

Media Development

2/2015

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Media Development is published quarterly by the
World Association for Christian Communication
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Toronto, Ontario M4C 4X7, Canada.
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www.waccglobal.org

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Subscriptions to *Media Development*

Individuals worldwide US\$40.

Libraries and institutions in North America and Europe US\$75.

Libraries and institutions elsewhere in the world US\$50.

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Cover design: Brad Collicott

Published in Canada
ISSN 0143-5558

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In the Next Issue

The 3/2015 issue of *Media Development* will focus on “Better communication for a better world”, in which ten students at the Centre for Communication and Social Change of the University of Queensland, Australia, offer reflections and ideas.

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The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) fall due in 2015 and many people are asking what happens next? What is the plan and what are the priorities? This has become known as the “post-2015” debate. Yet, search the official documents and there is very little to be found relating to the role communication rights, mass and social media are to play in this brave new world.

In 2012 the United Nations (UN) Conference on Sustainable Development, took place in Brazil. Known as Rio+20, it agreed to establish an “Open Working Group” of government representatives to make a set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). A key question was how the SDGs would relate to or advance the earlier MDGs.

In August 2014 the Open Working Group on SDGs reported to the UN General Assembly, setting out 17 goals for the period 2015 to 2030:

1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere.
2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture.
3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.
4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.
5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.
6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.
7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all.
8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.
9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation.
10. Reduce inequality within and among countries.
11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.
12. Ensure sustainable consumption and pro-

duction patterns.

13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.

14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.

15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.

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.

17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development.



Once again communication received short shrift, with barely a mention under Goal 16, “Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms” – presumably including freedom of expression and opinion.

This happened despite many UN-related agencies and most civil society organisations agreeing that strengthening communications, independent and pluralistic media, and improving access to information and communication technologies play an essential role in the development of today’s in-

formation societies and communities.

The year 2015 also marks the 15th anniversary of UN Security Council resolution 1325, a landmark legal and political framework acknowledging the importance of the participation of women and the inclusion of gender perspectives in all aspects of peace-building. UNSCR 1325 recognizes that exclusion from peace processes infringes women's rights.

Despite a broad commitment to gender-inclusive and women's-rights-based approaches to peace processes, the role of media in portraying peace process, particularly those involving or impacting women, is little understood.

On 4 December 2014 UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon published his synthesis report "On the Post-2015 Agenda." He wrote:

"We are at a historic crossroads, and the directions we take will determine whether we will succeed or fail in our promises. With our globalized economy and sophisticated technology, we can decide to end the age-old ills of extreme poverty and hunger. Or we can continue to degrade our planet and allow intolerable inequalities to sow bitterness and despair. Our ambition is to achieve sustainable development for all... Never before has the world had to face such a complex agenda in a single year. And this unique opportunity will not come again in our generation."

None of these noble aspirations will come about unless people are able to communicate their dreams, concerns, and needs – locally, nationally, regionally, globally. The obstacles are many: social, cultural, political, ideological, yet communication can help overcome them all unless it is silenced, censored, and repressed.

Communication clearly underpins sustainable development and requires equitable access to information and knowledge, to information and communication technologies, as well as plurality and diversity in the media. Without it, the post-2015 agenda may take a wrong turn. ■

Setting a media agenda in the post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals

Fackson Banda

As the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) come under review in 2015, the world has a new opportunity for articulating clear goals and targets for post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals. The Rio+20 outcome document, The future we want,¹ provided for the establishment of an Open Working Group (OWG) on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Comprising 30 representatives nominated by Member States from the five United Nations regional groups and co-chaired by Csaba Kőrösi (Hungary) and Macharia Kamau (Kenya), the OWG has since proposed a series of 17 goals and associated targets published in its outcome document.²

The process of articulating the proposals has been marked by give-and-take among UN member states – certainly not an easy task, given the way paragraph 247 of the Rio+20 outcome document frames the manner in which the task of elaborating such goals should be approached. It states that the SDGs should be action-oriented, concise, easy to communicate, limited in number, aspirational, global in nature and universally applicable to all countries while taking into account different national realities, capacities and levels of development and respecting national policies and priorities.

Of particular concern to UNESCO is proposed Goal 16 and its associated Target 10. The goal is to "Promote peaceful and inclusive soci-

eties for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.” Target 16.10 aims to “ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements.”³

Therefore, my main concern in this article is two-fold. First, I would like to undertake a conceptual analysis of Target 16.10 itself. This is necessary because there appears to be a tendency to focus on one aspect of this target to the near exclusion of other, equally more important issues encapsulated therein. Second, I want to underline UNESCO’s potential role in leading measuring and monitoring of this target, drawing on its track record in promoting free, independent and pluralistic media globally. My conclusion is that, while the proposed goal and target would seem to reflect media-related issues in the way that the MDGs did not, there is sufficient international precedence to warrant such a reflection – and more.

Analysing the goal and its target

Proposed goal 16 aims to “Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.” For its part, proposed target 16.10 aims to “ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements.”

Conceptually, there are two intertwined aspects to this target – both of which are linked to broader questions of how citizens’ freedom to access information, largely facilitated by free, independent and pluralistic media, is an integral part of governance that in turn is a prerequisite for sustainable development. These two intertwined elements are the “right to information” and “fundamental freedoms”. More importantly, Target 16.10 includes a contextualised implementation of these rights, namely that national legislation relating to public access to information and the enjoyment of fundamental freedoms should be in line with “international agreements”. This is important in at least two respects.

For one thing, in terms of national legislation, there is evidence, as UNESCO’s report on *World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development* reminds us, of a “predominant trend towards the adoption of freedom of and/or access to information laws (FOI)’ over the last decade.”⁴ For another, even as the vast majority of countries around the world have constitutional guarantees for freedom of expression, the media and journalists, including their online and citizen journalist counterparts, are facing growing legal constraints in many parts of the world, which include defamation, slander, insult and other laws which do not meet “international standards for legitimate limitations on freedom of expression”.

Such a lacuna in practice poses a danger to the actual and possible realisation of the “fundamental freedoms” envisaged in target 16.10. What must be underscored, then, is that “national legislation”, under this target, must be consistent with “international agreements”. This leads me to the question of whether or not there is sufficient international precedence to support this thesis. The answer is a categorical yes, as I demonstrate below.

Unpacking international agreements: precedents

There is a plethora of precedents at international law that can serve as part of measuring and monitoring compliance between national legislation and international agreements. For example, we can confidently say that target 16.10 will serve to reinforce the right to freedom of expression, which is not only recognized as a basic human right in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,⁵ but is also upheld in the European Convention on Human Rights,⁶ the American Convention on Human Rights⁷ and the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights,⁸ thus lending itself to universal political recognition and application.

The particular relevance of the right, and its associated rights to press freedom as well as access to information and sustainable development has been underlined in many reports, including the UN Secretary General’s recent synthesis report,⁹ and this argument continues to merit being

underlined.

Therefore, in addressing this target, we need to guard against the temptation to overplay the element of “public access to information”, and downplay the aspect of “fundamental freedoms”. In this regard, it is worth citing a revised draft report by the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN), which seeks to provide a framework for developing indicators for SDGs.¹⁰ Two important arguments may be made here. The first is that the report proposes an indicator on the safety of journalists, but treats it as one of several “Complementary National Indicators”, rather than as a stand-alone primary indicator. Giving it such a status under-recognizes it as a key factor in relation to development issues in general. And, by so relegating it to a lowly status, its relevance to “fundamental freedoms” and its importance to the “right to information” are under-highlighted.

When journalists are silenced, societies as a whole (i) lose confidence in their right to safely express themselves on development issues, and (ii) lose out on their right to information due to the removal and intimidation of journalists as key information providers to the public. It would thus be preferable to elevate this indicator.

Indeed, it is this conceptual interconnection between citizen’s access to information and the attendant enjoyment of fundamental freedoms which the 2013 report of the UN Secretary-General’s 27-member High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda sought to highlight. The report was unequivocal in linking good governance to such democratic fundamentals as people enjoying freedom of speech, association, peaceful protest and access to independent media and information; increasing public participation in political processes and civic

Media training is a crucial part of ensuring that young journalists uphold press freedom. Photo: capacity4dev.eu



engagement at all levels; guaranteeing the public's right to information and access to government data; and reducing bribery and corruption and ensuring officials can be held accountable.¹¹

In this vein, it is important for us to underscore that target 16.10 has important ramifications for the governance agenda, including helping the international community to:

Acknowledge the significance of free expression as both a goal of development and a means to development.

Ensure press freedom both online and offline, and providing for a media system on all platforms which is free, pluralistic and independent as a means to optimise the role of communications and information in development.

Ensure the existence and implementation of a national law and/or constitutional guarantee on the right to information, including guaranteeing that all laws are publicized and accessible by all.

Ensure the safety of journalists and the combating of impunity for crimes against them, as recognized in a UN resolution in November 2013, by highlighting the number of journalists, associated media personnel and human rights defenders killed, kidnapped or disappeared, unlawfully detained and tortured, as a result of pursuing their legitimate activities.

Strengthening an enabling environment for free, independent and pluralistic media, as a guarantee of media sustainability, including through quality journalism education.

Going forward: Carving out a role for UNESCO

Against this conceptual background underpinning target 16.10, let me now highlight the particular role that UNESCO sees itself playing in accounting for and monitoring the implementation of the target. UNESCO has already been active in pushing for a more robust recognition of free, independent and pluralistic media in any post-2015 package of SDGs. As early as 2013, UNESCO authored a think-piece on the role of media in strengthening democracy and development. Titled "Beyond 2015: Media as democracy and development" this writing formed part of the

Organization's contribution to the first round of the "World We Want 2015" e-consultations in January 2013 during Phase 1: What should be the governance building blocks for a post-2015 agenda?¹²

This intellectual input formed a part of a keynote address given by our then director of the UNESCO Regional Science Bureau for Asia and the Pacific at a panel session on "Taking more action for sustainable development: can media help?" during the Asia Media Summit (2013) in Manado. This event was attended by high-level government officials, including the Indonesian and the Cambodian Minister of Communication and Information, several ambassadors, and prominent media experts. In this regard, it may be recalled that H.E. Mr. Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, then President of Indonesia (where the 2013 Asia Media Summit took place), was one of the Co-Chairs of the Secretary-General's High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda.

But more importantly, UNESCO already monitors, on a global basis and with clear indicators, the safety of journalists on an annual basis, and the right of access to information every four years. Such information is an important contribution to monitoring sustainable development in the post-2015 period. In this regard, UNESCO will seek to draw on existing institutionalised data sets, which have been presented as part of the accountability mechanism envisaged under the UN System Task Team on the Post-2015 Development Agenda. In no specific order, these include the following.

