios en el evangelio, que se traduce como mensaje del verdadero amor al prójimo en un contexto de vulnerabilidad humana.

Durante el desarrollo de talleres con pastores, pastoras nos percatamos cómo este paradigma de ser prójimos de quienes sufren por ser VIH positivo queda cuestionado al mantener prácticas discriminatorias hacia tales personas. La estigmatización y la consecuente discriminación representan para todo ser humano la ruptura en las relaciones con sus hermanos. Del testimonio de los y las participantes se percibió que tanto laicos como pastores al ser confrontados con la experiencia personal de personas portadoras de SIDA y escucharles testimonios de cómo fueron excluidos de círculos cristianos, fue de mucho impacto para sus vidas.

Después de cada actividad había un tiempo para reaccionar y compartir sus experiencias, las cuales en su mayoría fueron expresiones tales como: “nunca antes habíamos sentido con tanta profundidad el dolor del rechazo;” y “esta experiencia nos ha hecho cambiar de mentalidad, ahora hemos aprendido como ayudar a prevenir el VIH Sida y amar a quienes ya conviven con el SIDA.”

Dificultades en los procesos educativos

La influencia del fundamentalismo religioso en relación a la educación pública y la educación sexual son barreras que dificultan la comprensión del problema. En Nicaragua líderes religiosos de las diferentes expresiones de fe obstaculizan cualquier iniciativa en educación sexual tergiversando el contenido y aduciendo que el acceso de la juventud a esta información incrementaría el VIH SIDA y el libertinaje. Por ello la labor de sensibilización con pastores toma su tiempo, pues se trata de desaprender esquemas instalados en el imaginario colectivo desde hace siglos.

Al interior de las iglesias cristianas la sexualidad es considerada un tabú fundamentado por una lectura tradicional de la Biblia. Se hacen esfuerzos por separar lo espiritual de lo corporal asumiendo en el cuerpo un espacio de vulnerabilidad, pecado, contaminación, impureza. De ahí que contraer el sida ha sido asociado a pecado, castigo y juicio de Dios, culpa, condena.

Desde los espacios de comunicación social, se percibe un desmedido énfasis en cubrir noticias ligadas a las figuras de alto perfil, como políticos, funcionarios, científicos, estrellas del espectáculo y del deporte y en ciertos eventos de impacto internacional, y muy poco interés en los acontecimientos cotidianos y en las acciones de vida que realizan día a día las organizaciones civiles. Se muestran más interés en reportar cifras que en dar espacio a las historias personales que hay detrás de esos números. Esta realidad no permite visibilizar la realidad en toda su dimensión y por ende inhibe y desmoviliza acciones encaminadas a la reducción del estigma y la discriminación.

Retos para la iglesia y las instituciones educativas

Actuar de manera proactiva y unida es un reto planeado a la iglesia, apoyando desde las comunidades de fe los diversos esfuerzos que se realizan tanto en la prevención como en el diseño de una pastoral de acompañamiento y ternura coadyuvando a reducir el estigma.

Profundizar los esfuerzos educativos al interior de la iglesia acerca de la sexualidad como don de Dios. Promover los espacios de reflexión sería donde el tema de la sexualidad salga del silencio y la censura para dar paso al reconocimiento y la afirmación de los cuerpos como espacios de gozo, placer de gratitud y respeto.

Desde las iglesias tenemos que tener en cuenta e incorporar urgentemente el eje de género y la defensa de derechos de las mujeres. Trabajar en la promoción de una teología que afirme la ciudadanía de las mujeres la cual debe iniciar en sus propios cuerpos y promover el rol de las mujeres como su-
jetas y merecedoras de la Gracia de Dios igual que los hombres.

Reconsiderar nuestra actitud ante quienes padecen el SIDA y restituirles su valor. Conscientes de que todos los seres humanos somos creados a imagen de Dios es imperativo pasar del rechazo a la aceptación y al apoyo incondicional hacia las personas afectadas por el SIDA. Abandonar la compasión estéril siendo promotores de la restitución de sus derechos como personas integrales.

Es necesario pasar de la comprensión del VIH como una retribución o castigo a verlo como un problema humano al cual hay que dar respuestas concretas de solidaridad y de respeto a la dignidad humana.

Impulsar una eclesiología del cuidado. Una iglesia-comunidad sanadora y acogedora. Esta dimensión no solo debe plantearse hacia las personas que llegan a ella siendo portadores de VIH-SIDA sino también una comunidad que busca ser sanada ella misma del desamor, la incomprensión, la intolerancia y la compasión inútil hacia quienes son diferentes o sufren el flagelo del SIDA.

Las instituciones educativas seculares y las de educación teológica en particular están llamadas a revisar los modelos educativos hasta hoy implementados dando lugar a estrategias educativas y culturales fundadas en los valores universales de la justicia, la libertad, la equidad, la solidaridad y la tolerancia, que garantiza el respeto universal de la dignidad de la persona humana. Los diseños curriculares de teología deben apuntar a un abordaje integral de la realidad de los seres humanos y la pandemia del VIH-SIDA y el estigma. Esta tarea no debe ser preocupación del área pastoral únicamente sino de la disciplina teológica en su conjunto.

Es urgente en nuestros procesos educativos apostar a una cultura de cambio, cultura de vida, cultura para el desaprender las certezas y abrirmos a la novedad lo cual plantea una lucha permanente contra la exclusión y los prejuicios porque estos son el terreno fértil para la violencia, los extremismos y la muerte de miles de seres humanos.

Es urgente mantener el diálogo con los medios de comunicación quienes a menudo se alejan de este rol de sensibilización, presión política y cambio social por efecto de la lucha de espacio y sensacionalismo del actual sistema económico. Es decir, los medios sociales de comunicación pueden tener una mayor influencia en el cambio de comportamientos de riesgo de la juventud, una labor de orientación a los padres para hablar responsablemente de la sexualidad con sus hijos e hijas. Los medios de comunicación junto con organizaciones de la sociedad civil como portadores de responsabilidades están llamados a unir esfuerzos para reducir el estigma fomentando la creación de un ambiente de tolerancia promoviendo la participación y el ejercicio de sus derechos de las personas portadoras de VIH y SIDA.

En Nicaragua, donde muchas de las preocupaciones y desafíos que he mencionado son asuntos de vida y supervivencia cotidiana, el testimonio de las iglesias en medio de una extrema injusticia por el impacto de la globalización ofrece un modelo de resistencia y esperanza, que nos inspira a continuar creyendo, luchando y viviendo.

El entramado de la sociedad junto con sus medios sociales de comunicación no debe subestimar el potencial real de las iglesias para contribuir a la transformación de las relaciones, a pesar de las dificultades que todavía enfrentamos. Con voluntad y esperanza renovada, todo es posible.

Notas
3. Este proyecto ha sido respaldado por el programa VIH de la Asociación Mundial de Comunicación Cristiana (WACC). Ha sido referido a 50 iglesias brindando capacitación a pastores y pastoras; jóvenes, mujeres sobre la magnitud de la pandemia y la urgencia de la prevención, enfatizando el rol de comunicadores que tienen los pastores y la necesidad de orientar a sus congregaciones sobre las devastadoras consecuencias del estigma sobre la vida de personas portadoras de VIH.

Facing up to what’s concealed in the Arab world

Bassem Maher Sedra

According to a BBC report published in December 2007, “Despite worldwide attention on the issue, ignorance about HIV and AIDS is still a major problem in Egypt. The disease, which has claimed millions of lives throughout the world, is still widely seen as a ‘foreign problem’, nothing for ordinary Egyptians to worry about.”

According to the “2006 Report on Global AIDS”, published by the joint United Nations program on HIV and AIDS (UNAIDS), some 510,000 people were infected as of the end of 2005 in the Middle East and North Africa region, or what we call the Arab world, with 67,000 people newly infected with HIV during 2005. These numbers become more significant when compared to Western and Central Europe with 720,000 people infected by the end of 2005, and only 22,000 new infections during the same year (according to the same report).

This means that while the prevalence rate is decreasing in most parts of the world, it has increased by 300% in the Arab world, which puts it in second place globally in HIV infections rates. Also according to the same report, the Arab world suffers very low testing rates, only 0.2% of adults; and the worst treatment access, where only 5% of the 75,000 people needing treatment receive it.

These dramatically disappointing numbers can be attributed to a number of reasons, most of which revolve around awareness and culture.

Most of the people in the Arab world, a region where religion plays an integral part, believe that religious and cultural values are capable of protecting them and controlling the prevalence of the virus. Unfortunately, this gives a false sense of security that curbs all efforts to outstrip the AIDS epidemic. Also, and due to these cultural and religious values, people like sex workers, intravenous drug users, and men who have sex with men are highly criticized or even condemned. So instead of quitting these practices, they do it in secrecy, which leads to more prevalence rates among these groups. Moreover, some cultural habits like group tattooing, cupping, and circumcisions are considered to be another reason behind high prevalence rates in a number of Arab countries.

Another cultural hindrance is gender inequality in the region. As a result of this inequality women are more vulnerable to becoming infected with HIV. Women, due to the imbalance in power relationships, have very limited options, and while marital infidelity is totally unacceptable by Arab societies if it comes from the wives’ side; it is, in a sense, culturally justified if committed by husbands.

As a result of this social injustice, 80% of infected women in the Arab world have contracted the virus from their husbands, and yet, in a lot of cases, they were mistreated by their relatives and in-laws to the extent of being expelled from their own homes. In addition, women’s ability to negotiate for the safe practice of sex and to demand their legal, economic, and social rights are very limited. Add to this the high illiteracy rates among Arab women, we get a fatal combination that leads to more vulnerability and higher prevalence rates and, hence, their children.

