

WACC's Development Initiatives Program (DIP)

From 2016 to 2020, under its Development Initiatives Program (DIP) WACC is supporting 65 one-year-long communication projects aimed at advancing, strengthening, and implementing the communication rights of marginalised and excluded peoples and communities in countries of the global South. These projects include a range of activities, including providing communication infrastructure (e.g. a community radio station), capacity-building (e.g. training in communication rights, media practices), advocacy (e.g. awareness-building about media biases and misrepresentations), and media monitoring (e.g. of gender, poverty, or peace). Both a short and a longer-term impact can be seen from institutionally and individually strengthened capacities as well as outputs (e.g. methodologies, reports, handbooks) that are replicable both in national contexts but also regionally.

WACC's rights-based approach to communication means prioritizing improved levels of accessibility and affordability, so that the most marginalized and "least served" are empowered and inequalities reduced; it means enabling communities and vulnerable groups to participate in decision-making processes; and it means monitoring progress in realizing communication rights in order to hold governments and gatekeepers to account. In this respect, the link between communication rights and sustainable development has never been clearer: traditional mass media, social media, and digital platforms can contribute to the creation of new public spaces for voices to challenge the social, economic and political structures that exclude people and communities.

For people around the world, the suppression of communication rights translate into a form of marginalization that is often invisible to development actors and policy makers: poverty of voice, or communication and information poverty. Unless these invisible forms of poverty are addressed, economic and social poverty cannot be overcome. Therefore, communication rights should be integral to planning and implementing actions aimed at achieving sustainable development and positive social change

WACC, in partnership with groups and organizations that form part of the communication rights movement, work to support the communication needs of marginalized communities and to create more enabling and democratic communication environments through policy and legislative change. All these efforts are based on a common understanding of communication as a fundamental human right, essential to people's dignity and community, as well as to achieving lasting social change and respect for human rights. Communication rights enable all people everywhere to express themselves individually and collectively by all means of communication. They are vital to full participation in society and are, therefore, universal human rights belonging to every man, woman, and child.

The World Association for Christian Communication (WACC), as a pioneer of the communication rights movement since its foundation in 1968, has been among the few global organizations working to advance the communication rights of marginalized communities around the world. WACC has partnered with thousands of grassroots communities, from indigenous groups to women's groups to youth groups, to advance communication rights in their local contexts while also advocating for systemic changes in terms of communication-related legislation and policy at the national, regional, and international levels.

WACC is uniquely placed to promote the concept and practice of communication rights in order to advance social justice by challenging discriminatory political, sociocultural, and economic structures. This is because it has extensive networks of partners in countries around the world, particularly at the grassroots level, and because WACC is widely recognized as an organization with an unwavering commitment to supporting the rights of those who lack a voice to make themselves heard.

In September 2015, during the United Nations Sustainable Development Summit, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a new agenda to guide its development work between 2015 and 2030: “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”. This new agenda centres on 17 Sustainable Development Goals containing 169 specific targets.

While almost none of the Sustainable Development Goals directly addresses the issue of communication and information poverty, a number of the goals and targets are linked to communication rights issues. Crucially, they include Goal 1 “End poverty in all its forms everywhere”, but also Goal 5 “Gender Equality”, Goal 10 “Reduced Inequalities”, and Goal 16 “Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels”.

There is general agreement that strengthening communication, independent and pluralistic media, and improving access to information and communication technologies play an essential role in the development of today’s societies and communities. A free, independent and pluralistic media sector has also been linked to enhanced and governance and development.

For WACC, taking a rights-based approach to communication means prioritizing improved levels of accessibility and affordability, so that the most marginalized and “least served” are empowered and inequalities reduced; it means enabling communities and vulnerable groups to participate in decision-making processes; and it means monitoring progress in realizing communication rights in order to hold governments and gatekeepers to account.

In this respect, the link between communication rights and sustainable development has never been clearer: traditional mass media, social media, and digital platforms can contribute to the creation of new public spaces for voices to challenge the social, economic and political structures that exclude people and communities. They can also help enable civic participation, relationships based on mutual accountability and trust, pluralism, and community empowerment processes.

WACC studied the fit between the SDGs and WSIS+10 when it drew up its Strategic Plan 2017-2021. Among the SDGs, “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls” (5) and “Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels” (16) fell squarely under a communication rights umbrella. WACC is now working to implement: (a) programmes and projects that can contribute to achieving these goals; (b) strategic alliances and partnerships globally, regionally, and nationally that can help advance related programmes and projects; (c) advocacy work on communication rights among its global network of WACC members, project partners, and communication activists.

WACC’s Development Initiatives Program (DIP) will continue to serve WSIS+10’s vision “to build a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society, where everyone can create, access, utilize and share information and knowledge, enabling individuals, communities

and peoples to achieve their full potential in promoting their sustainable development and improving their quality of life, premised on the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, and respecting fully and upholding the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.”



In Colombia, WACC project partner Grupo Comunicarte drew on its experience using media for education and previous work in the area to establish two school-based radio production collectives, involving more than 60 indigenous children and adolescents from the Inga and Kamentsa communities, to produce content for local radio station Inga-Katmensa 103.5 FM. As a result of the project, participating children and youth increased their media literacy skills, acquired a more nuanced understanding of their rights, and made their schools more democratic and inclusive learning environments.