UNESCO Media Development Indicators: This is a framework for assessing national media development, endorsed by the intergovernmental Council of UNESCO's International Programme for the Development of Communication (IPDC). Two of the five categories of this framework – *A system of regulation conducive to freedom of expression, pluralism and diversity of the media* as well as *Media as a platform for democratic discourse* – include indicators on "a national law and/or constitutional guarantee on the right to information" and "journalists, associated media personnel and

human rights defenders killed, kidnapped or disappeared, unlawfully detained and tortured, as a result of pursuing their legitimate activities.” The Media Development Indicators are being piloted in 12 countries, with assessments ongoing in another 19 countries. The most recent assessment reports to have been published are those of Palestine, Nepal, Gabon, Egypt and Tunisia.

World Trends in Freedom of Expression and Media Development: This report offers a new look at recent evolutions in media freedom, independence, pluralism, journalist safety and gender.

UNESCO Journalist Safety Indicators: Developed within the context of the endorsement of the UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity by the UN Chief Executives Board. Furthermore, it has been welcomed by the UN General Assembly. It provides a framework for action at national and international levels of relevance to the nexus of the rule of law and freedom of expression. Within this context, the purpose of the JSI indicators is to pinpoint significant matters that show, or impact upon, the safety of journalists and the issue of impunity. The JSIs serve to identify the actions that are taken by the various relevant stakeholders in promoting journalists’ safety and fighting impunity at national level.

These actors include the UN, State and political actors, civil society organizations and academics, and media and intermediaries. It should be noted that the indicators are not intended as a universal model, but rather as signalling a range of relevant items that can serve the purpose of mapping and understanding. They are therefore descriptive and are for the purpose of analysis not prescription. Not every indicator is relevant or even desirable in every context. However, any published findings should indicate the cases in which indicators have not been included for reasons of either suitability or absence of data.

Universal Periodic Review (UPR): The UPR is a unique process which involves a periodic review of the human rights records of all 193 UN Member States. The UPR is a significant innovation of the Human Rights Council which is based on equal treatment for all countries. It provides an oppor-

tunity for all States to declare what actions they have taken to improve the human rights situations in their countries and to overcome challenges to the enjoyment of human rights. The UPR also includes a sharing of best human rights practices around the globe. Currently, no other mechanism of this kind exists. *UNESCO contributes data on freedom of expression, including constitutional guarantees thereof, in addition to tracking killings of journalists.*

An important point to note is that, in terms of data gathering and analysis, all these UNESCO reports are triangulated with other data sources, including those from the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights (Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression), International Journalists’ Network (international directory of constitutional provisions on the media), Pew Global Attitudes Project (a series of worldwide public opinion surveys), MediaWise (project on public trust in the media), International Federation of Journalists (annual reports on journalists and media staff killed), etc.

What this means, in effect, is that UNESCO’s data sets draw from a well-established internationally diverse institutional arrangement for data collection and monitoring. For example, as noted already, at the international level, the United Nations Human Rights Council, through its Universal Periodic Review, monitors national adherence to freedom of expressions. UNESCO monitors freedom of expression-related aspects of the UPR. At the regional level, taking the example of Africa, the African Charter creates an African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights, which allows for interstate complaints and even envisions the receipt of individual communications. In particular, the Office of the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression in Africa has been expanded to include the question of public access to information, which makes this institutional innovation better able to deal with the “freedom of information” data requirements of target 16.10.

In Europe, the human rights regime is embodied in the Council of Europe. Personal, legal, and political rights are enshrined in the 1950 European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and its

Protocols, while economic and social rights are laid down in the 1961 European Social Charter. They both reflect the norms of the Universal Declaration. The decision-making procedures of the European regime are effective, especially the strong monitoring powers of the European Commission on Human Rights and the authoritative decision-making powers of the European Court of Human Rights, which would ensure a degree of policy coherence in as far as monitoring for compliance may be required under target 16.10.

A final word: At the time of preparing this article, an initial technical report, prepared by the UN TST and submitted to the UN Statistics Division, had been shared with National Statistics Offices for possible consideration. That report forcefully refers to the safety of journalists as a possible proxy for freedom of expression and freedom of the press – a key concern of the IPDC. It also includes elements relating to ensuring public access to information and the formulation of freedom of information laws, where these do not exist. The UN Statistical Commission is set to deliberate on this draft report, and UNESCO, working with a coalition of international civil society organisations (including the Global Forum for Media Development [GFMD]), will continue to champion the recognition and inclusion of freedom of expression, freedom of the press as well as access to information. ■

Footnotes

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12. The think piece can be accessed at: <http://www.worldwewant2015.org/node/273401>. Similarly, a discussion brief on the subject, reproduced from a larger paper, can be accessed at: http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/HQ/CI/CI/pdf/news/free_media_post_2015.pdf.

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Putting a human rights perspective on the post-2015 agenda

Julia Duchrow

By September 2015 the member states of the UN have to agree on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which will replace the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to combat poverty. The process started with various reports of different stakeholders, in which recommendations for a follow-up framework were gathered.

In this preparation phase the private sector was given a prominent role to develop ideas and recommendations,¹ for example through a White Paper by its Global Compact network. One widely discussed report was that of a panel of eminent persons from civil society, private sector and government, under the co-chair among other of David Cameron, the so-called “High Level Panel” report. In December 2014, the UN Secretary General presented his synthesis report on a sustainable development agenda, which aggregated and valued the different reports in preparation for sustainable development goals. Though the report offers a synthesis of the various reports, it is mainly based on the work of the intergovernmental 30-member “Open Working Group” of the General Assembly of the UN.

The report of this working group, as well as the synthesis report, have been positively received by civil society, because unlike previous MDGs, the defined goals introduce a human rights perspective and refer to human rights standards. In previous reports, like the High Level Panel report of eminent persons of 2013, this perspective was not taken into account in any depth. The proposed goals were not based on human rights standards,

which in the field of HIV/AIDS for example, led to recommendations, and therefore used standards, below the agreed-upon UN standards in this area.

Since the Goals have to be agreed upon in September 2015, the states actually entered into a crucial phase of negotiations and, in February 2015, the second round of discussions of the member states started on the SDGs. The main discussion in this round focused on a declaration heading the SDGs and which will introduce the vision that inspires them.

The role of human rights in the process

From a human rights perspective, one precondition to end poverty and achieve sustainable development is to focus on overcoming inequalities, relying on existing human rights standards. The reason for this is that the standards have been agreed upon through a long process of negotiations and in many cases are universally applicable. The other reason lies in the nature of human rights, which define rights holders and duty bearers: It is a system that makes the resources that have to be allocated and the individual rights that have to be fulfilled very clear and predictable. Furthermore, with regard to a strong right to non-discrimination, this is an important tool to overcome inequalities because resources cannot be allocated in a discriminatory manner.

Since poverty in the last phase of the fulfilment of the MDGs has been reduced in some areas, the disparities in the allocation of resources and goods and, therefore, inequalities among rich and poor have increased. This phenomenon can be seen globally, but is also the case in fast-growing economies. This has an influence not only on the way the economic, social and cultural rights of all people are respected, for example when it comes to the supply of basic services by the state, like water and other infrastructure, but also greatly influences respect for and protection of political and civil rights. Through a lack of cohesion, for example, conflicts increase. In many countries, for those who oppose a system of exclusion and inequality, the possibility to protest and to organise counter activities has been restricted as result too.

Rooting the goals in human rights standards (which is supported by many civil society organizations) will make sure that the right to food, to clean water and to meaningful education are met. It will be of the utmost importance that the Sustainable Development Goals be a binding instrument, so that governments cannot implement them in a “pick and choose” fashion, but only by looking at the goals as a unit.

The synthesis report of the UN General Secretary

The synthesis report “The Road to Dignity 2013” is mainly structured around the report of the Open Working Group of member states. It addresses the fact that combating poverty can only be dealt with in a coherent manner by taking into account the causes of poverty. These include climate change, conflict and instability, the lack of rule of law, and a global economic system which benefits a minority at the expense of the majority. As Oxfam notes in its 2014 report “Working for the Few”, the 85 richest people in the world own as much wealth as the 50% poorest of the world population.

It was significant in the previous negotiating process in the “Open Working” Group that states realised that the SDGs will be an instrument to overcome injustice and poverty in all countries both in the Global South and in the North. This means that the goals will have to be met in all countries, regardless of whether they are high or low income. This understanding will lead to greater ownership of the process in the future.



The report places strong emphasis on the protection of dignity for all. In connection with this, CSOs welcomed the fact that the protection of dignity of all in the work place has to be a core element to fulfil Goal 8. It will be important to keep that commitment in the final report in order to overcome very worrying working situations in many areas. These areas include the garment industry, the mining industry and the agricultural industry, for example in the use of pesticides which cause disease for farm workers.

It is remarkable, and shows a coherent approach to development, that the synthesis report of the General Secretary has a strong focus on peace as an important factor for development. Under the heading “Justice: To Promote Safe and Peaceful Societies and Strong Institutions” the report emphasises the need to rebuild and reintegrate societies after conflict and the fact that fragility has to be assessed. Since, in many countries, violent conflict around resources like land are major factors hampering development, it is crucial that states see this relation and focus on civil conflict resolution. This also means that a future set of SDGs will have to address the question of arms deals which fuel further conflicts and which are, therefore, a great obstacle to sustainable development.

The next stage of the negotiating process, as the General Secretary sees it, will be through negotiations in the Open Working Group. At the end of February, the group decided on a declaration which set the vision and the tone of the SDGs. The report has been received with good will by CSOs. However, NGOs in Germany made it clear that the

report is the bottom line and reflects minimum standards, which should not be lowered in the following negotiation process, but should be aimed higher.

Expectations of civil society

Even if the synthesis report can be seen as a good start for a further negotiation phase, the call from civil society organisations is to address the structural reasons which produce inequality and poverty. This report, and previous reports preparing the process, have all very much relied on an economic growth paradigm. In the preparation period for the negotiations on the SDGs, as mentioned above, the private sector had a big role in the preparations for the drafting of the SDGs. Various preparatory reports, like the Global Compact, were drafted by members of the business community and by eminent members of the High Level Panel. These reports fell short of a human rights guided perspective and did not refer to universally accepted human rights standards.

Taking planetary boundaries into consideration, this cannot be a model for sustainable development, simply because of the limits which we have and which we have already reached in many areas. But recent years have also shown that a belief in a possible “trickle down effect” of economic growth to all people to combat inequalities, instability and poverty has not worked. A post 2015 framework will therefore only create sustainable development, if it implements a socio-ecological transformation and doesn’t support a model for “green growth” in a capitalist world economy.

A future SDG framework to overcome poverty has to make sure that all measures take into account what impact they will have on marginalised groups and ensure that no one is left out. Under the heading “leave no one behind”, a group of 282 NGOs from all over the world have, therefore, signed a common statement calling on states to put this aspect at the core of the framework.