Stigmatization and discrimination

Another major problem is stigmatization and discrimination against people living with HIV and AIDS. This can be clearly seen in the way society in general treats people living with HIV and AIDS, condemning and isolating them, refusing any physical contact, refusing to provide healthcare, expelling children from schools and adults from works, and other similar practices which are very common in the Arab world.

Such discrimination leads to the creation of more misconceptions about the virus and how it is transmitted, and more ignorance about what to do if infected and how to live normally without transmitting the virus to others. It also leads to reduced access to healthcare (as the previous numbers show). And above all it keeps the most vulnerable groups (sex workers, intravenous drug users, and
men who have sex with men, and others) from taking the tests.

Raising public awareness of the issues
In September 2006, the Ibrahimia Media Center started a project aimed at developing methods and media programs with the goal of raising awareness of different target groups about the HIV and AIDS. The long-term goal of this awareness raising was to improve the situation for people affected by HIV and AIDS and to decrease virus prevalence rates in the Middle East and North Africa region.

Among the activities carried out by the project were Research that was conducted in five Arab countries with the aim of assessing the knowledge of the target group about HIV and AIDS, and the perceptions and attitudes towards persons affected by HIV infected; Development of localized syllabus and course material to be used for the training workshops; Conducting informative workshops in three Arab countries; Producing a number of media materials (TV drama “soap-opera”, Public Service Announcements, websites, and booklets); and Conducting a number of ground activities within and outside Christian communities.

Experiences were gained throughout the different activities and the evaluation of the materials produced. Workshops have proved to be very influential tool and, when used correctly, they have a multiplying effect. Religious leaders and media workers, for instance, were two very important constituencies to address in similar activities.

The activities done by religious leaders and the productions made by the media workers have proved that those two categories can certainly be major tools of positive change if they decide to embrace such a cause. Moreover, having them together in the same workshops not only led to enriching the discussions and the creation of a platform for more diverse debate, but it also led to the creation of networks that turned out to be of great help.

TV Drama (soap opera), which is a very popular medium in the Arab region, proved to be a very good tool to create sympathy with PLWH, to change a number of misconceptions, and to direct attention to the seriousness of the situation. On the other hand, Public Service Announcements demonstrated the quality of concentrating the idea and presenting it in a very short and acceptable way. They delivered different messages like creating sympathy with PLWH, communicating information, fighting stigma and discrimination against people affected
by HIV, countering common stereotypes and misconceptions, encouraging people with high risk behaviours to take the test, and raising awareness of the seriousness of the situation.

As a medium they can be adjusted to suit different ages and different target groups. And throughout the different evaluations it was repeatedly seen as the most effective medium among all the other media.

Finally, the website and its related social media platforms were very effective as interactive tools, where relationships with the audience can be built, information communicated, and most importantly, feedback received.

A lot has been done and a lot of encouraging positive feedback received. Yet, a lot more still needs to be done. We need to change the way ordinary people in the Arab world view the issue of HIV and AIDS as “someone else’s problem” or the problem “over there”, and to encourage individuals to deal with this issue as a matter of personal responsibility.

We need to confront the taboos and the culture of silence that confine the spread of knowledge; to change the stereotypes about people affected by HIV; and to establish a realistic debate that increases people’s awareness and encourages them to take the test.

We need to break the vicious cycle of ignorance, which leads to fear, which leads to stigmatization and discrimination, which leads to silence and denial, which in turn leads back to more ignorance and so on. We need to raise the awareness of ordinary people, and the most vulnerable groups about how to avoid the transmission of the virus.

Finally, we need to raise the awareness of the people affected by HIV and AIDS, people with risky behaviours, affected communities, and women in general about their rights and the available options to bring them out of this circle of fear and ignorance.

The Ibrahimia Media Center (IMC) is a non-governmental organization based in Egypt. The IMC project was supported by PMU InterLife – Sweden.

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Positive voices for change to fight against HIV and AIDS

James Rehmat

In 2009-10, the World Association of Christian Communication (WACC) and the Ecumenical Commission for Human Development embarked on a project called “Fostering AIDS Initiatives That Heal” (Project FAITH) for reducing discrimination and stigmatization towards HIV positive people. The aim was to discourage the labelling of people living with HIV and AIDS as immoral and to help people to face the challenges of the epidemic by providing information and knowledge and deepen understanding of HIV and AIDS.

The project involved religious communities, people living with HIV and AIDS, young leaders and local media personnel in Lahore, Pakistan.

Pakistan at present is categorized as a “Low Prevalence High Risk” country for HIV virus infections. While HIV prevalence appears to be low in Pakistan at present, the presence of a number of vulnerabilities and risky behavioural patterns suggest the need for urgent, prioritized, and coordinated action to curtail the emergence of a widespread epidemic. Poverty, gender inequalities and low levels of education and literacy all contribute to HIV vulnerability in Pakistan. Other related factors that can increase vulnerability at the individual level include unemployment, social exclusion or marginalization, physical and/or mental abuse, and gender-based discrimination.

HIV and AIDS is a relatively new sector in Paki-
stan. The response to the epidemic at all levels has been too slow. Though government and civil society organizations started their involvement and concern in the early 1990s, the scale and quality of these interventions remained debatable. The reasons are not difficult to identify. Lack of reliable epidemiological data, reliable information about the problem itself, access to information, absence of technical expertise to design suitable interventions, deficient technical skills to implement the projects and above all the stigma and discrimination attached with HIV and AIDS made it almost impossible for such interventions to succeed. Practically speaking there was no advocacy at the grassroots level for the rights of people living with HIV and AIDS and very few dared to speak up for the rights of vulnerable and marginalized groups.

The right to information is one of the basic human rights and lack of access to basic knowledge and information about HIV and AIDS is one of the contributing factors to the increase in high risk behaviour. Moreover, easily available information helps in the reduction of stigma and discrimination.

Effective prevention and control of HIV and AIDS largely depend upon effective communication of information about the epidemic. But due to Pakistan’s cultural and social norms it is still considered a taboo in society which results in discrimination against people living with HIV and AIDS. For this purpose we need to communicate authentic, reliable and rights-based messages about HIV and AIDS using an effective communication strategy.

**Championing a positive change in attitude**

Ecumenical Commission for Human Development (ECHD) is a Christian, independent ecumenical relief and development agency focusing on advocacy for policy reforms and enabling environment for HIV and AIDS interventions. We bring a positive change in people’s attitudes, promote safe practices and reduce high risk behaviour through behavioural change communication initiatives. ECHD is also an advocate for vulnerable and marginalized groups, i.e. female sex workers, the transgender community, people living with HIV and AIDS, and young people who are at greater risk of being infected with HIV and AIDS. ECHD strengthens their voices at all important decision making and policy forums.

We are facing number of challenges in that Pakistan is on the frontline of a state of war against terrorism in which the government plays an active role and on which a huge amount of the annual budget is being spent. Very limited financial resources are available for the health sector especially prevention and control of HIV and AIDS.

In 2010 Pakistan faced devastating floods that badly hit many areas in all the provinces of the country. More than 2,000 lives were lost, considerable numbers of people are still missing and millions were displaced. Government and other agencies are busy paying full attention to rehabilitating the victims of flood and the war against terrorism and the funds are given towards purchasing food, shelter and other non-food items for those affected.

Cultural and other restrictions on focusing on the sexual transmission of HIV and on promoting the use of condoms through the mass media are inadequate and civil society organizations lack the enabling environment that is so crucial to an effective response. Condom use is one of the single most important factors in a successful response to HIV and AIDS. Although condoms are promoted as an integral part of service delivery to target populations, usage levels are woefully low.

Religious leaders and congregations of different faiths are still reluctant to accept that there is a danger of a generalised epidemic in the country. Due to limited information and knowledge, they are still reluctant to talk about sex matters and related issues are considered a sin.

**Sensitization and advocacy campaigns**

The ECHD sought to tackle this situation through information, education and communication (IEC). A threefold solution was proposed: 1) Involve and sensitize religious leaders, theological seminary students, young leaders, women rights groups and people living with HIV and AIDS in reducing stigma and discrimination through orientation meetings, IEC material dissemination, interfaith dialogue and interactive theatre. 2) Advocacy and access services for people living with HIV and AIDS. 3) Capacity-building among religious communities, young leaders and people living with HIV and AIDS to serve as resource persons and later to become agents of change.

By means of these activities ECHD encouraged religious leaders to pay full attention to the disease
and to help community and HIV-positive people to adopt and maintain positive living practices, increase the disclosure of their HIV status, and to improve community involvement in HIV and AIDS services.

HIV and AIDS sensitization was carried out through interfaith dialogue on communication and leadership skills, the basic concept of the disease, strategies for reducing stigma and discrimination, and a faith-based approach to prevention and control of HIV and AIDS. More than eight dialogue sessions were conducted in five union councils of Lahore reaching over 337 individuals.

These dialogues aimed to share and explore human values, religious teaching, cultures and tradition for human dignity and respect, highlighting issues surrounding stigma, care and support for HIV and AIDS patients and the community’s role in HIV and AIDS prevention.

**Arts and media play a role**

The performing arts are also a tool to raise awareness about the prevention of HIV and AIDS among target communities. A total of eight performances both on World AIDS Day and International Candle Light Memorial Day were organized and 1,176 individuals participated. These performances raised awareness about reducing stigma and discrimination and challenged local communities and religious leaders to take appropriate steps and action to help people living with HIV and AIDS. The performances also encouraged religious leaders to change their attitudes and make a caring response towards people living with HIV and AIDS.

The documentary “Faith in Action” comprises a series of sermons of religious leaders in response to reducing stigma and discrimination at the local level. It monitors the activities and the efforts necessary to mobilizing as many leaders as possible for more proactive, effective policies, and to creating an enabling environment for People Living with HIV and AIDS.

Religious leaders are thought to be the most influential in changing the hatred in current religious speech into a more positive and humane discourse. The documentary was aired on local cable networks in the target areas of the project and the communities responded positively.

The documentary also provided brief details on the life of Mr Muhammad Asim (living with HIV and AIDS) whose family speak out on AIDS. More than 300,000 people watched this documentary and shared their reactions with us.

Capacity-building training workshops and advocacy seminars with young and religious leaders, were conducted involving people living with HIV and AIDS and women, explaining safety measures and preventive stigma and discrimination methodologies. More than 645 leaders, women and media personnel as well as people living with HIV and AIDS attended these workshops to promote empowering the vulnerable and providing them with increased self-esteem and a healthier lifestyle.

The lesson was learned during this project that interfaith dialogue and theatre performances are very effective communication tool in HIV and AIDS sensitization. Interactive theatre leaves a deep impression on the minds of the audience; theatre is difficult to forget.

Local young and religious leaders are an integral part of the project. Their involvement is not only important in combating ignorance, but also in providing people living with HIV and AIDS with the confidence openly to disclose their status. Partnering with local leaders builds confidence within the community and allows for the sustainability of the program.

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The fallacy of balance in communicating climate change

Arul Aram

The media play an important role in stimulating discussion in developing countries about both the global and local phenomena associated with climate change. They are a vital link between the scene of a natural disaster and the rest of the world. The media should facilitate discussions on climate change among scientists, politicians and the public. Strong reporting on climate change impacts and solutions is needed to make the public interested in climate issues. This article examines how the media, particularly of India, covered climate change in the Himalayas.

According to P.J. Shoemaker and S.D. Reese (1996), controversy is one of the main variables affecting story choice among news editors, along with human interest, prominence, timeliness, celebrity, and proximity. But controversy raises editorial issues, such as, what is the fairest way to report such hotly disputed versions of reality to an audience? The culture of political journalism has long used the notion of balanced coverage. In this construct, it is permissible to air a highly partisan opinion, provided this view is accompanied by a competing opinion. But recently, scientists and scholars have challenged the legitimacy of this journalistic core value.

In a survey of 636 articles from four top United States newspapers between 1988 and 2002, M.T. Boykoff and J.M. Boykoff (2004) found that most articles gave as much time to the small group of climate change doubters as to the scientific consensus. Through the filter of balanced reporting, popular discourse has significantly diverged from scientific discourse. Given the real consensus among climatologists over global warming, many scientists find the media’s desire to portray the topic as a scientific controversy to be a distortion.

Given that stories about climate change are steeped in scientific detail, communicators should convey the scientific consensus and limitations to current knowledge according more to scientific norms of evidence rather than to journalistic norms of “balance”. Wherever possible, communicators should help increase the scientific literacy of their mass audience by explaining how scientists become more confident about knowledge claims, especially regarding the use of probability statements (McCright and Shwom, 2010).

Himalayan meltdown

The melting of glaciers due to global warming is not just a phenomenon of the Arctic and the Antarctic but that of snowy mountains like the Himalayas as well. At times, such issues are dealt with by scientists in a jargon-filled discourse and that is one of the main reasons why the media keep off or misreport such issues. The tendency of the media is to ignore an issue when it is difficult to grasp or it is abstract.

The Himalayan blunder of the Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) of predicting a quick meltdown of snow in the mountains may be because of the fact that Himalayan glaciers have been less studied. But the fact remains that the glaciers are melting, though not to the extent the IPCC wrongly predicted. If the melting accelerates, the north India river basins will be flooded initially and later suffer from drought.

The problems faced by climate change journalists are similar to those on other beats. Lack of sensational content may cause reports to get sidelined. So, controversies such as an error in assessing the melting of glaciers in the Himalayas are blown up. The fact that the Himalayan glaciers are less explored complicates the matter. It is difficult to find news sources and one cannot get concrete facts.
False sense of balance

The false balance that has been a problem for years is declining. But it does pose a problem when climate change is covered by balancing climate change scientists with those of climate change sceptics. This is particularly so in print media. Those supplying the media with information – scientists, politicians and non-governmental organizations – are partly to be blamed. The way the media frame climate change affects the public response to the issue.

The defaming of Dr. Rajendra Pachauri, Chairperson of the IPCC, for the organization’s documentation on Himalayan glaciers soon after the partly successful 2009 Copenhagen summit is a classic example. In fact, the media “balanced” the remarks of the IPCC Chairperson with those of sceptics without giving the former due space for explaining. Let us see the controversy in detail.

Himalayan glaciers arouse such peculiar passion because they have long been a central icon of global warming campaigners. Like polar bears have been to the West, the ice of the Himalayas has been to the East. Al Gore said in his Oscar-winning documentary An Inconvenient Truth (2006) that the vast Himalayan ice sheet feeds seven of the world’s major river systems, providing water to 40% of the world’s population.

The IPCC based its offending paragraph of wrongly predicting that the Himalayan glaciers would melt completely by 2035 on a telephone interview Dr. Syed Hasnain gave to the popular science magazine New Scientist in June 1999. He had made clear that his comments related only to a part of the Himalayan glaciers. It was in that year that Dr. Michael Mann in the USA launched his famous “hockey stick” graph, to show that temperatures had risen faster in the late 20th century than ever before in the earth’s history. The graph was made the centrepiece of the IPCC’s 2001 report.

Dr. Hasnain’s interview with New Scientist was quoted in a 2005 report by the environmental campaigning group the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF). The IPCC’s 2007 report cited this as its authority without peer review: “Glaciers in the Himalaya are receding faster than in any other part of the world and, if the present rate continues, the likelihood of them disappearing by the year 2035 and perhaps sooner is very high if the earth keeps warming at the current rate.”

The year after the IPCC report was published, Dr. Hasnain was recruited by Dr. Pachauri to head a new glaciology unit at The Energy Research Institute (TERI), also headed by Dr Pachauri, Chairperson of the IPCC. In a matter of months, TERI was given a share in a $500,000 study of melting Himalayan glaciers by an American non-governmental organization, the Carnegie Corporation. Carnegie’s database reveals that a key part in winning this contract was played by Dr. Hasnain’s assertion that most glaciers in the region will disappear by 2035 as a result of global warming.

As fallout, the media continuously attached the suffix “gate” to all controversies and scandals relating to climate change that were being uncovered one after the other i.e. (the Climategate, Amazon-gate, WWFgate). Originally, a burglary at the Washington office complex called the Watergate in June 1972, grew into a wide ranging political scandal that culminated in the resignation of American President Richard Nixon two years later.

Here, the media was expecting to pull another “Watergate” and pressure Dr. Pachauri to resign and get the United Nations to disband the IPCC. Backers of this move included those from carbon-based industries. The fact that Himalayan glaciers are less studied because the region falls in the conflict zone between countries and scientists are not used to such high altitudes and low temperatures to gather data can be excuses for the error. Anyway, the Himalayan glaciers are definitely melting / receding in the terminal areas though not to the level of scaremongering the IPCC report had created. This controversy gave a chance for vested interests to manufacture doubts about the science behind climate change itself.

Newspaper coverage

Most Western newspapers were highly critical of Dr. Pachauri. Some of their headlines read: “Your £10m backing for climate change guru”, “The real story behind Glaciergate row”, “World misled over
glacier meltdown”, “U.N. climate panel blunders again”, and “Climate watchdog in new blunder”. However, Indian newspapers, by and large, supported Dr. Pachauri in his hour of crisis. Let us see how Indian newspapers covered the issue of the glacier meltdown at the beginning of 2010.

The Deccan Chronicle: “For the average Ladakhi, water supply from glacial melt is on the decline. Ninety-two year old Phuntchok Namgyal from Stakmo said that he did not need a scientist to tell him about global warming.” [The newspaper here used an effective anecdote to counter the slander against the IPCC.]

The Times of India: “While these cases prove that supranational agencies are not without flaws, science itself is not the villain. Most scientists accept that Himalayan glaciers are melting. It is only the degree of the recession that is under dispute.” [Although not defending the IPCC directly, the news item defended science and the crux of the matter.]

The Hindu (reprinted The Guardian story): The fact that Himalayan glacier is less studied because the region falls in the conflict zone between countries and scientists are not used to such high altitudes and low temperatures to gather data, can be excuses for the error. [In its characteristic way, the most credible Indian newspaper The Hindu did not make a value judgment but simply reprinted an elaborate article from The Guardian that tactically supported Dr. Pachauri.]

It is difficult to write in newspapers about environment with all its intricacies because there is no section specifically allotted for environment. The stories are fitted in wherever possible. Often the stories are pushed to the supplement and they lose seriousness. In such a context, environment hogs the limelight when it is linked to some political controversy like the Himalayan blunder.

**Role of television**

Television has covered the climate change issue quite extensively and most of its features have focused on how human activities affect the environment in the long term. Television has a huge impact in shaping opinion about climate change issues. TV news translates the complex scientific concepts to the common people in an understandable manner. Visuals tell a story. Unlike the newspapers, television reaches illiterates too. On television, words merely provide an interpretation for the on-screen action. The power of the visual creates a greater impact on the viewers in perceiving the message.

However, there is no consistency in television reporting. Television does not take up a permanent stand on issues. It concentrates more on immediacy than accuracy or even balance. The content is moved more towards entertainment to be “marketised”. The text operates more on a market basis with a mere profit motive. This diverts the audiences’ attention from the social and political issues and more towards the drama of the issue.