A key element to secure development is creating an enabling environment for civil society to participate in development. This asks for the rule of law in a country, but means also taking the right to participate very seriously, allowing meaningful

participation and not seeing civil society as mere “input” givers in local and small issues, but also in bigger development projects and to allow protest and criticism as well. Those whom development should serve should be at the centre of any development projects. Strong institutions – which are frequently mentioned as an important factor for development – cannot alone guarantee the protection of human rights standards.

What is also needed is a document that defines sustainable development goals in a coherent manner, taking into account socio-economic, ecological and peace aspects and combining them meaningfully. Furthermore, meaningful change can only be achieved through a new development agenda, if a strong monitoring mechanism is implemented as well as clear financial commitments by the member states. Otherwise, there will be the danger that the report remains a mere statement of goodwill.

The path the SDGs will take is not yet set and remains open. It gives hope though, that the discussion paper for a declaration of the new framework will recognise the need to integrate poverty, inequality, climate change and conflict. It also carefully asks a post-2015 framework to be in line with UN values. For a final document this can only be the bottom line: that sustainable development goals are based on existing human rights standards, the implementation of the goals are well monitored, and accountability mechanisms are put in place to ensure that we take a great step towards a better life in dignity for all. ■

Note

1. Global Policy Forum, Brot für die Welt, Misereor: Corporate Influence in the Post-2015 Process, January 2014.

Julia Duchrow heads the human rights and peace unit of Bread for the World (BFW), Germany. After completing a doctoral thesis on international law and the protection of minorities, and before joining BFW, she worked for ten years as a political asylum officer for Amnesty International.

Youth Voices on a Post-2015 World

DFID/CSO Youth Working Group

The Department for International Development (DFID) in the United Kingdom works with youth groups to study young people's rights and realities. What follows is the executive summary of a report published in 2013 looking at what should follow the Millennium Development Goals.

The global conversation on a post-2015 world is one of the most important debates of our time: any development framework agreed by UN member states in 2015 / 2016 will guide future policies and spending on development, not only in developing countries -- where over 87% of the population is under 25 - but also globally. As youth-led and youth-focused agencies working internationally, we see no sense in discussing future development goals without recognising the role that young people can and must play as assets and problem-solvers in development.

Our top priority for the post-2015 process has been to ensure that young people with fewer opportunities, including young people living in poverty, conflict or post-conflict situations, and/or those living far from global decision-makers, are able to have their voices heard in the post-MDG agenda.

Youth Voices on a Post-2015 World is the result of youth consultations that were run in 12 countries globally from October 2012 to January 2013 to understand young people's views on what should come after the Millennium Development Goals. 346 young people were given the space to discuss the local and global issues of importance to them, and articulate their solutions and visions for a world beyond 2015.

Delivered through a global network of 14 youth-led and youth-focused partners, these

consultations have engaged diverse groups of young people rarely present in global or national policy-making processes. We are confident that this innovative collaboration has provided a depth of analysis and understanding rarely seen; offering access and insight on the world that young people want, and showing that young people can and must be a leading part of the solution.

Following a youth-led analysis workshop in February 2013 to identify the common themes in young people's discussions, this report summarises the findings.

Visions and principles for a post-2015 world

Through the youth consultations a picture emerged of how young people envision a better world post-2015. Presented here is a summary of individual visions and discussions collected from the youth consultations in 12 countries worldwide:

"We see a world that values diversity, environmental sustainability and active participation by all citizens. A world that operates an economic system based on fairness and equality, where everyone feels safe and has access to basic services such as health and education and where the standards of those services are high no matter what people's background or economic situation. No young person in this world would be excluded or marginalised because of gender, ethnicity, disability or sexual orientation. Young people in this world are incorporated into decision making processes and given access to the levers of power regardless of their background."

We have identified 11 principles in the consultations that underpin the world we want. The most important of these is equality and freedom for all, regardless of gender, disability or where you are on the social spectrum. Closely related to this are principles of non-violence and respect for diversity. Environmental sustainability was one of the top three principles globally and was seen as enabling the achievement of many goals.

Crucially a post-2015 framework should ensure that concern for sustainability underpins other targets. The right to access basic services such as health and education was also important. Taking responsibility and ensuring accountability also play a key role in principles that relate to governance, the economy and civic participation.

Issues to be addressed and their solutions

Many of the important issues identified by young people related closely to the underpinning principles. For example, ineffective governance and corruption was the most widely mentioned issue across all consultations. The discussions also included issues that are not explicitly mentioned in the principles or visioning discussions, such as poverty, food and nutrition, and infrastructure.

Young people put forward a great number of solutions for resolving these problems and most have implications for all stakeholders in development, not only governments. Five common themes amongst the solutions were identified by the analysis team:

- **Sensitize:** Raise awareness to promote human rights, respect for others, support equality and protect the environment.
- **Empower People:** Support wide scale civic participation, proper representation, accountability and knowledge of human rights.
- **Harness Technology:** Use technology and promote innovation to enable, support and strengthen solutions and their reach.
- **Collaborate:** Build effective relationships from local to international levels to support solutions across issues and amongst everyone involved.
- **Reform Institutions:** Review and reform systems across education, health, governance and infrastructure (to ensure access to basic human securities).

What next?

Our consultation results are being used by young people and youth-led / youth-focused organisations to shape national, regional and international conversations on the world we want post-2015.

Youth engagement has been much more visible in the post-2015 process than it was during the formulation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs): young people have been involved in national and thematic consultations and have taken part in discussions with the UN High Level Panel in London, November 2012, and Monrovia, January 2013.

The next challenge for the post-2015 process is to go beyond creating the space for participation and ensure that young people's input is reflected in the final outcome. Our next step is to present the highlights of this report directly to the UN High Level Panel at their fourth meeting in Bali, March 2013, and to develop an influencing strategy that ensures that the voices in this report are fed into the global conversation from now on.

In doing so, we want to demonstrate that youth consultations delivered through collaboration between youth-led and youth-focused organisations globally can and must be replicated across all policy frameworks. Our ultimate goal is to contribute to the development of a holistic framework that is responsive to the needs and rights of young people and enables them to play a leading role in addressing the most important issues facing their countries and the world. ■

This project was initiated by members of the DFID / CSO Youth Working Group and would not have been possible without the support of the Youth in Action Programme of the European Union. The activities were co-funded by the Youth DFID PPA Consortium led by Restless Development, with War Child and Youth Business International.

Gender and peace after 2015

Valentina Baú

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have represented a crucial framework in international development since their establishment in the year 2000. Two of their key strengths have been their ability to articulate complex development challenges in eight clear goals (while, at the same time, offering indicators for their measurement) and that of shifting the public focus on critical global issues.

Not only has this successfully raised awareness about and drawn enormous attention to problems that had until then been often neglected by donors in the North, but it has also succeeded in generating a commitment from governments in the Global South, whose accountability in the achievement of the goals is seen as an important component.

While Goal 3 is one that explicitly refers to gender (“Promote gender equality and empower women”, mainly in relation to literacy and education), it has been recognised that one of the shortcomings of the MDGs is their overall lack of a clear gender dimension. Even with the inclusion in Goal 5 of another issue that is high on women’s rights agenda (“Improve maternal health”) it can be said that there is no clear reference to gender equality across the spectrum, and to how it should be achieved.

In addition to that, the nature of the MDGs is such that progress in one has an impact on progress in all the others. Hence, working towards overcoming gender disparity means working towards the achievement of all Goals.

A strong argument¹ has been that the application of a human rights-based approach to the implementation of the Goals would have allowed for the enforcement of processes that are based on

equality; for the prioritisation of marginalised and vulnerable communities; and for the participation of all groups in the design of development strategies.

The failure to integrate human rights standards in the MDGs has led to an unequal type of development, which does not take into account all segments of the population. Indigenous people, for example, are not mentioned in any of the Goals; and how or whether these have benefitted indigenous women in particular is yet to be clarified.

Another missing element in the MDGs is that of conflict and state fragility. Peace and development are also interlinked, and the prevention of conflict (and how to address it in a way that is inclusive) should be a major commitment to take on within a global development framework.

The issue with post-conflict realities

Since 2001, shortly after the establishment of the MDGs and their launch at the global level, the course of conflicts has begun to take a catastrophic direction. From the US-led wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the multitude of civil conflicts in the African region, the environment in which the Goals were conceived has changed.

Further social and economic problems have affected the already poor countries of the world, and brought about unforeseen circumstances in the implementation of the MDGs. One among them is the situation that takes shape for both men and women in countries affected by large-scale violence, particularly after the end of the armed fighting. It is in this scenario that the consequences of the absence of a valid gender dimension become more visible.

The under-representation of women and their lack of voice in processes of peace-building and reconstruction in the aftermath of conflict is deeply concerning. Not only do women represent a large amount of the population in conflict-affected areas, but they also make up a large share of the potential victims of the conflict. Their exclusion violates their human rights and makes them subject of discrimination.

Sotik-Borabu women peace drive in Kenya. Photo: Valentina Baú.

Reconstruction is a complex process for which most government institutions are unprepared. In the struggle to reconstruct themselves, these institutions pay little attention to gender as an element of peace-building, and pre-existing structures characterised by male-dominance are perpetuated. Moreover, the significance of women's contribution to peace is seldom understood and nurtured.

What needs to be fostered is the opportunity for social change that comes with the reconstruction process, and to assign women a more prominent role in the various activities that are in place. Through points 2 and 3 of its [2013 Declaration](#), the Peace-building Commission of the UN General Assembly Security Council has affirmed the significance of committing to:

“Emphasis[ing] the importance of sustaining political momentum behind ongoing peace-building processes, promoting gender equality and promoting and protecting the human rights of women”;

“Underlin[ing] the critical role of women in preventing conflicts and supporting, participating in and carrying out peace-building initiatives and post-conflict reconstruction, as well as actively working towards post-conflict economic recovery”.

Another important angle that needs to be applied to a discussion on gender in post-conflict contexts is one that recognises gender as concept that involves both men and women, and how they



relate to one another. This perspective allows us to regard both men and women as victims, perpetrators, and supporter of the violence, while at the same time bringing to light their contribution to peace²

It also makes it possible to address issues of masculinities and male vulnerabilities that are key in the achievement of a sustainable peace, and to recognise that women can participate actively in the conflict too. This “relational” approach clarifies “how people’s responses to violent conflict are shaped by their gender identity, and thus provides clues as to how such responses can be modified”.³ Finally, it is a useful framework in which future policies and recommendations on gender and peace-building should be formulated.

The post-2015 agenda: Reflections and challenges

Gender-based inequalities in education, health and political representation around the world are still persistent. One of the questions that have been raised in the post-2015 debate is not only whether or not a goal on gender is realistic, but how effectively we can continue to mainstream gender issues into broader policies.