**Conclusion**

Journalists in developing countries lack skills, knowledge and resources to cover climate. Training journalists to deal with climate change must be made a priority for media outlets. Journalists need to understand the science, policy, economics and politics of climate change, all together. If journalists without knowledge report on the process of science and scientific uncertainty of climate change they may mess up the issue.

Climate change is abstract and it is difficult to make people understand the importance of it. Media reporting needs to focus more on how climate change affects people and less on controversial arguments. Journalists need to make stories more relevant to audiences, get the perspectives of the poor right, and report on how climate change can bring benefits.

News is generated through diverse angles: dramatization, prominence, consequence, novelty, personalization, conflict, and balance. Some of these angles – dramatization, novelty and balance – are resorted to more for entertainment or professionalism than for dissemination of information that would enable people to make informed choices. As we say, newspapers give priority to balancing as a journalistic norm while television gives priority to dramatization followed by balance. Thus the media fail the issue of climate change not only by oc-
casionally committing scientific errors but also by adhering to the journalistic value of balance.

When engaging in an issue of science-related public controversy, science journalists have a responsibility to ensure that the stories are based on the current state of scientific knowledge. They need to differentiate unfounded controversies from genuine scientific disagreements. One way of getting out of controversies but still making stories interesting is to focus on how climate change affects people.

There is a need to fuel the trend of increasing media coverage of climate change. There is also a need to increase the quality of coverage. Journalists must look for newer sectors and areas that are impacted by climate change. Many aspects of daily life that can be covered as part of climate change include tourism, sports/recreation, local government, health, business, agriculture, forestry, and education. Politics should take a backseat and the application of science should gain in prominence.

“Balance” should not be used as a mechanism for journalists to compete with all other news for time on the air or space on the front page. Journalists without proper skills reporting on the process of science and scientific uncertainty may involuntarily exaggerate the issue by setting scientific arguments against unscientific counter arguments. Although journalists are pressured to offer stories that are unique, the stories must nevertheless be scientifically valid.

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Linking global climate change and local peace

Janani Vivekananda

Is the relationship between climate change, increased political and social instability, and the consequent risk of conflict among vulnerable people sufficiently understood? Rather than focusing exclusively on cause and effect, the media should turn their attention to resilience – the capacity of local systems to withstand shocks and to respond to change.

The relationship between climate change and conflict is interlinked and complex. The negative impacts of climate change are already being felt around the world – most strongly in already poor communities in unstable states, threatening simultaneously to reverse development gains and to amplify existing social, economic and political stresses. Under certain conditions, where there is poor governance and low institutional capacity, these climate impacts could interact with pre-existing vulnerabilities and grievances to contribute to political instability and conflict.

One example of such tensions can be found in fisher feuds in Mali. Along the banks of the Niger River in Mali, relations between fishermen and pêcheurs de sable or sand-miners are becoming increasingly strained and in cases have become violent. The practice of extracting sand and gravel from the banks of the river is growing exponentially to satisfy the mushrooming market to service the construction boom in urban centres such as Bamako. More and more traditional fishermen, attracted by the higher prices commanded by sand compared with fish, and the greater year-round predictability offered by sand as opposed to the
seasonal availability of fish, are switching from fishing carp and Nile perch to “fishing” for sand and gravel.

The process of extracting sand destroys the river bed and is highly disruptive to what remains of local fishing, significantly depleting yields. The process of unregulated extraction of sand from flood-prone river banks also diminishes natural flood defences and leaves Riverside communities more exposed to floods.

Yet members of the same communities also see the benefits in switching from fishing or herding livestock to the more predictable and profitable livelihood of sand and gravel extraction. The grievances lie not so much in a problem with the act of sand extraction itself, but the lack of regulation of the process and absence of governance and dispute resolution mechanisms at the community or state level where conflicts of interest arise.

Clearly, responding to climate change related security risks is not a climate issue alone. Furthermore, it is evident that the security implications of climate change are first felt at the local level, and this is where they need to be understood. The process of extracting sand disrupts the river bed and is highly disruptive to what remains of the local fishing, significantly depleting yields. The grievances lie not so much in a problem with the act of sand extraction itself, but the lack of regulation of the process and absence of governance and dispute resolution mechanisms at the community or state level where conflicts of interest arise.

**Local governance plays a key role**

The impact of climate change will to varying degrees reduce the resilience of people and communities. In some situations it will cause extreme disruption with which people simply cannot cope as it overwhelms them and renders their homes and livelihoods unviable. If the governance structures that the community regards as safeguards are not up to the task, climate change will weaken confidence in the social order and its institutions and damage the glue that holds societies together. In some contexts, this can increase the risk of instability or violence. This is a particular problem in fragile states where governance structures and institutions are often weak, regardless of climate change.

Sectors such as water, agriculture, energy, health and trade will be especially affected by climate change and this could have a destabilising impact on a state’s ability to provide people with basic services. As climate change impacts interact with features of the social, economic and political landscape, countries with weak governance systems will become overwhelmed, and face a high risk of falling into political instability and violent conflict.

Climate change thus creates both risks and opportunities, winners and losers. Efforts to respond to climate challenges must therefore understand these challenges not as single issue threats but as a complex mix interacting with social, political, economic and environmental factors. Peace-positive responses to climate change must not only consider the immediate natural impacts of climate change, but also the broader dimensions of resilience such as political power, livelihoods and access to justice.

**Focus on resilience**

“Resilience” is a broader, more flexible, and therefore more useful approach to climate change than “adaptation”. The latter tends to focus on specific anticipated climate effects, while resilience focuses on the capacity of people to act, for example in their education, family networks, or access to markets.

Resilience, however, is most difficult to achieve where it is most needed – in places where states fail to meet people’s basic needs. States recovering from conflict such as Nepal, politically unstable countries like Pakistan, or environmentally vulnerable areas like Bangladesh may lack the capacity to adequately respond to environment shocks.

Furthermore, where governance is already weak and the relations between citizens and the authorities are stretched, inappropriate responses to climate change may inadvertently cause further harm.

Policy discussions about the consequences of climate change are beginning to acknowledge the conflict, security and governance implications. These concerns however focus on transboundary and international security implications, rather than local-level realities. They neglect the strong linkages between vulnerability to climate change,
poverty and conflict. They pay scant attention to the complex vulnerabilities of households and communities. And they fail to acknowledge that the first trembles of climate-related insecurity will manifest at the local level before they threaten to escalate to the national or transnational level. It is at the local level that these vulnerabilities can most effectively be addressed.

Policy inertia
The issue of climate change as a priority security risk was first put to the United Nations Security Council in a landmark step by the United Kingdom in March 2007. At a meeting on 20 July 2011, Germany, as the rotating president of the UN Security Council, reignited the debate, placing global warming and security back on the Council’s agenda. After a fierce discussion on the question of whether or not climate change poses a direct threat to international peace and security, the Council issued a statement expressing concern over the “possible adverse effects”.

With Germany pressing for the debate on climate change and security on the UN stage, a window of opportunity opens to consider the complex and interlinked risks posed by climate change to local-level security. Policy responses to climate change and security must take account of the broad dimensions of resilience: access to early warning information and the capacity to interpret and act on it, relationships of trust between citizens and authorities, viable livelihoods options, rule of law and efforts to combat corruption.

If these issues are taken on board, there is a good chance that adaptation efforts could yield a double dividend: increasing resilience to climate change and developing new approaches to poverty reduction.


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intercultural. El Otro, entendido como cualquier presencia de lo alter habilita, por otro lado, la dimensión ética y política que hacen que la comunicación misma sea un hecho histórico y más aun con capacidad transformadora. Pues es la presencia del ser diverso, del Otro, la que invita a la experiencia de la solidaridad, de la práctica de la disponibilidad, y en sí de la responsabilidad por él.

El compromiso por la condición del Otro es base misma del proyecto político de cualquier proceso auténticamente comunicativo. Y, por otro lado, entra en juego lo ético porque es la responsabilidad por el Otro la que despierta el mundo de valores que no se reducen al proyecto individual sino al de concebir un proyecto desde el nosotros. Así, Tsuji, indica que: “Cada ser humano se define como sujeto ético mientras se descubre como un ser que vive con otros.”

Y una capacidad que tiene el hecho comunicativo resulta en la del propio descubrimiento, pues como señala Gadamer (1998), “…también en el Otro y en lo diferente puede realizarse un espacio de encuentro consigo mismo.”

Pero si bien, con lo dicho, podría entenderse que la comunicación pasa por la experiencia del diálogo entre sujetos que se exponen desde su diversidad surge la duda bíblica del: “Jesús y ¿quién es mi prójimo? Que podemos convertir en ¿y quién es mi Otro para que dialogue con él?”

Antonio Machado, dirá, el Otro es el “tú esencial”1 así abogaba por la aceptación de lo heterogéneo, de lo que nos trasciende y nos ayuda, a la vez, a conservar y permanecer cada cual en su yo. Para él aquella esencial heterogeneidad del ser se constituye en “…la incurable otredad que padece uno.”2

La presencia del Otro, para Paulo Freire (1973) es la base de la comunicación pues él diría: “… la comunicación verdadera no es transferencia o transmisión del conocimiento, de un sujeto a otro, sino (es la) coparticipación en el acto de comprender (...) Lo que caracteriza la comunicación, es que ella es diálogo, así como el diálogo es comunicación.” Incluso, el sujeto pensante no puede pensar solo: no puede pensar sin la coparticipación de otros sujetos. No hay un pienso, sino un pensamos.3

La calidad activa de aquel Otro en el espacio comunicativo es puesto en evidencia en la definición que da Luis Ramiro Beltrán sobre el proceso humano de la comunicación donde señala: “…la comunicación es el proceso de interacción social democrática que se basa sobre el intercambio de símbolos por los cuales los seres humanos comparten voluntariamente sus experiencias bajo condiciones de acceso libre e igualitario, diálogo y participación.”6

Además, surge la necesidad de preguntarnos, si desde los espacios de la comunicación al no estar ajenos de los campos de lucha por formas de poder, efectivamente se estará en condiciones de debatir y estar conscientes sobre lo que será la inclusión de la presencia y voz del Otro.

La noción de inclusión tiene sentido y se construye sobre la capacidad real de participación de los actores y de los acuerdos que se establezcan entre todos para atender las condiciones de la di-
versidad. Así, se reconoce el derecho que todos tienen tanto a ser reconocidos, como a reconocerse a sí mismos como miembros de la comunidad a la que pertenecen independientemente a su medio social, su cultura de origen, su ideología, pensamiento religioso, el género, la etnia o situaciones personales derivadas de una discapacidad física, intelectual o sensorial.

Con esta multiplicación de rostros de los Otros, la inclusión propone el ingresar en los espacios del poder para pensarlos de modo más equilibrados, justos y equitativos, supone plantear un paradigma que sostenga la diversidad y la diferencia como potencialidades pero a su vez denuncie la presencia de las desigualdades. Se puede admitir lo plural pero a su vez no se podrá alimentar condiciones que generen la injusticia de la desigualdad.

Para esto la inclusión desde lo comunicacional toma sentido en la búsqueda de espacios de convivencia a través del diálogo donde lo diverso, lo diferente cobran protagonismo y se convierten en una oportunidad para el desarrollo personal como colectivo en sociedades tanto pluralistas como democráticas.

Habrá que diferenciar, sin embargo, entre dos términos que se manejan casi como equivalentes, el de inclusión y del de integración. Para esto debe entenderse que inclusión y integración representan filosofías totalmente distintas y hasta opuestas. La integración social posibilita pertenecer a un determinado grupo con una intervención mínimamente activa y de bienestar social.

La inclusión, por el otro lado, se construye sobre las condiciones de participación, acuerdos que no anulen la diversidad ni tiendan a homogeneizarla, y más aun el compromiso por la expresión del Otro como acción política. Pues como entiende Habermas (1999) la acción política presupone la posibilidad de decidir a través de la palabra sobre el bien común.7

La inclusión social parte de reconocer que todos somos diferentes en necesidades y capacidades, y que ningún ser humano es igual a Otro. Ambas nociones se distinguen en apreciaciones y prácticas que se debe tomar en cuenta. Así, integración e inclusión quieren decir:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NOCIONES DE INTEGRACIÓN</th>
<th>NOCIONES DE INCLUSIÓN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>La persona se integra a un grupo</td>
<td>La persona participa en un grupo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educación especial</td>
<td>Educación en general y dentro del contexto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principios de solidaridad y beneficencia</td>
<td>Principios de equidad, valoración del Otro, igualdad de oportunidades</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La inserción parcial en el ámbito educativo, laboral, social</td>
<td>Inclusión con adaptaciones que coadyuven a mejorar la calidad de desempeño educativo, laboral y social</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transformaciones superficiales</td>
<td>Esquemas constructivistas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Determina el lugar de la persona</td>
<td>Incorpora a la persona</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiene mirada homogenizadora</td>
<td>Resalta y potencia la diversidad y diferencia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Privilegio del modelo medico</td>
<td>Modelo eco-psicosocial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitación de la participación</td>
<td>Desarrollo de la convivencia a través del diálogo</td>
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Algunas pistas que se podrán tomar para potenciar y fortalecer las formas de expresión inclusivas, podrán comprender:
- Asumir la inclusión supone creer en una política deliberativa.
- Transformar la expresión en acción e iniciativas.
- Trasladar la democracia participativa hacia una participación ciudadana.
- Asumir la responsabilidad por el Otro como un nosotros.

Inclusión no significa la incorporación en lo propio y exclusión de lo ajeno. Según indica Habermas: “La inclusión del Otro indica, más bien, que los límites de la comunidad están abiertos para todos, y precisamente también para aquellos que son
extraños para los otros y quieren continuar siendo extraños.”

Finalmente, “Nadie que pueda hacer una contribución relevante puede ser excluido de la participación; a todos se les deben dar las mismas condiciones para hacer sus aportaciones; los participantes tienen que decir lo que legítimamente opinan y les es culturalmente pertinente; la comunicación tiene que estar libre de coacciones tanto internas como externas.”

Por otro lado, si los hombres han sido dotados de la gracia del encuentro, de la necesaria búsqueda de complementariedad desde la diferencia entre actores, deberá asumirse que todo diálogo exige el compromiso por una inclusión comunicativa capaz de promover la circulación de otros discursos, aquellos que liberen la identidad, construyan proyectos políticos y éticos desde los sujetos diversos.

La cualidad central del fenómeno comunicativo humano pasa justamente por ver que se dialoga desde la diversidad y que en consecuencia se impide la profundización de formas de desigualdad entre seres llamados a edificarse mutuamente.

Notas


News audiences beware! Insights from Darfur

Bella Mody

In capitalist business systems, buyers of products and services are told to check out claims made by profit-making advertising and marketing companies. Some know this warning as the Latin phrase caveat emptor (buyer beware!). Journalist turned journalism professor Dan Gillmor (2010) urges that consumers of news also need to think critically and evaluate news reports for comprehensiveness and fairness: skepticism, judgment, free thinking, questioning, and understanding are crucial.

“Many US citizens think the world backed the war in Iraq. Maybe it’s the papers they are reading,” UK’s Weekly Guardian, 2004.

The following article uses excerpts from my 2010 book, The Geopolitics of Representation in Foreign News: Explaining Darfur, which my students and I wrote, to answer the questions: Whose version of foreign events does the news “represent” in this internet age of information abundance? What does it emphasize? What is it silent on?

Foreign news is a major source of our knowledge about foreign Others and plays a significant role in continuing out-of-school lifelong education. Journalism’s “curriculum” consists of hard news, features, background articles, and opinion columns. My focus was on how different news organizations from Qatar, China, Egypt, South Africa, France, and the UK represented the struggle of Darfur in western Sudan for equitable treatment by its own national government in Khartoum.

In 2003, western Sudan’s unmet regional de-
mands for economic development and political representation burst into the open again, for the third time in two decades. The military dictatorship of Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir responded with disproportionate violence, as it did in response to similar demands for attention from now independent South Sudan and the Nuba mountains. The result: 300,000 civilians have been killed. Nearly one-third of the western region’s population, that is, more than two million Darfuris, live in refugee camps.

Internal wars in young states

Today’s comparatively young fifty- to sixty-year-old postcolonial states in Africa and South Asia are the sites of struggles between diverse regional, ethnic, and linguistic groups, like young Western European states around the time of the treaty of Westphalia in the mid-1600s. Some minority groups have been ancestral residents among distinct majorities, like the Tamils of Sri Lanka, while others have been situated within new national boundaries negotiated by empires in retreat after World War II.

Irrespective of their origins, some one-time ethnic kingdoms now reduced to minority groups in large states have been frustrated by their new national government’s inability and/or unwillingness to provide them with equitable opportunities for growth. For the most part, warfare is now a means to achieve political ends within countries (Crocker et al., 2007).

News about foreign crises

Foreign news reports frequently originate with raw material supplied by wire services. Many wire service subscribers in newly independent countries in Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean have been troubled by the mostly negative nature of the limited news about themselves. Veteran Associate Press reporter Mort Rosenblum (1979) called this a “coup and earthquakes” syndrome.

In the 1970s, the non-aligned movement used the one-country one-vote forum of the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to redress the business-as-usual old world information order that reflected the global distribution of economic power, while the “Group of 77” countries called for a new world economic order to reverse the unfair system of trade and aid.

Lack of representation of new young states of the South in news reports from the North led to pleas by developing countries for a New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) in the 1970s that would feature “fair and balanced” coverage of the postcolonial world. Reasons given for the neglect by major news agencies included commercial criteria (costs, the need for stories about unusual events), political reasons (low national interest), and socio-cultural differences (lack of knowledge) (Kimani and Middleton, 2009; Hawkins, 2009).

The geopolitics of comprehensive coverage

If news were a mirror reflection of events, or if objectivity were humanly possible, reporting on an event would be identical in all news media around the world. It is not. Going beyond norms for objectivity and bias-free writing that arose in response to US needs, I designed a measure of comprehensiveness to assess journalism’s presentation of knowledge about foreign events.

I also proposed a geopolitical model of influences on news organizations that produce foreign news, including forces that are both internal and external. I considered variations in how news organizations represent the same foreign event as a refraction of happenings, influenced by four locational predictors.

A news organization’s location in historical time and space gives it a standpoint: was it a colonizer or a colony, or is it a post-World War II superpower with military bases and almost no colonies? I called this historical geopolitical solidarity. I also included current national interest, because studies of foreign news have found this to be the single factor that consistently predicts the nature of representation over decades, across a range of countries.

The third influence on how a news organization presented an event was ownership. The political economy perspective holds that the system of ownership is central to understanding media content and its power. In oversimplified colloquial terms, the publisher-owner of a news organization
who pays the piper (editors and reporters) calls the news. An influence not envisaged in previous literature on news is the intended audience: work practices and professional guidelines of news organizations with the same owner and different intended audiences may vary.

The quality of explanation
The lack of explanation of causes is a longstanding complaint against journalism. Reasons range across the pressures of a 24-hour news cycle to issue complexity to ideologically explosive content to the craft focus of news writing. Writing for daily news deadlines permits description of What and Where but only allows limited explanation of the Why and How of an event or issue.

In-depth reporting on foreign events requires local expertise or access to previously published work. Although an understanding of the causes of a problem, e.g., continuing poverty, is not sufficient to bring about a change in the unfair distribution of land, productive assets, health, and education, it is a necessary step. The lack of ideas and explanation about root causes prevents and/or obfuscates understanding that could lead to real change.