Some argue that offering guidance for gender mainstreaming will not work, as context-specific circumstances affect individual countries. The

issue of whether or not we should move towards a universal agenda that is more detailed and encompassing is therefore at stake.

The other challenge involves gaining the political commitment of national governments to adopt gender-sensitive indicators and at the same time to release sex-disaggregated data. Measuring gender-responsiveness is a complex process, but one that we need to master if we wish to continue focusing on progress. In an interview with the [Guardian](#), Deputy Director of UN Women John Hendra observed:

“The things that are difficult to measure are often the most important. If we are going to move towards a more transformative agenda there is a dichotomy we have to address: many say the MDGs are easy to measure but they don’t really address the deep-seated challenges that communities and societies face. To do that we have to ... focus on getting baselines in place by January 2016, and the best we can do as a broad development community in measuring the most difficult areas. ... We need to be able to much better track where programmes resources go in terms of targeting gender equality and involving women.”

In addition to that, in order to advocate for the inclusion of a specific dimension of gender and conflict in the post-2015 framework, we need to make evident the connection between peace, security, good governance and economic recovery on one side, and women’s empowerment and gender equality on the other side. While data on the social and political situation of women are already weak at the global level, they become even scarcer in conflict-affected contexts.

In the debate surrounding the inclusion (or exclusion) of a peace and security goal in the post-2015 agenda, as explained in a [UN Women Peace and Security Report](#), no specific attention has been paid to how men and women experience conflict differently. In particular, the report highlights how the choice of violent deaths as an indicator for conflict fails to incorporate a gender perspec-

tive. Sexual violence is, in fact, not inescapably lethal, and yet represents one of the most violent forms of warfare. It also overlooks other forms of violence women endure during conflict, such as mass rape, starvation and displacement.

At the same time, the [African Women’s Steering Committee on Post-2015 Agenda](#), comprising a number of different national and international organisations operating in the African region, has highlighted how the new framework must advocate for the implementation of “gender



Fulani women at a village meeting. Photo: PANOS.

parity laws in existing regional and international commitments by ensuring an enabling environment for women in order to realise equal participation, representation and inclusion in decision-making, leadership, governance, peace building and post-conflict reconstruction processes.”

Another important point raised by the Committee is to “[s]trengthen and consolidate women’s participation, skills and expertise in all forms of the media and to eliminate media coverage that condones gender stereotyping and myths by redressing relevant laws on freedom of information and communication”.

Why communication matters

As the previous paragraph has reminded us, media and communication have an important and active role to play when it comes to promoting gender equality and communicating

women's rights. Yet, their impact is often neglected, with little resources being allocated to their use. This is also clearly marked through their absence from the MDG framework.

The issue with media and communication is that they are seldom regarded as a distinct, significant, strategic area. Most agencies still conceive their function as naturally intertwined with some of their programme's activities, not requiring a specialised and context-specific design. Conversely, media and communication channels should be developed through accurate research on the context they are being applied to, considering its cultural, social, political and technological environment. This is particularly important in post-conflict realities, where the need for accurate information and for the dissemination of a message of peace is central.

From a mainstream media perspective, gender equality in peace-building can be promoted by portraying the truthful role that women can (or do) play in the reconstruction process. Broadcasting women's voices and concerns, showing their involvement in peace-related activities, and highlighting their contribution to peace at the household level is helpful in achieving a progressive change in society's mindset on the significance of their inclusion.

From a communication perspective, providing a safe space where both men and women can talk about their experience of the violence, creating opportunities for dialogue between opposing groups of the same gender, and allowing for an exchange of reflections among opposite genders is useful in creating an environment that is conducive to peace. At the same time, the use of both new and traditional technologies can be tailored to create platforms for men and women to share their stories, identify a possible way forward, and begin to heal.

While these are only some of the benefits that a communication approach can bring to gender and peace, we need to recognise that a successful post-2015 agenda will be one that not simply takes into account the complexity of post-

conflict realities, but that also acknowledges the different experiences and assets of those who have endured violence, and uses the media and communication for positive change. ■

Notes

1. Dorsey, E., Gómez, M., Thiele, B. and Nelson, P. (2010) *Falling Short of our Goals: transforming the Millennium Development Goals into Millennium Development Rights*, Netherlands Quarterly of Human Rights, Vol.28, No.4, pp.516-522.
2. El-Bushra, J. (2012) *Gender in Peacebuilding. Taking stock*, International Alert, London.
3. Myrtilinen, H., Naujoks, J. and El-Bushra, J. (2014) *Re-thinking Gender in Peacebuilding*, International Alert, London, p.8.

Valentina Baú works as a lecturer and researcher at the University of New South Wales (Sydney, Australia). Both as a practitioner and as a researcher, her work has focused on the use of communication in development. She has completed a PhD at Macquarie University on the role of participatory media in conflict transformation and reconciliation after civil violence. Her present research explores different approaches and evaluation methodologies in the area of Communication for Development in Peacebuilding. In the past, Valentina has collaborated with different international NGOs, the United Nations and the Italian Development Cooperation, while living in various African countries. Her work has been published on various academic journals as well as renowned online platforms. Research profile page: <https://unsw.academia.edu/ValentinaBaú>

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Nepal needs better communications to respond to disaster

K.R. Sigdel and Dol Raj Kafle

When earthquakes hit Kathmandu, the only thing everybody wants to do is to communicate. Everyone wants to make sure their family members and friends are safe. This first-hand report of local conditions was published on WACC's web site within days of the first earthquake in Nepal.

People wanted to know the scale of damage to their property, loss of lives and the situation in their community (the toll exceeded 8,000, injured over 17,000, and damaged over 400,000 houses). The government apparatus had to be mobilized and that required communication.

For rescue and relief, reaching out to the affected people was the first priority. However,

for obvious reasons, the entire public communication system had almost crashed for hours after the quake. There was no electricity, no wifi and no telephone working for over a week in remote areas. Mobiles, which everyone had, were useless for the first few days.

State-owned Radio Nepal was the only mass media functioning after the earthquake as it had a sturdy building. After few hours, a few stations that had their buildings intact continued to broadcast. Others shut down and many others collapsed during the quake. Television was not accessible to many, as it required power supply and people had to stay inside to watch. Aftershocks kept the people out in the open for almost a week and during that time radio was the main medium.

Radio Nepal, followed by few some other radio stations, soon started broadcasting news which not only included the death toll, injuries and damages but also crucial announcements, notices from the Government's disaster response authority. Radio became the major means of mass

*A scene in Kathmandu following the first earthquake.
Photo: K. R. Sigdel.*



communication, although it was mostly one way. The radio stations faced the challenge of continuing their broadcasts amid fear of aftershocks in order to dispel rumours and help rescue and relief operations.

Radio Nepal did an exemplary job in communicating rescue and relief needs to the Home Ministry from across all affected areas. When the second earthquake shook much of the country, damaging 80% of the houses in Sindhupalchowk (the most affected area), communications became more complicated and difficult, and it deteriorated international aid/rescue works flocked in, just at a time when everyone needed more specific, clear and accurate information.

Communication for rescue work

In the first week after the quake, the priority was to rescue people who were trapped and alive. However, as there was no emergency means of communication, the rescue operations faced challenges. Many lives would have been saved had there been any emergency means of contract for the people to call the rescue team and a system of prompt response.

People in remote areas were completely cut off. It was impossible to travel, which had come to a standstill because of landsides and fear of more to come. Even if some managed to communicate to the rescue team, it was too big a task for a small team to handle. It would take months if other international rescue teams had not arrived.

Local people and organizations, including the international organizations, started distributing immediate relief, mostly food and tents to the people. However, relief mainly went to people who were close by and were accessible by road. Those in remote areas and in places where there was no road or it was damaged could not receive anything.

While it was realized by the Nepal Risk Reduction Consortium (NRRC) that “communication on disaster risk reduction should be harmonized to avoid mixed messages to the public, avoid confusion, and maximize impact”, it was far from being implemented due to a lack of any such agreed upon communication strategy or even awareness

Remote rural areas of Nepal were the most isolated and difficult to access. Photo: K. R. Sigdel.



of such a policy initiative.

Secondly, due to lack of communication, those who wanted to distribute relief could not receive information on what kind of relief the people needed. That resulted in distribution of excess or unnecessary materials in some areas and nothing in other areas in the first week: causing angry protests, looting and violence.

Proper communications dispels rumours

“Media shape our perception of risk and that the risks that kills us are not necessary the risks that scare us the most,” Dr. Orlando Mercado, an international expert on communicating disaster risks, [once said](#) while in Kathmandu in 2013. Indeed, dispelling rumours and making the mass media communicate the right message was another challenging task after the earthquake.

There was false news about “scientists forecasting 9 or 11 Richter scale quake” and “rotten human corpses under the debris”, of food and water shortages in the Kathmandu valley, and of cholera that terrified already scared people of spreading infectious disease and more serious disaster. Similar sensational news helped worsen the situation and forced over one million terrified people out of Kathmandu in very few days.

Another outstanding phenomenon after the earthquake was the twitter campaign called “Go-HomeIndianMedia” with thousands of supporters, that began after the public found coverage by the Indian media too “intense” and “insensitive”. The Indian media fraternity also realized that the Indian media too needed to mature and should learn how to better report during disaster.

Communication to handle public fury during disaster

The scale of people’s frustration was huge after the disaster as the public did not feel the presence of their government. There was no one to talk to from government in villages or in cities. There was no place to lodge complaints. In some places it has been many years since local elections have happened and this means there are no people’s representatives in the local bodies, like villages and wards.

It was very challenging for the government to reach out to the people in a systematic way. A simple emergency inquiry system would have made things easier for people. The only public line some people were aware of was 100 – the police. Not many were aware of emergency contacts. In every corner, you would find people [criticizing the government](#) and the political party representatives for failing to do anything to help them during the disaster.

The government, however, took some immediate damage control measures to quell public anger. Prime Minister Sushil Koirala decided to [address the nation](#) three days after the first quake. With the announcement of relief packages, the address would certainly have reassured earthquake survivors.

Communication and resource mobilization

Resource mobilization was probably the sector most affected by lack of proper and systematic communication. As foreign donations started pouring in after the quake, local NGOs rushed to the villages with relief. Many organizations and groups started their own fundraising campaigns nationally and internationally. An unaccounted amount of money was wired through money transfers.

The Prime Minister’s office soon jumped in, set up a PM Relief Fund and declared that it would pool all the money collected at all the accounts set up by fundraisers. After news that the NGOs relief work was not transparent and not monitored, the government made another announcement that NGOs could distribute relief only through government channels. This triggered huge [uproar and confusion](#) and the government adjusted its decision after incurring criticism.¹

Between these two decisions, there was a lot of confusion and lack of systematic communication. It was all ad-hoc – an official of the National Planning Commission (which was coordinating resource mobilization) tweeted and posted in Facebook that, “I have been [swamped with enquiries](#) on what the recent Central Bank directive transfer of funds after the April 25 earthquake means.” He took pains to clarify the confusion with a long

explanatory note.