Causal analysis in foreign news could enable the public in other countries to discriminate between one crisis and another (rather than dismiss a region as say, piracy-prone). Somalis are unlikely to resort to piracy to meet their food, clothing, and shelter needs if they have alternatives. As in the US War of Independence and the French Revolution in the 18th century, the causes of regional rebellions in many flag-independent former European colonies of the 20th and 21st centuries are inequity and dependency.

Causal knowledge provides the public and policy makers with information to enable action against the root causes of disasters and wars. Contextual information explaining the causes of crises is available in the national press, but editors in the North have found it is of little interest to their readers.

Foreign news coverage of the January 2010 earthquake in Haiti focused on the poverty that limited the country’s remedial response, but few mentioned the historical foreign causes of this inability: France forcing the hemisphere’s second Republic (declared in 1804) to incur massive debt to pay for the loss of French property during the revolution; the US occupation in 1915; neo-liberal aid and trade “adjustment” policies of the IMF and US that forced small farmers off the land into Port-au-Prince’s sweatshops as a low-cost offshore labor force for North American corporations; the internationally sponsored coup in 2004 that overthrew Jean-Bertrand Aristide elected by over 70% of Haiti’s electorate; or the blocking in the Security Council of any expansion of the UN mission’s mandate since 2005 to include employment generation and infrastructure development.

Findings
This section presents selected findings from an analysis of 26 months of Darfur coverage by ten news organizations. Each news organization explained this foreign crisis with its own lens and foci. Differing news representations of the same event cross-nationally is not a new finding. The first major study of a day in the world’s press across multiple countries in the late 1950s (Schramm, 1959) found the same thing. There is anticipation in the global North that libertarian Anglo-American professional journalism norms of objectivity will spread (Reese, 2001), but journalism professor Jyotika Ramaprasad has found reporters in Africa and Asia claiming allegiance to US norms of neutrality while describing political, economic, and cultural influences that actually constrained such performance.

British researcher James Curran (2005) mentions examples of how the rhetoric of American professionalism they were spouting actually deluded journalists in other countries from recognizing their collusion with ruling political powers. Generally, news organizations located in states with high national interest in keeping good relations with Sudan for reasons of oil or water (China, Egypt) restricted themselves to hard news stories. The proportion of feature stories ranged from 0 to 10%. This afforded limited opportunity for explanatory journalism.
Explanations of causes

There was only one noticeable similarity between the ten news organizations we studied: the relative neglect of the causes of the crisis. Discussion of causes ranged from a low of 4% of news articles in Al-Ahram and 8% in People’s Daily in the global South to a high of 31% in the Washington Post. This is unfortunate, since news about underdevelopment and disparity is the only (albeit imperfect) means of sharing information on a large scale that could inform initiatives to prevent hunger, death, and disease.

Discussion of causes requires local knowledge and/or time for background research. Mention of the types of causes (of the origins of the protest and the disproportionate state backlash) ranged across regional inequity, environmental changes, ethnicity and race, oil, and foreign intervention. The kinds of causes mentioned (although causes, on the whole, were mentioned infrequently) resonated with the history of the country in which the news organization was located.

Thus, South Africa’s Mail & Guardian Online discussed race and ethnicity causes frequently. News organizations located in former colonizers from the White Caucasian North (Le Monde, BBC.co.uk, the Guardian) also discussed the causes of the Darfur crisis in terms of race and ethnicity. Both newspapers from the US discussed causes in terms of regional inequity reasons, distinct from the UK and France.

Oil was mentioned as a cause in news articles infrequently, ranging from no mention in the Chinese-language domestic paper People’s Daily, BBC.co.uk, and the New York Times to a high of 5% in the Washington Post. This is despite the Khartoum regime and many countries in the South pointing to resource-driven imperialism since the US-led invasion of Iraq.

Comprehensiveness of coverage

I ranked differences in news on a specially-designed index of timeliness and comprehensiveness of coverage (timing, explanatory depth) since my interest is in news as cross-national out-of-school continuing education. I was disappointed to find that no news organization received more than a 70% score on the comprehensiveness index, indicating room for improvement.

Only four news organizations achieved passing grades of 60% or higher. The Washington Post and the BBC tied for first place with a score of 87 (67% of the total possible score of 130). It is clear that the UK license fee and Foreign Office allocations to the BBC World Service provide knowledge of consequence to global public education.

The Mail & Guardian Online took third place with a score of 85 (65%). The New York Times was in fourth place (83, 64%) and Al Jazeera in fifth place (77, 59%). Mid-range performers on comprehensiveness were Le Monde in sixth place (74, 57%), the Guardian in seventh place (72, 55%), and China Daily in eighth place (62, 48%). Al-Ahram was in ninth place (47, 36%) and People’s Daily in tenth place (46, 35%). The lowest three performers were news or-
ganizations located in the global South, in states with high current national interests in Sudan, and owned by the state.

**Geopolitical influences on coverage**
The relative impact of each of the geopolitical predictors I investigated – ownership, geopolitical location, national interest in Sudan, and global audience – on the comprehensiveness index scores for each of ten news organizations (weighted by the number of articles) was assessed through multiple regression analysis.

Results indicated that each of these predictors significantly impacted comprehensiveness index scores of the news organization's curriculum. Private ownership, geopolitical location in the global North, low national interest in Sudan, and having a global audience all predicted higher comprehensiveness index scores.

National interest in Sudan was the strongest predictor, followed by intended audience. The influence of the intended audience is a unique conceptual contribution of this study. Historical geopolitical vantage point in the global North or South was third, speaking to the possible declining influence of historical geopolitical solidarity. Ownership type had the least influence on comprehensiveness of coverage.

**Summing up**
News audiences (readers, viewers) need to ask critical questions about which country the news production organization is located in, what the historical relationship and current national interest of that country is with the state being reported on, which audience the news is being composed for (e.g., a foreign public diplomacy constituency or national readers), and who owns the news organization (the state or private capital).

Regretfully, news organizations are currently not doing as well as they might on educating us comprehensively about foreign events. The sad thing is that there is no alternative to international journalism as a source of understanding current events in distant countries.

**Notes**
1. See The Geopolitics of Representation in Foreign News: Explaining Darfur for references and endnotes that have been kept to a minimum to improve readability.
2. The Group of 77 intergovernmental organization of developing countries in the United Nations headquarters in New York is the means by which countries of the global South promote their collective economic interests and enhance their negotiating capacity.

**References**

Bella Mody holds the DeCastro chair in Global Media in the Journalism and Mass Communication program at the University of Colorado in Boulder. She specializes in international applications of communication technologies, the political economy of media in developing countries, and design research on public service applications of media. Mody's authored/edited books include International and Development Communication: A 21st Century Perspective, The Handbook of International and Intercultural Communication, Telecommunication Politics, and Designing Messages for Development Communication. A native of India, Mody consults for UN agencies, national governments, and humanitarian organizations on media applications for agriculture, health, and education.
Locarno 2011: Opening doors and seeking new paths

Hans Hodel

The INTERFILM President reports on the 64th Festival del Film Locarno (3-13 August 2011), and finds himself unexpectedly touched by images, characters, and stories, and perhaps even applauding.

As a professional in a press screening at a film festival (at least three times a day or more) watching films, sometimes you think you know the story, even if you haven’t previously read the synopsis in the catalogue. Then something unusual occurs.

Several times this happened to me during the 64th International Locarno Film Festival and it was a very good sign for the films in the official competition, selected by Olivier Père in his second year as artistic director. In fact, the international press gave him a warm welcome and ranked Locarno fourth after Cannes, Berlin and Venice. Olivier Père reduced the number of films but, nevertheless, attracted 159,500 spectators – 7.5% more than last year.

In the context of the struggle between all the international film festivals and their regulations, it is not easy to find a convincing selection for the official competition. But Olivier Père succeeded in securing 20 films from many different countries and in different genres with touching stories.

Cruic – drumul spre dincolo (The Path to Beyond) directed by Anca Damian (Romania) was a surprising animated feature-length documentary. It tells the life story of a 33 year-old Romanian, who died in a Polish prison while on a hunger strike protesting against being accused of an unproven crime. Claiming he was in Italy on the day of the theft, he failed to convince the authorities of his innocence.

Terri directed by Azazel Jacobs (USA) is a big kid in a small town, overweight, sensitive and awkward, who doesn’t seem to have room for anyone who is different. Abandoned by his parents, he is left with his ailing Uncle James, who needs the boy’s help more than Terri needs his.

The Loneliest Planet directed by Julia Loktev (USA/Germany) has Gael Garcia Bernal as Alex and Hani Furstenberg as Nica, two young people in love and engaged to be married. They hire a local guide to lead them on a camping trek in the Caucasus Mountains in Georgia, a landscape that is both overwhelmingly open and frighteningly closed which leads them to confront themselves.

Sette opera di misericordia (Seven Acts of Mercy) directed by Miaasimiliano and Gianluca De Serio (Italy/Romania) is the dark story of Luminita, a young illegal immigrant living on the edge of a shantytown, who devises a way to escape her misery. While putting her plan into action, she runs up against Antonio, a mysterious and very sick old man.

Hashoter (Policeman) directed by Nadav Lapid confronts the viewer with Yaron, one of an elite group of police officers working in an anti-terrorist group in the Israeli police force, who is suddenly involved in a clash not with the “Arab enemy”, but with young Israeli radicals protesting against injustice in Israeli society. One of several films with contemporary resonance, it was awarded a special jury prize.