After the NGOs criticism, the government rolled back its restriction on direct distribution relief. This is clearly a challenge for Nepal to find out what kind of communication system caused these decisions and confusions.

Social media and local radio

Perhaps there is no debate that Facebook and other social media helped people connect and communicate on an unprecedented scale. If not immediately after the earthquake, during the very first week itself, Facebook had become the only major hub for communication among local people. It allowed people to share their thoughts and feelings and other information. Words of prayer, love and support poured in from all across the social circle, including from friends and families living outside the country.

The warm words helped people heal their trauma and keep them controlled in the face of the tragedy. Facebook Inc. and [Mark Zuckerberg](#) himself took the initiative to connect people and started the “Mark Safe” project for all Facebook account holders in Nepal, which was an innovation and helped millions of people to communicate their needs.

Radio stations turned out to be very helpful in making communication possible during the disaster. This experience made everyone realize the importance of taking extra care in setting up public buildings, including communication hubs like radio stations. It also prompts us to think about disaster preparedness plans for mass media.

International humanitarian organizations played an exemplary role in addressing some of the major communications challenges during Nepal’s earthquake. The [UN OCHA](#) took charge of coordinating all international organizations and their responses with local authorities and the people by setting up different coordination hubs at different levels. Regular situation updates were helpful in coordinating relief work.

While it will take a long time for Nepal to return to normalcy, this disaster has certainly exposed how vulnerable, weak and unprepared we are to disaster risks. In terms of communication,

it was equally clear that Nepal needed to do more to ensure that in future disasters, we do not repeat the mistakes that happened in the aftermath of the April 25 earthquake.

There is need for building the capacity of journalists to improve mass media coverage of disaster. There is need for collaboration between journalists, risk assessors and first responders to strengthen the capacity of journalists to report disasters accurately.

When it comes to broader communications and coordination, the government’s disaster response authority needs to have a clear communications strategy and guidelines in place so that there is no confusion about key messages on resource mobilization, rescue or relief work. ■

Note

1. In times of crisis, accurate information is as essential as it is elusive. It was thus quite unfortunate when rumours around the Prime Minister’s relief fund started to spin out of control. Rules placed by the government around the influx of funds to non-registered NGOs or personal accounts were misinterpreted by both international news media and on social media.

K.R. Sigdel and Dol Raj Kafle are former WACC project partners living and working in Nepal.

Myths of radicalization in Britain

Jeremy Seabrook

The latest buzz word in the “war against terror” is leading us down a blind alley, argues Jeremy Seabrook. It epitomizes a line of thinking that will do little to stop young people seeking purpose in religious fundamentalism.

Media and political discussion about how young Muslims in Britain – and not only men – are “radicalized” is characterized by the same shallow ineptitude that marks our engagement with Islam in the rest of the world. “Radicalization” is assumed to mean “the making of terrorists”. It does not. There is a long ideological continuum in every totalizing belief-system, secular and religious.

Although the precise order of the stages in the process may be disputed, the many variations suggest a more complicated situation than a belief that exposure to one preacher in a mosque on a single occasion may turn otherwise “normal” young men into violent antagonists of their own country.

We have been haunted by a “with-us-or-against-us” mentality, by tales of “extremists” and “moderates”, “hawks” and “doves”, “hard-liners” and those we “can do business with”. This simplistic division obscures more subtle realities. In any religious ideology, there are the committed, the observant, the pious, the devout, the orthodox, the ultra-orthodox, the intransigent, the extremist; none of whom can be predicted to commit outrages on the streets of Britain or to rush to Syria or Iraq to join the ghoulish legions of ISIS.

Passing between these different states of mind does not render the individual incapable of abiding by the laws of the land and leading life as a blameless citizen. Indiscriminate use of the word

“radicalization” is likely to produce the very effect it is supposed to inhibit.

Imminent estrangement

A deeper problem lies at the heart of stillborn discussions which insist that thousands of young Muslims are in danger of imminent estrangement from their own families, communities and country.

The story runs like this: there they are one minute, pursuing a life which – whether they are in work or not – revolves around football, sex, alcohol and perhaps petty crime; while the next, “radicalized” by some charismatic preacher, they reappear in the fancy dress of martyrs, threatening to give their lives in solidarity with their kin in parts of the world with which they have none but a confessional connection.

Somewhere, in the panic over alienated Muslims, and the threat of terror posed by an unknown number of returnees from battlegrounds in Syria, Iraq or Somalia, there is also a deep fear, not only of why a destructive, but apparently beguiling, ideology may alienate them from Britain, but also of how life here might cause them to repudiate it so vehemently.

The secular paradise promoted by the West may be no more substantial than the spiritual one projected by any religion into the hereafter and may not offer a satisfactory life to young people – particularly when it is accompanied by unemployment, casual work, public odium, discrimination and stereotyping.

The young have always been animated by a restless need for improvement, a better world, an advance from the sad disappointments of what has gone before. They are now told that this is the best of all possible worlds, and it has been brought to such a state of perfection that nothing they can do will make the slightest improvement to it.

If the distorted heroics of “jihadis”, apparently streaming from Europe into a chimerical “caliphate”, are characterized by nihilism and a perverse desire for martyrdom, we should also ask questions about the nature of the values of a Europe, with its culture of perpetual escape offered as a consolation for cancelled idealism and annulled

hopes for social justice and political change.

Consciousness of this void at the core of what still likes to promote itself as “the cradle of civilization” is, apparently, so unbearable that relief from it must be sought constantly – in alcohol, drugs, travel, money, gambling, sex, speed and violence in film, TV and on social media. If the monstrosity of ISIS seduces anyone, this says a great deal about the state of mind produced here, at home.

Those who go off to fight for a transcendent cause – no matter how vain or illusory, whether against President Assad or as soldiers in the service of some crazed other-worldly project – do so in part as a response to the alternatives offered to themselves and their peers, who are resigned to getting smashed, wasted, out of their skull and legless.

Such horrible images mirror as metaphor the ugly casualties of war, to which some have literally taken themselves in a doomed search for purpose. And that is before we even begin to look at the graphic violence of the so-called entertainment industry, from which ISIS and its propaganda machines seem to have taken considerable inspiration.

Work of crazies

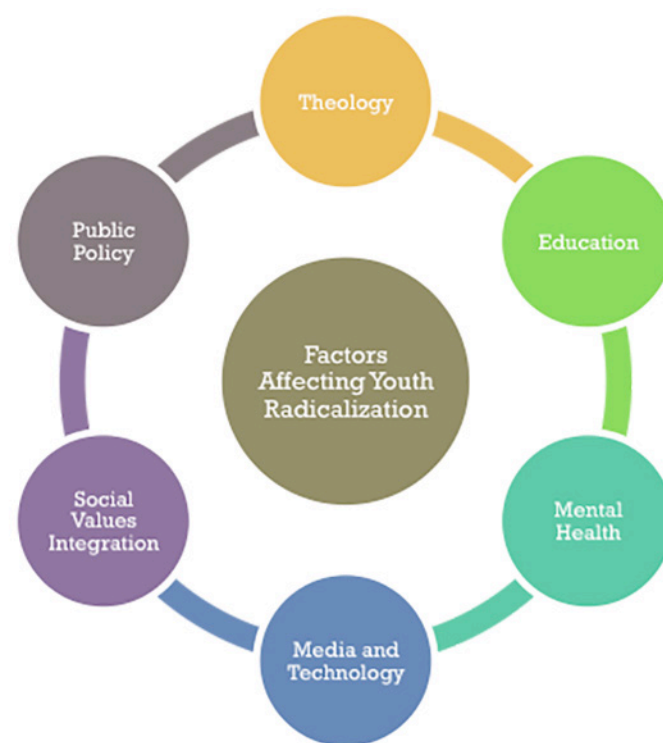
It cannot be stated too strongly that it is the responsibility of government to protect its people. But it soon becomes clear that there is one rule for those who find some kind of bloody relief for their aggression, frustration – or whatever it is – in their own country, and those who follow the menacing banners of religion to whatever grisly battlefields of the imagination it may lead them.

When someone goes on a shooting spree in a school or a mall in North America, or against political opponents, like Anders Breivik; when the thousands of annual casualties of US gun crime are followed to their sad graves, when Saudi student Nahid Almanea is knifed to death in a park in Britain, the concerns raised are different.

This is the work of crazies, deranged individuals, and society has no part in creating them. There is a set of laws for criminal actions apparently inspired by Islam and another for those pro-

duced by the pathologies of “our” society.

The Briton interviewed on Radio 5 Live who said he would not return to the country until “the black flag of Islam” was flying over Buckingham Palace and 10 Downing Street is clearly living in a nebulous world of fantasists, yet is treated as a spokesperson for what Deputy Prime Minister



Nick Clegg called “a medieval, violent, revolting ideology”.

There was no such public panic after the many (mostly foiled) copycat attacks following the US Columbine high school massacre in 1999. Among those attempting to emulate Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold were a neo-Nazi sympathizer in Loughborough, two students in greater Manchester, a 21-year-old in Mallorca, an Argentinean, an Australian, and scores of individuals in the US. Of 12 “rampage” shootings between 1999 and 2007, eight directly claimed “inspiration” from Columbine. Not only were these people not described as “representing” anything at all, but publicity was muted, for fear of provoking similar macabre mimicry.

What all this amounts to – both in the exaltations of religious violence and in secular acts of brutality – is evidence of the suggestibility of many young people. Suggestibility is a condition of mind originally created by commerce to make young people receptive to the latest must-have ac-

cessory, object or technological novelty.

Like so much else, this has run dangerously out of control, and has permitted aberrant and destructive ideas to take root in the fallow fields of consciousness, the abandoned spaces of idealism, hope and purpose.

The custodians of our safety are always asking for “a tightening of state monitoring power”. In 2014 Richard Barrett, former head of counter-terrorism at MI6, said: “Although there is no linear projection from foreign fighters to domestic terrorists, it is inevitable that a number will fall into this category.” There is no doubt truth in these sober words; but that number is not going to be reduced by the maladroit approach of those whose task is to “keep us safe”. The greatest agent of what is glibly called “radicalization” is not social media or exposure to wild preaching, but direct experience.

This is true of all movements that cause people to question accepted social and moral assumptions, whatever their subsequent response – whether considered political commitment or flamboyant heroics of warfare on behalf of a gruesomely seductive ideology.

To diminish the estrangement of some people from their country of birth or adoption, a more ample understanding of the mutations of faith is required, as well as more critical insights into the society in which we must all make our home. Yet these are approaches unlikely to be considered by those who speak of “stamping out”, “degrading” and “destroying” terror. ■

First published in the monthly New Internationalist, December 2014.