Winner of the Pardino d’Oro in 2007 for Wave, Adrian Sitaru from Romania returned to Locarno with the impressive dark drama Din dragoste cu ceke nai bune intentil (Best Intentions) and won the prize for best director.

Golden Leopard Award

Abrir puertas y ventanas (Back to Stay) directed by Milagros Mumenthaler (Argentina/Switzerland) was given a Commendation by the Ecumenical Jury and was the surprise big winner of this year’s Golden Leopard. It also won the FIPRESCI Prize (International Federation of Film Critics) and got a special mention from the Youth Jury.

Milagros Mumenthaler, the young female direc-
tor of the film, was born in Argentina in 1977 and then moved with her family to Switzerland. Aged 17 she studied film in her native country at the University del cine in Buenos Aires and graduated there in 2004. *Abrir puertas y ventanas* is her first long feature film and was supported by a writing residence at the Cannes Festival’s Cinéfondation.

The story of the film takes place in Buenos Aires at the end of one summer. Following the death of the grandmother who raised them, sisters Maria, Sofia and Violeta live alone in their family home full of past memories, each trying to deal with her absence in their own way. Marina buries herself in her studies, while also taking care of the house; Sofia concentrates on her appearance and material possessions; and Violeta wanders from her bedroom to the living room, receiving occasional visits from an older man.

This period of transition and uncertainty is marked by disagreements, laughter, mean remarks and affectionate gestures, until one autumn day Violeta suddenly disappears without a word. “Evoking a dense atmosphere, Mumenthaler shows that there are various, sometimes painful ways to becoming an individual and that, although memory guides us to accept the present, one still has doors and windows to open,” said the Ecumenical Jury.

A second Commendation of the Ecumenical Jury
(and the CICAE Prize of the International Art&Essai Cinema Confederation) went to the film *Onder ons* (Among Us) directed by Marco van Geffen (Netherlands). It shows in different ways the situation of a shy and inhibited Polish girl, working as a babysitter in the Netherlands. While everything in that new country is unfamiliar to her, she chances upon the identity of a rapist who has been prowling about the town, but she doesn’t know what to do with this information.

The Ecumenical Jury wrote, “Done with considerable craftsmanship this film shows us that the subtle xenophobia of western people, often covered only by a thin layer of cultural conventions, distracts from the fact that violence and lack of communication are generic issues of the clean and ‘well organized’ suburbs”.

**Award of the Ecumenical Jury**

The Ecumenical Jury for the first time included the film critic Konstantin Terzis, an INTERFILM member from Greece. Ieva Pitruka (Latvia) and Sanne Grunnert (Denmark) were the other INTERFILM members. The three SIGNIS members were Daria Lepori (Switzerland), Christian Wessely (Austria) and Joachim Valentin (Germany) as President.

Awarding its Prize to *Vol spécial* (Special Flight) directed by Fernand Melgar (Switzerland), the only documentary in the official competition, the jury demonstrated its critical capacity, identifying the film’s high quality with its sensitive camera-work and its strong political and human message. Nobody understood Paulo Branco’s impossible critique of the film as fascist after presenting its verdict as president of the international jury. But it became clear that this jury saw the film with different eyes from most of the press and the audience, who received it with warm applause, naming it one of the best films in competition.

Fernand Melgar had already been awarded the Pardo d’Oro in 2008, when his film *La Forteresse* was in the “Filmmakers of the Present” competition. In that film, in the context of recent political discussion and decisions in Switzerland concerning the law dealing with foreigners and asylum-seekers, he introduced the audience to a Registration Centre following asylum-seekers throughout the process, limited to sixty days, that will result in their being granted refugee status or not.

In *Vol spécial* he goes to an administrative detention centre where men are jailed while awaiting deportation from Switzerland. Only the Youth Jury and the Ecumenical Jury gave awards to this film for its “touching and authentic documentary”, which “leads the audience into the Frambois detention centre where ordinary people never go and where hopes and fears of different men culminate.

Guards as well as detainees act humanly under inhuman conditions, so the spectator is enabled to see them all as individuals with a family, religion and their own dignity, lacking only justice”.

The Ecumenical Jury award included prize money of 20,000 CHF provided by the Reformed Church and the Catholic Church of Switzerland and is given for the film’s distribution in Switzerland. But, this time the money will also be used for a new documentary by Fernand Melgar reporting what happened to the men deported from Switzerland.

**Highlighting the other Indian cinema**

With an output of 1,274 feature films in 2010, the Indian film industry does not exactly look languishing. “However, Bollywood pictures are so dominant that Indian independent filmmakers often find it difficult to realize their projects,” explained Martina Malacrida, head of the festival’s Open Doors section, supported by the Swiss Foreign Ministry’s Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC).

With 13 films from 1929 (*Prapancha Pash*/Throw of Dice by Franz Osten) to 2010 (*Udaan*, by Vikramaditya Motwane and *Kanasemba Kudureyanen*/Riding the Stallion of a Dream by Girish Kasaravalli), it was the aim of this programme to reflect the global challenge of marrying growth with development and globalization with cultural diversity. It was amazingly diverse and vibrant thanks to directors who are deeply committed to realizing their filmic visions on the margins of the commercial circuit.

For more information visit: http://www.pardo.ch; http://www.kirchen.ch/filmjury; www.inter-film.org
ON THE SCREEN...

OBERHAUSEN (GERMANY) 2011

At the 57th International Short Film Festival Oberhausen held 5-10 May, 2011, the Award of the Ecumenical Jury carrying prize money of 1,500 Euros, went to the film Atrophy (or the fear of fading) directed by Palesa Shongwe (South Africa, 2009).

The citation read: “Atrophy is a successful combination of dance, poetry, music and documentary. A young South African woman expresses her longing for freedom through a dance that creates a feeling of community and evokes her cultural tradition. At the same time she fears that the space she unfolds through dancing will become more and more constricted due to the conditions of life in the townships. The rhythm of the body creates spaces that resist these growing social limitations.”

CANNES (FRANCE) 2011

At the 64th edition of the Festival de Cannes (11-22 May 2011) the Ecumenical Jury chose as winner of its Prize the film This must be the place, directed by Paolo Sorrentino (Italy, France, Ireland 2011). “Through the story of Cheyenne, a fallen and aching rock star, Paolo Sorrentino proposes to follow the inner voyage and odyssey of a man searching for his Jewish roots, maturity, reconciliation and hope. A classic drama of great richness and elaborate aesthetics, the film gracefully opens deep and serious paths of reflection.”

In addition, the Jury awarded a Commendation to Le Havre, directed by Aki Kaurismäki (Finland/France/Germany 2011). “An ode to hope, solidarity and brotherhood : using sophisticated filmmaking, Aki Kaurismäki invites us into a world which he transforms through the magic of colours, the humour of dialogue, the humanity of the characters – with ‘The Sermon on the Mount’ in the background.”

A second Commendation was given to Et maintenant on va où? directed by Nadine Labaki (France/Lebanon 2011). “The women of a small isolated village are ready to do anything to preserve peace between the two communities that are living there together. With much delicacy, Nadine Labaki succeeds in offering a poetic tale balancing carefully between comedy and tragedy, provoking an emotion that is turned towards hope.”

YEREVAN (ARMENIA) 2011

At the 8th Yerevan International Film Festival 10-17 July 2011 the prize of the Ecumenical Jury went to the film Europolis directed by Cornel Gheorghita (Romania/France 2010). Motivation: In this road movie, death is not the ending but a new beginning for a hopeless young man. Travelling throughout Europe with his mother, he undergoes a transformation. Cornel Gheorghita tells his story with images full of the beauty and magic of cinema. His symbolism blurs the border between life and death.

In addition, the Jury awards a Commendation to Steel Gates directed by Armen Khachatryan (Armenia 2010). Motivation: This documentary shows the daily life of the poor but well known Armenian artist Apresik Aloyan. Living alone in a factory, he is a caring person who believes in eternal life. The director, Armen Khachatryan, allows us to be part of this message of hope.

RIGA (LATVIA) 2011

The INTERFILM Jury at the 21st Riga International Film Festival “Arsenals” (10-18 September 2011) chose as its winner in the International Film Competition Corpo Celeste directed by Alice Rohrwacher (Italy/Switzerland/France, 2011). “In a very honest and authentic way the film depicts how a young human being grows up in a world where religious instruction and her own family fail to care about humanity. The girl has the courage to stand up against authorities and manages to sustain values of humanism and compassion. She is able to cope with spiritual qualities which are rare in this age. Humorously the
Above, still from This must be the place, directed by Paolo Sorrentino (Italy, France, Ireland 2011). Below, still from Le Havre, directed by Aki Kaurismäki (Finland/France/Germany 2011).
film also shows the difficulties facing the church to educate young people and to teach them spiritual values.”

In the Baltic Film Competition the Jury awarded its prize to the documentary *The End Game* directed by Liga Gaisa (Latvia, 2011). “With very delicate camera work this documentary shows four people diagnosed with multiple sclerosis who perform Samuel Beckett’s ‘End Game’. Putting on this play enables them to understand their own life and to exist within the so called normal society. It also brings them together in a new way. They find out that it is important for them to show that life is still a wonderful experience and that they can share its values with each other.”

**Montreal 2011**

The Ecumenical Jury at the 2011 World Film Festival Montreal awarded its Prize to *David*, directed by Joel Fendelman (USA). David, a Muslim child living in Brooklyn, New York, finds himself in a Jewish School. Through the story, we are transported with finesse and sensitivity to the heart of a social problem: the coexistence between religious and cultural communities.

A Commendation was given to *Hasta la Vista*, directed by Geoffrey Enthoven (Belgium). Three young friends, each with a different disability, organize a dream trip. Through daily difficulties and sometimes comical happenings, the director offers a new perspective on the challenges and limitations of their situations and of the open-mindedness of their families and immediate circle.

**ON THE PAGE...**


The promotional blurb for this book asks rhetorically: What do St. Francis, Oskar Schindler, Princess Diana and Smokey Bear have in common? The answer, according to Donn Tilson, is that all of them (religious and secular, human and animal) are “objects of devotion” with their own “shrines” and with “clergy” who are engaged in “devotional-promotional communication” to establish and reinforce the relationship with their “devotees”. According to Tilson, this relationship involving “object of devotion”, “clergy” and “devotees” has to be understood as a “covenantal relationship” founded on trust, a relationship into which the devotees enter willingly in order to gain spiritual benefits.

Tilson also acknowledges, and indeed his book is replete with examples, of how often this mutually beneficial relationship (clergy gain followers, prestige and, often, wealth; devotees are nourished emotionally and spiritually) can degenerate into mere propaganda, exploitation and the commodification of the spiritual.

The book is a collection of case studies in which Tilson uncovers in some detail the promotional and PR strategies used by ‘clergy’ down through the ages and across cultures to communicate the merits of their different objects of devotion. In the course of this exposition, Tilson underscores the similarities in the promotional techniques used to advance the cause of religious and secular figures given ‘quasi-religious’ status.

He also demonstrates time and again how the long-term success of any devotional cult is dependent upon the coming together of different forces (cultural, religious, political, commercial, civic and popular). Both institutional support and popular devotion are needed to sustain the long-term viability of saint or shrine.

The greater part of the book is concerned with the cult of different kinds of “saints”. Tilson identifies “hero-saints”, “folk-hero saints”, “celebrity-hero saints”, “shadow saints”, “hero-patron saints” and even a “pilgrim-tourist-
“patron saint”. Often the same figure can sustain multiple identities depending on which aspect of the cult is emphasised.

All kinds of figures come together in the category of “patron saints”. These figures, such as Smokey the bear, the patron saint of fire prevention in US national forests, provide “heavenly endorsements” for different activities. They can be real or fictional (Bambi), religious or secular, human or animal. In an interesting chapter on animal saints, Tilson explores the story of St Francis and the Wolf of Gubbio, charting how over time the wolf was transformed into a patron saint for “tourism conscious Italian civic interest”.

Celebrities, religious or secular, can become patron saints too, lending a “celebrity aura” to places and beliefs, as Kings and Queens once did for churches and shrines. In more recent times, the late Pope John Paul II, the “pilgrim Pope” endorsed a range of shrines across the world and on his death became a focus of pilgrimage himself.

The role of saints and their shrines is exemplified in the case study of the rise and enduring popularity of the Spanish shrine of St James at Compostella. The cult and the shrine grew up as a result of a combination of different forces and alliances, secular and religious, promoted by endorsements from royalty and the Church. It was an expression of popular religious devotion harnessed to the crusade against the Moorish kingdoms, an assertion of political independence and a symbol of religious legitimacy.

In modern terms, the St James “brand” evoked huge loyalty from its consumers. St James has become the model of the “pilgrim-tourist-patron saint” as his shrine became and remains the focal point of one of the great pilgrimage routes of Europe.

A crucial element in a devotion’s success is the skilful use of media to communicate the merits of the favoured saint or shrine and to out-do or even disparage rivals. The fame of the shrine of St Thomas a Beckett, for example, was in no little measure due to the untiring promotional efforts of the monks at Canterbury who compiled accounts of miracles due to his intercession and made sure that reports of his life, holiness and miracles were spread widely.

Tilson argues that many of the same processes are at work when secular leaders are transformed into civic icons. He explores how George Washington became the saintly “father of the nation”, America’s patron saint and the exemplar of republican virtue who could not tell a lie. Tilson shows how Washington’s transformation was deliberately and systematically promoted through the media: by his biographer (hagiographer), Mason Locke Weems and by a host of portrait and history painters who created a complementary visual icon.

Tilson sees the same combination of processes at work today in an age of what he terms, “generalized sainthood” and the veneration of “celebrity saints”, from the realms of sports and entertainment. Those who Tilson’s calls “shadow saints”, like Al Capone can also become objects of devotion and the sites of their crimes perverse shrines.

For the most part devotees travel to shrines but in some case shrines come to the devotee. In a chapter entitled “Saints on Parade”, Tilson gives examples from different cultures of holy objects and the relics of saints being paraded before the faithful, notably the world tour of the relics of St Therese of Lisieux between 1995 and 2001. He also shows how this traditional religious expression has been adopted and transmuted into the spectacle of the travelling blockbuster exhibition based on iconic figures such as Tutankhamun and Princess Diana.

In Tilson’s words, the appeal of both exhibitions lay in “the confluence of celebrity, glamour, pathos, nostalgia and promotional campaigning that “writ large” their story in an attractive and sympathetic manner”. And according to him, in both cases the exhibitions evoked among the visitors, “responses bordering on the spiritual”.

In all cases, however, the key to understanding the importance and influence of the devotional figure in question is his, her or its relationship with the devotees who flock to the shrine, participate in the ritual displays of devotion, purchase the relics/souvenirs and enter the experience vicariously through art and media. In a chapter on “artful devotion” Tilson shows how this relationship is shaped through all forms of communication (painting, sculpture, music, theatre, buildings, film, television, print, internet etc). Different artistic and media forms are employed to create the devotional ambience within which the devotee can enter into fulfilling emotional, spiritual and intellectual relationships with the object of devotion.

Another recurring theme is that of the “mar-
“Marketing” efforts made by “clergy promoters” to attract the attention of potential devotees and entice them to visit a particular shrine. From earliest times priesthoods have promised visitors and pilgrims not only spiritual blessings but also healing, hospitality and other attractions.

In a major case study Tilson analyses how spiritual, commercial, media, civic and sporting interests combined to market the Winter Olympics in Turin in 2006. Here the focus of religious devotion was the Shroud of Turin which was also presented as an icon of the city and the Games. As Tilson points out there were in fact two “shrines” in Turin, the religious one telling the story of the Shroud and the sporting one in the form of the Olympic Stadium.

As the case of sporting stadiums shows, the “sacred space” itself can also become an object of devotion in its own right. Tilson cites the case of Machu Picchu in Peru, which the Peruvian government is promoting not only as a encounter with a spectacular landscape and an archaeological heritage but also an experience of ancient spirituality. And as Tilson catalogues, there is now a worldwide boom in spiritual tourism; religious events such as the Hajj, Kumbh Mela or the Holy Year celebrations attract thousands of pilgrims as well as the marketing efforts of multinational and local companies.

Interestingly, for a book as detailed and comprehensive as this one, Tilson does not discuss in any detail Marian shrines such as Lourdes or Fatima, surely prime examples of how spiritual devotion, the hope of miracles and the interests of local businesses and civil authorities combine and coincide.

The book does, however, give some space to charting the efforts of States to cash in on their spiritual patrimony. For example, Tilson details the battle for spiritual tourists between Israel and Jordan as they promote rival sites for the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan, a struggle which it seems the Jordanians have largely won, due in no small measure to the site’s endorsement by the Pope.

But, as Tilson points out, though these events and the visitors they attract can give a boost to local economies, they have very real downsides, including damaging the very sites they celebrate as well as often exploiting indigenous peoples and their religious cultures. Not surprisingly, therefore, Tilson welcomes initiatives like the Sacred Lands project in the UK, now globally the Sacred Sites programme under UN auspices, which strives to “recover, restore and create sacred sites”, from local community gardens to major shrines. He also cites approvingly the efforts of countries like Bhutan, Qatar and Oman to find ways to preserve their religious heritage and balance spiritual values with modernisation.

One question left after reading this book, however, is this: is the relationship of congregants/devotees to religious saints and shrines significantly different from the relationship between secular/celebrity ones and their fans/devotees? And if there is little difference, what implications might that have for our understanding of the concepts of “religious communication”, “spirituality” and “devotion”? ■

Review by Dr Jim McDonnell, United Kingdom.
Communicating Peace: Entertaining Angels Unawares

Communication rights and the ever more urgent need to construct a culture of peace are central to a vision of a world in which universal human values displace the accumulated weight of history’s tyrannies. Contributions by Clifford G Christians, Philip Lee, Kaarle Nordenstreng, Francis B Nyamnjoh, Liv Sovik, Slavko Spli- chal, Pradip N Thomas, and Robert A White complement reprinted essays by the late Fr Michael Traber.

Available from WACC Publications at $20 including packing and postage.
HIV and AIDS is not about ‘us’ and ‘them’. It is about all of us who live and are responsible for a world of isolation, exclusion, poverty, judgment, injustice – and for all of us who work and speak out for community, inclusion, sufficiency, tolerance, justice – and abundant life for all.”

Sara Speicher

Si le nombre important des organes de presse au Bénin devrait être, en principe, un atout pour la lutte contre la stigmatisation et la discrimination, la réalité est toute autre. Beaucoup d’organes et surtout la majorité des organes de presse écrite se contente des comptes rendus en reléguant au second plan des enquêtes et des reportages et pour les organes de l’audiovisuel, la production fait figure de parent pauvre.”

Justin Amoussou

Es urgente en nuestros procesos educativos apostar a una cultura de cambio, cultura de vida, cultura para el desaprender las certezas y abrirnos a la novedad lo cual plantea una lucha permanente contra la exclusión y los prejuicios porque estos son el terreno fértil para la violencia, los extremismos y la muerte de miles de seres humanos”

Blanca Cortés

The right to information is one of the basic human rights and lack of access to basic knowledge and information about HIV and AIDS is one of the contributing factors to the increase in high risk behaviour. Moreover, easily available information helps in the reduction of stigma and discrimination.”

James Rehmat