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Comunicación mundial: ¿Adiós al espacio y el tiempo?

Carlos A. Valle

“Comunicación mundial significa: liberar el espacio para atar el tiempo,” afirma Norbert Bolz en su libro Comunicación Mundial.¹ Está convencido de que esta nueva situación a nivel global ha pulverizado dos elementos básicos de la vida social: el espacio y el tiempo. Es lo que Anthony Giddens afirmaba hablando sobre la globalización: “no tiene que ver, ni siquiera primariamente, con la interdependencia económica, sino con la transformación del tiempo y el espacio en nuestras vidas.”²

Los desarrollos tecnológicos han permitido que los medios masivos de comunicación impongan una visión particular del mundo al alcance del receptor. El acento se pone en los efectos visuales entremezclados por un abrumador movimiento y un incesante cambio de escenario acompañado por el color y el sonido. Se produce así un efecto hipnótico que no llama a la comprensión sino a la contemplación.

Hoy es palpable este efecto en el cine que ha dejado de lado la importancia de la historia para hacer de su contenido el bagaje repetido de efectos electrónicos. Esta modalidad recibe mucha aceptación de audiencias que están movidas por la búsqueda de efectos sensoriales que le sustraigan de toda reflexión racional.

La visión que proveen los desarrollos electrónicos permite que se exhiban, como nunca antes, una multiplicidad creciente de información. Sabemos que se trata, de todos modos, de infor-

mación selecta y con orientaciones peculiares dada las fuentes mayormente concentradas de las que dependen.

Es cierto, por otra parte, que el desarrollo tecnológico ha permitido la comunicación de grupos anteriormente marginados. De todas maneras, aun reconociendo su importancia, no se puede ocultar la realidad de las enormes desigualdades que, entre otras cosas, ha puesto de manifiesto el aumento del poder de los grupos concentrados.

¿Cómo afectarán estos desarrollos tecnológicos el libre compartir de la información, la soberanía de los países, el contacto directo entre diversos grupos de base? ¿Quién se va a arrojar el derecho de decidir en el ámbito local, nacional, regional y aun mundial a manejar la información según su propio interés? Hay que recordar que en la tradición liberal no se relaciona la libertad de información con el principio de igualdad.

Un banquete pantagruélico

La información que permite producir esta tecnología llega a ser como una muy abundante y tentadora comida que se presenta sugestiva y deliciosa. Sin embargo, como en todo banquete pantagruélico las posibilidades de degustar todo tienen su límite. Por lo general, termina por ser empalagoso y hasta indigesto y aburrido.

Es lo que pasa con la información que proveen los grandes medios, no se llega a absorber, discernir y, mucho menos, evaluar. Esta saturación de información produce el desgano para la selección de lo que se recibe. Crímenes, resultados del deporte, decisiones políticas y demás hechos aparecen como componente de un menú del que se termina por no distinguir entre lo importante, lo secundario y lo superfluo.

Los canales de televisión han introducido el llamado “sin solución de continuidad”, la supresión de pausas entre programas o secciones en

un mismo programa. En el caso de la televisión el propósito es evitar que los cortes comerciales, no previamente anunciados, sorprendan al televidente que tardará en darse cuenta que la serie o película que miraba ha dado lugar a un aviso de dentífrico o un perfume.

Esta recurrente estratagema se inscribe en el



contexto de una comunicación mundial que, para Bolz, tiene el propósito de llevar a renunciar a la verdad y a poner la confianza en la competencia de las fuentes de información. La renuncia a la verdad, si es que se puede hablar de renuncia, presupone, al menos, una incapacidad o imposibilidad de acceder a ella, por falta de información o porque la información recibida no brinda herramientas para su propia comprensión. La ignorancia puede provenir de falta de interés o capacidad personal, o porque los estímulos que lo rodean no le proveen elementos para su desarrollo.

La despolitización de las sociedades modernas más que una renuncia a la participación refleja un proceso de persuasión para aceptar los

parámetros de interés producidos por los centros de poder. Estos intereses se centran mayormente en el desarrollo económico. Así, la economía, concentra su incentivo en tener y consumir. De esta manera, es un tanto arriesgado atribuir la renuncia a la verdad como una decisión voluntaria y no el reflejo de un estado de cosas donde lo que se produce es un ocultamiento de la verdad.

El tema de la verdad está emparentado con la confianza mediática. Ambos deben tratarse como un problema de comunicación. La “renuncia” a la verdad constituye en sí misma un problema comunicacional porque no se trata de una voluntaria renuncia a conocer sino el obstáculo que impide contar con los recursos para hacerlo.

Ese limbo comunicacional es el que da lugar a la necesidad de desarrollar el tema confianza como un elemento esencial a la sociedad de la información. No se trata aquí de establecer una valoración ética, ni de la verdad ni de la confianza, sino de comprender su lugar en el contexto de lo que se llama comunicación mundial.

La búsqueda de confianza

En la comunicación la confianza está relacionada con la percepción que se tiene a partir de la información y, mayormente, está vinculada con aspectos emocionales y no racionales. En una sociedad pequeña la confianza parte de un conocimiento personal de sus dirigentes. La información sobre sus actos o propósitos está al alcance de la mano. El elemento afectivo juega un papel determinante.

En una sociedad compleja la búsqueda de confianza es mucho más sofisticada. El contacto personal ha desaparecido. Las relaciones se establecen por intereses, por los vínculos laborales que crean lazos que no siempre se caracterizan por la confianza. Las relaciones económicas, comerciales o bancarias, préstamos, tarjetas de crédito, presuponen la previa investigación y constatación de la capacidad de responder a las obligaciones de quien requiere esos servicios. Lo que antes podría bastar con un simple “me dio su palabra”, hoy se traduce en un documento ratificado por una fuente con recursos certificados.

Aun, teniendo en cuenta todos los recaudos a los que se apela para que no se quiebre la confian-

za, la sociedad moderna necesita una cierta cuota de confianza que permita su funcionamiento. ¿Cómo se establece la confianza? Hay que dar a conocer, por ejemplo, el producto o la persona que se quiere sea conocida y aceptada. La confianza se cimienta a partir del conocimiento.

La publicidad tiene ese propósito: hacer que lo que promueve sea conocido, divulgarlo y, al mismo tiempo, atraer la atención sobre el mismo. No se consideran aquí las formas y procedimientos que se utilizan para hacerlo sino el concepto básico de publicidad y su necesidad de generar confianza.

Para que la publicidad sea efectiva necesita presentar su producto de manera que sea bien recibido y resulte atractivo. Se trata de crear una imagen que apele a los afectos, a la sensibilidad del receptor sin que, necesariamente haya una reflexión racional sobre el producto. Como bien se ha afirmado: “La publicidad le dice al público: aquí está lo que tenemos para usted, algo que necesita y que ya lo puede tener.”

La promoción de un producto comercial, ya sea una bebida o un perfume, difícilmente haga mención a las bondades del producto como tal. El acento está puesto en los efectos que pueden provocar en el usuario del mismo en relación a su propia estima. Esta estrategia de comunicación publicitaria está también presente en la comunicación mundial, y a partir de cual los grandes medios afianzan su poder a todo nivel.

La estrategia de promoción de un producto sobre el que se procura producir confianza también se traslada a la promoción de personas, ya sean artistas o políticos. El contacto personal o cercano, con candidatos políticos es, en un gran conglomerado, escaso o nulo. Rostros y nombres adquieren cierta entidad cuando aparecen en los medios. Un viejo político solía decir que prefería que hablaran mal de él a que lo ignoraran.

Un gran medio de comunicación tiene la posibilidad de hacer visibles a ignotos candidatos atribuyéndoles valores y proyecciones difíciles de constatar sobre un desconocido, y es elaborada a partir del relato de pequeñas historias que llamen a la simpatía. Se trata, en primer lugar, de crear un acercamiento afectivo que abra la puerta a la con-

fianza antes de siquiera estimarlo como un buen candidato. Una repetitiva presencia en los medios podrá aumentar esa aceptación.

Para obviar este proceso, largo y complejo, se acude a personajes conocidos y aceptados en la sociedad quienes generalmente se sienten tentados a la aventura política. Esta estrategia comunicacional también puede utilizarse para un proceso inverso: destruir la trayectoria de aquellos que se conviertan en un impedimento a ciertos proyectos. Aquí también se apela a situaciones que causen efecto en la sociedad: corrupción, traiciones y demás.

La plataforma política

El manejo de la política por parte de los grandes medios ha ido sustituyendo a los partidos tradicionales, especialmente porque los medios han llegado a ser la plataforma de grandes conglomerados económicos antes que lugares de expresión comunitaria. Así, los políticos o quienes quieran serlo, terminan siendo dependientes de la política que le proveen los grandes medios, antes que las de sus propios partidos o núcleos políticos porque temen ser condenados o ignorados.

Por eso muchos políticos tienden a evadirse para responder sobre cualquier pregunta que pueda comprometerlos, y han aprendido un libreto que repiten en toda ocasión en que no pueden evitar ser consultados. Lo que trae como resultado que la realidad viene a ser la verdad de los medios. Como bien afirma Orlando C. Aprile, en su valiosa obra, *La publicidad audiovisual*: “La experiencia de la realidad es mediática y mediatizada.”

El contexto de los acontecimientos pierde su dimensión temporal. Hay hechos reflejados con borroneados ecos históricos o simplemente dejados de lado. La inmediatez de lo que se comunica tiene a su vez las trazas de lo efímero. Un acontecimiento que suscitó amplia difusión mediática por cierto tiempo, repentinamente es dejado de lado por un nuevo suceso al que hay que volcar la atención. En poco tiempo nadie se acordará de aquello que parecía tan central y decisivo.

Un hecho, sobre el que no hay nuevos indicios es sostenido por la repetición, por ejemplo, de grabaciones de datos que duran escasos segundos,

y que entran en una cinta sin fin y causa saturación a corto plazo. Esto mismo se produce, aun en hechos que tienen cierto atractivo generalmente morboso, pero tienen corta vida. Los medios tienen tendencia a sobredimensionar esos hechos por la búsqueda de audiencia y justifican sus excesos como una conducta responsable por la verdad.

El funcionamiento de este esquema de creación de confianza se apoya en la consolidación del presupuesto de que el tiempo y el espacio han perdido su papel rector. Se trabaja con la idea de que las fronteras han sido abolidas por la tecnología. Un acontecimiento producido en casi cualquier parte del mundo se experimenta como un hecho que sucede a la vuelta de la esquina. La distinción entre lo local y lo internacional se traduce en una limitación a la comprensión de lo que sucede en el propio entorno. Tanto los problemas como los logros en cualquier ámbito crean un círculo de realidad donde los ámbitos varios se tropiezan entre sí.

Además, dada la volatilidad de la información, la profundización o, incluso, una cierta comprensión de los hechos y la perspectiva de lo que sucede o pueda suceder en el mundo, entran en esa burbuja de sensaciones emocionales audiovisuales. Para los acontecimientos de carácter internacional la reacción afectiva tiende a reforzar culturas asentadas en el círculo familiar o social. Esto es evidente cuando se utiliza a la religión como elemento determinante para comprender los sucesos. Es aquí cuando los elementos irracionales dan lugar prioritario a los emocionales, y la valoración de los hechos pierde toda dimensión real. En este sentido habría que distinguir posturas fundamentalistas de todo tipo con intereses políticos y económicos que dominan la interpretación de los hechos apelando a esas posturas.

Por otra parte, cuando se puede producir el rápido impacto de un hecho, no importa donde suceda, se acrecienta la virtual disipación del espacio. Asimismo, cuando más pronto ese mismo hecho es ignorado por la presencia de un nuevo hecho, la evaporación del tiempo es inevitable. Eso provoca una pasividad creciente para asumir los hechos cercanos como realidades que afecten directamente. Son parte de la marea de una infor-

mación que no intenta trascender sino llamar la atención, una atención cuya duración debe ser lo suficientemente impactante para deslumbrar pero con una calidad que destiñe a la luz de un nuevo hecho que busca seducir.

La dinámica de la comunicación mundial asentada en el creciente desarrollo tecnológico está motorizada por grandes concentraciones de medios y de fuerzas económicas que desde hace varias décadas han ido fortaleciendo su poder. Reflexionar sobre estas posibilidades y realidades lleva a preguntar cómo se debería estructurar una sociedad cuya autoridad esté al servicio de la gente y permita articular su participación en una comunicación auténtica.

Nunca se sabrá exactamente la dimensión y trascendencia del hecho sobre el que se han encendido las luces. La ignorancia es parte del propósito de esta comunicación y parte de la casi intencionada apatía de la audiencia. “Así, la vida moderna nos obliga a compensar con más confianza el desconocimiento creciente” (N.Bolz).

La presencia progresiva de esta realidad inasible como es el tiempo y la tendencia a tratar como incorpóreo el espacio son como dos puntales para el desarrollo de una comunicación por medios cada vez más concentrados que se ven favorecidos por el desarrollo de la tecnología, y que se presenta como una ley natural inmodificable para determinar la vida de la comunidad mundial. ■

Notas

1. Nobert Bolz, *Comunicación mundial*, Katz editores, Buenos Aires, 2006 (pág.8).
2. Anthony Giddens, *The Third Way*, Polity Press, 1998, Cambridge.

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Changing religious landscapes and political communication in Latin America

Dennis A. Smith

Growing up in a middle-class Evangelical home in the United States, I learned to take religious belief and practice very seriously. This rather hermetic world was not very comfortable with religious diversity, and we were not encouraged to devote our youthful energy to changing unjust social and political structures.

Our focus was on evangelism and personal piety. Our reading of Scripture suggested that all positive social change was rooted in converting individuals to faith in Jesus Christ. At the Second Coming, Jesus himself would finally institute a millennial reign marked by true peace and justice. In the meantime, the Apostle Paul in Romans 13 called on us to respect political authority, yet experience suggested that it was wise to keep the grimy and duplicitous world of politics at a safe distance.

We viewed people from other religious traditions with suspicion and, sometimes, fear. I remember quite well when John Kennedy was elected President of the United States in November 1960. The Sunday after the election, I sensed an undercurrent of tension at church because Kennedy represented a dual challenge to our convictions: He was both a Roman Catholic and a politician. As I recall, the problem was not so much that Kennedy was a Democrat, but that he was a Catholic! Had the US become subject to Rome? How could God have allowed such a thing to happen?

In 1973, my personal journey took an unexpected turn. On the advice of my university chaplain I began attending a Presbyterian congregation in Evanston, IL. I had begun to work in radio while still in secondary school, and in university I studied both communication and education. Soon I would begin a career as a lay mission worker in communication for the Presbyterian Church (USA).

I first arrived in Guatemala as a volunteer in 1974. I spent the year travelling throughout the country: observing, listening, learning. I was embraced by a warm, wise and generous people who, at the same time, observed this young gringo from an enormous distance, marked by an ancient silence. I returned to Guatemala in 1977 as a mission worker and began to participate in and document the conversation between media, religion and politics in Latin America. Neither my lived experience nor my academic training had provided me with the analytical framework I needed to understand the economic and political exclusion, or the cultural alienation, experienced by most Guatemalans. Patient Guatemalan mentors and a few veteran missionaries introduced me to Latin American literature, history and culture.

It was through my contact with colleagues in the Latin America region of the World Association for Christian Communication (WACC) that I came to new notions of what communication is and how it works. In the 1970s, WACC colleagues were deeply involved in a golden age of communication theory and practice in Latin America. At a time when rising military dictatorships were being challenged by emerging insurgencies and grassroots social movements, Paulo Freire, Mario Kaplún and others began to blur the traditional lines between communication, pedagogy and mass political mobilization for social change.

It was a time when the few existing electronic media outlets – radio, TV, print – were controlled almost exclusively by the private sector or by nation states. The few exceptions – usually community or religious media – did little to incorporate the voices of the silenced, the faces of the invisibilized. Thus the growing emphasis of people like Freire and Kaplún on creating al-

ternative and *alterative* media – generally low-tech communication initiatives committed to *altering* the social, political and cultural status quo. In Latin America's post-Vatican II context – a time of growing ecumenical collaboration and common commitment to theologies of liberation – these alternative and alterative media identified with liberation struggles. Not surprisingly, military dictatorships repressed them brutally.

In time, I came to understand communication as being less linear, less specifically political, less rooted in technology; thicker, rounder, more sensual. In the words of Argentinean communication theorist María Cristina Mata, I came to understand communication as building meaning in common. At the same time, I came better to understand the power of the media to set the agenda for public discourse. In Guatemala, for example, I witnessed how the ancient, complex beauty of Mayan culture was often reduced by the private sector to a tourist poster, and, in this colourful representation, the people themselves, their very way of being, could be made invisible, their voices could be silenced.

I began to ask myself: What happens when not only your land but also your story is stolen from you? Your memory of who you are and why you are here usurped? I learned that once a people is silenced, made invisible, genocide becomes a viable policy option for those in power.

Learning communication in context

Gradually, as I re-learned my profession, I explored the history of Latin America's emerging political and religious context.

Early Protestant mission efforts in the 19th century coincided with the Latin American political and military movements that led to the creation of the region's nation states. As Latin America moved beyond the colonial era, Protestants demonstrated a decidedly modern approach to religious practice while Roman Catholicism positioned itself as the defender of conservative religious tradition and declining European empires. Throughout the colonial era, Catholicism, the religion of both Portuguese and Spanish royalty, had great cultural and economic power. During col-

onial times, the Catholic Church had been charged with cultivating religious identity, sustaining the political and economic status quo and defining the differences between colonizer and colonized.

As the colonial era stumbled to a close and nation states were formed, the emerging Latin American political and economic elites were deeply influenced by European Liberalism – they promoted less-regulated markets, representative democracy and the separation of Church and State. They were also influenced by the Positivism of Auguste Comte and John Stuart Mill, believing that education, science and technology offered the key to a democratic and prosperous future. In some countries – including Brazil, Mexico and Guatemala – the new Protestant missions became the *de facto* allies of these new political elites. Many US missionaries built schools and hospitals and came to be recognized by the new political elites for their practicality and entrepreneurial spirit. Such initiatives offered Liberal politicians living examples of their revolutionary ideologies.

The Protestant missionary impulse was also rooted in their understanding of themselves as the children of the Enlightenment and in their disdain for the Catholicism then practiced in Latin America. Not only did they see Catholicism as being locked in medieval obscurantism, they also felt it had strayed far from Christian orthodoxy by failing to hold the line against the syncretic influences of African and Indigenous spiritualities.

At the level of popular religious imagination, Catholicism and Protestantism approached worship and personal piety very differently. Catholic worship focused on the mystery of the Eucharist. Daily religious practice included devotion to the saints, praying the rosary, and embracing the ancient daily rhythms of a largely rural culture marked by the liturgy of the hours. Furthermore, the liturgical calendar divided the year into a regular cycle of religious festivals, including patron saint days for each community. All this pro-

vided a cultural architecture easily assimilated by rural Indigenous and Afro-Latin American communities deeply imprinted by the cycles of planting and harvest, life and death, loss and renewal.

On the other hand, Protestantism was attractive to merchants, teachers and trades people – the natural allies of Liberalism in Latin America's small towns and cities. Worship was centred not around the Eucharist, but the sermon – a reasoned discourse on a religious text. Many Protestant churches tended to be austere spaces, eschewing liturgical vestments, the liturgical calendar and even candles because they were considered too Catholic. Many Protestant communities celebrated the Eucharist only quarterly, or even annually. Daily religious practice included personal and family prayer, devotional Bible reading and bearing testimony to one's faith before the community. Despite Protestantism's privileged ideological position in Latin America's new political universe, their numbers were few and Roman Catholicism continued to be the religion of the masses.

In 20th century Latin America, Liberalism's early promise of progress gave way to the reality of conflict and profound social polarization. In time, the failures of Liberalism – and of government in general – gave birth to deep popular distrust in public institutions. In a harsh economic environment marked by mass migration to the cities, many new urban residents embarked on a search for consolation, meaning and transcendence.

The failures of Liberalism also represent, in a sense, the failure of secularism in our day. One of the banners carried at the recent marches in Paris proclaimed "Nothing Sacred". Such was the bold proclamation of the French Revolution. However, secularism fails adequately to describe the pulse of mystery and the deep longing for transcendence that undergirds Latin American culture. Everything, it turns out, is sacred.

Rise of Latin American Protestantism

A major new study released by the Pew Research Center in November, 2014 suggests that while Latin America continues to be home to more than 425 million Roman Catholics – nearly 40% of the world's total Catholic population – today only 69% of adults across the region identify as Catholic. The study observes that, "In nearly every country surveyed, the Catholic Church has experienced net losses as many Latin Americans have joined Evangelical Protestant churches or rejected organized religion altogether. For example, roughly one-in-four Nicaraguans, one-in-five Brazilians and one-in-seven Venezuelans are former Catholics" (Pew, 2014: 4).

Most Latin American Christians, including both Roman Catholics and Protestants, are Charismatics. That is, they claim to have had a personal, transformative encounter with the Spirit of God. Most Latin American Christians are deeply influenced by the notion that God expects you to be healthy and wealthy, and that a personal experience of God can be expected to grant you tangible, concrete benefits – what has come to be known as the prosperity gospel.

In the early decades of the 20th Century, Charismatic groups began to explore new ways of living out religious faith in Latin American culture. Faith healers adept at offering the hope of health and prosperity began to draw large crowds in marginal areas of major cities, areas marked by violence, limited social services and high unemployment. While Evangelical radio programs and religious films had been contributing to the consolidation of an identifiable Evangelical sub-culture since the 1930s, Latin American TV preachers in the 1980s began to change the public image of Evangelicals by developing a sophisticated and politically influential network of media outlets.

They produced quality programming rooted in popular music, charismatic preaching and dramatic testimonies. Evangelical music came into its own as a multi-million dollar enterprise. In Brazil, mega church pastor Edir Macedo broke out of the ghetto of religious broadcasting by consolidating his control over *TV Record*, that coun-

try's second most important broadcast television network. Content ranges far beyond religion and includes competitive news programming, sports and entertainment. His media empire also came to include a national daily newspaper and radio stations. Macedo understood how to use his media empire to become a key power broker in Brazilian politics (Smith & Campos, 2012).

By the end of the 20th century, new information technologies such as the Internet and Web-based social media accelerated this process. Using this powerful toolkit, religious entrepreneurs – both Roman Catholic and Evangelical – were able to tailor their messages to broadly diverse target audiences ranging from the urban poor to middle class youth and young urban professionals. Some Evangelical TV preachers designed their messages to directly challenge deeply ingrained religious practices related to folk Catholicism and Afro-Latin American religions.

One reason for the recent rapid growth of Protestantism has been the accelerating urbanization of Latin American society in the 20th Century. In Brazil, for example, in 1950, 64% of Brazilians lived in rural communities; by 2010 that number had fallen to 16% nationally and, in the highly-industrialized states of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, to less than 5% (IBGE, 2012). The rapid concentration of masses of people in emerging urban centres created a level of social dislocation that made changing religions a viable option for many new urban dwellers, an alternative that would have been much less attractive in their traditional rural settings. In many cases, small Pentecostal churches offered desperately needed social networks to people who, by moving to the city, felt cut loose from the family structures and traditional social mores characteristic of rural communities.

Another reason for the surge in Evangelicals has been the dramatic growth of Latin America's communication infrastructure. Looking again at the case of Brazil, until the second half of the 20th century, most of this nation's vast territory was only sparsely populated; even today most of the population lives within 300 km. of the Atlantic Ocean. By the 1970s, roads, telephone lines and electric cables began to crisscross the country.

Television networks began to build a common national identity out of a patchwork of regional cultures.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that, in the midst of an increasingly diverse religious landscape, Latin American religious identity is becoming both more fluid and more nuanced. There was a time when Roman Catholics were Roman Catholics and Evangelicals were Evangelicals, and never the twain should meet. Evangelicals, especially, often expressed animosity toward Indigenous or Afro-Latin American religions. Today, it is not unusual for Roman Catholics to attend Neo-Pentecostal mega churches, nor is it unheard of for Evangelicals, in moments of personal crisis, to consult a Mayan shaman or a Spiritist for advice and counsel.

Religion and politics: Emerging scenarios

Under the current wave of globalization, Latin America has experienced the fracturing of traditional hegemonies in politics, culture, religion and the economy. In this context, both traditional and emerging media have become powerful tools for promoting not only consumer culture, but also political ideologies and religious belief systems. New social actors are emerging. Traditional elites have either lost part of their power or have had to scramble to forge alliances with these new actors.

In the religious sphere, traditional Christian denominations – including Roman Catholics – are losing members and influence in Latin American society. Neo Pentecostalism has grown so quickly and become so pervasive that Christian groups throughout the region have been influenced by both its style and substance. Historically, traditional church leaders had the power to silence or marginalize Charismatic Christian groups and other religious minorities. Today, mega church pastors and other new religious actors compete with traditional church leaders, both Evangelical and Roman Catholic, for cultural and political power.

Neo Pentecostal leaders often assume titles to affirm their religious authority. Since their churches tend to be new enterprises organized by charismatic individuals, they do not conform to

the structures proffered by traditional ecclesiology. Their leaders tend to adopt titles awarded to them by divine revelation: Apostle, Bishop, Missionary – all terms of authority rooted in the Bible or Christian tradition.

Peruvian Pentecostal researcher Bernardo Campos notes that Latin American Charismatics began to import this new leadership model from the USA in the 1980s. “Apostles” are considered to be a contemporary expression of the messianic and apostolic traditions that imbued the early Christian Church with authority and dynamism. Campos observes that many Charismatic churches interpret their recent growth as a confirmation that more traditional churches have missed the boat by not putting into practice the power inherent in the apostolic movement (Campos, 2004: 20-23). Members of the apostolic movement throughout the world have formed a growing network, act as one another’s spiritual confidants and sponsors, speak regularly at one another’s public campaigns, and consider themselves to be part of a “New Apostolic Reformation”.

By combining their major media presence with daily religious services offered in huge auditoriums, the Charismatic mega churches break dramatically with the parish system of church organization still used by most Roman Catholics. Under the parish system, residents in a particular neighbourhood know that their religious needs will be attended to by the priest named to that parish. This system presupposes that a church organized in parishes – even if that church is no longer the established religion of the land – benefits from the inherent cultural authority granted by history and tradition.

Evangelicals organized around a different principle when they arrived in the 19th century, understanding their churches to be – in the spirit of the times – voluntary religious associations of individuals. Still, participation in such churches tends to be limited to those living relatively near the church building. Peruvian communication researcher and WACC member Rolando Pérez observes that the new media-based religious enterprises function parallel to community-based congregations, becoming, effectively, “deterritor-

ialized” churches. He suggests that this emerging system makes the local congregation but one of many public spaces where believers can celebrate their faith (Pérez,1997:21).

We are witnessing the emergence of a new kind of religious leader. Three to four years of traditional training in a theological seminary do not prepare one to become a religious entrepreneur adept at designing and implementing mass marketing strategies, preparing simple, repetitive messages easily interwoven with dynamic images, negotiating effectively with diverse actors ranging from the commercial media to political parties, staging high-energy religious spectacles, and organizing highly-motivated teams of volunteers. While some Bible institutes are now offering courses in how to project an effective image on camera, most of the new religious entrepreneurs have learned their craft on the job.

On the other hand, most traditional, non-Charismatic pastors have little practical understanding of how the media have become the space where modern societies create meaning. They have little notion of how effectively to engage existing structures of cultural and political power, nor how to advocate on behalf of the silenced, the invisibilized, the excluded.

At a cycle of WACC conferences on *Communication, Politics and Religious Fundamentalism in Latin America* held in 2006, Chilean sociologist Arturo Chacón argued that Protestantism, with its emphasis on reasoned theological discourse, has served as a vehicle for modernization. If traditional Protestants have sold their soul to reason, suggested Chacón, then Spirit-filled religious leaders, to sustain their authority, must reclaim their founding myths, and must either usurp existing religious institutions or create new ones. Chacón also argued that such myths are always cloaked in violence. Deeply rooted in the Latin American psyche is an understanding that God cannot be domesticated, and that our profound longing for a personal encounter with transcendence is fraught both with mystery and with danger (Smith, 2007).

At that same conference, Pentecostal scholar Violeta Rocha observed that, “Traditional religion as a path to the numinous can lose its centrality in

a community’s life when forced to compete with the concrete immediacy of consumerist gratification” (Smith, 2007). That is, in the prosperity gospel we are confronted with the commodification of faith, and faith turned into a commodity can be an attractive consumer good. In the words of the Spanish pastoral theologian Juan José Tamayo, “God has carved out a space in the midst of billions of inhabitants who have been progressively dishabited by a culture that pretends to abolish the mystery of things” (Tamayo, 2004:51-53).

If one were to reduce the religious experience to a commercial transaction of symbolic goods, then these new religious emporia would seem to be making great strides in consolidating their market share and supplanting traditional symbolic goods with newer, shinier models that bring greater personal satisfaction to the consuming public. The increased cultural and political power enjoyed by the new religious entrepreneurs would seem to strengthen their hand.

What is not yet clear, however, is whether these new groups actually strengthen and deepen religious faith, or, on the contrary, strengthen the impulse toward individualism and secularism. Evidence suggests that a sizeable number of Latin Americans move from traditional religious groups to Charismatic groups, and then continue on to abandon institutional religion. One must also take into account the growing number of individuals who have felt used or abused by the world of religious spectacle – especially those who have brought to the altar their desperate need for health or prosperity. Nor is it clear whether traditional Christian denominations will be able to re-invent themselves in such a way that they might be able to draw unaffiliated Evangelicals back into the fold.

Political vision of Reconstructionists

I have emphasized the pervasiveness of the Charismatic movement, Neo-Pentecostal mega churches and prosperity theology in Latin America. One additional comment about the political theology often embraced by these groups is needed. In the 1980s, a new movement known as Dominion Theology or the Reconstructionist Movement

surfaced among conservative Evangelicals. This group interpreted the Bible – especially the Old Testament – as commanding believers “to restore” each nation according to theocratic principles and to promote Evangelical moral paradigms. Reconstructionists affirm an eschatological and political vision founded on the belief that Christians were destined to govern the world.

Many prominent Evangelical politicians in Latin America have embraced this ideology. They seek to bring others to their faith not only because of their propensity for proselytism but also because of their conviction that, once a nation reaches a critical mass of believers, the Spirit will pour out God’s justice and prosperity upon the population (Smith & Campos, 2012). Undoubtedly, this ideology is present, in one form or another, in other contexts and people need to be aware of its presence.

It is worth noting that nowhere that the Reconstructionists have held power or influence – in Guatemala, Brazil, Nicaragua, El Salvador or Peru, for example – have they been able successfully to model sound public governance nor successfully resolve such issues as systemic corruption and violence. But they are present, they have money, and they often have access to media and to opinion leaders.

Influencing public policy

Rolando Pérez observes that the emerging actors on the religious scene in Latin America no longer need to legitimize their discourse and actions through their relationship with traditional churches. By consolidating their presence in the media and by regularly sharing the stage with powerful politicians, a new generation of Evangelical leaders has developed its own moral discourse on political power as well as carving out a space from which to speak out on social issues. These pioneers are assuming unprecedented levels of civic protagonism for non-Catholic religious actors in Latin America.

Pérez also observes that some Evangelicals in the region are beginning to understand “evangelization” as not being limited to proselytism but also as influencing public policy. Evangelical pol-

itical activists tend to take on issues that are typical of the conservative social agenda such as opposition to abortion and same-sex marriage, preserving the “traditional family” and opposing the historic privileges granted to the Catholic Church. But, some are also creatively engaged with such issues as corruption, transparency in governance and the rule of law (Pérez, 2009:2-3).

In the rough and tumble world of Latin American politics, Evangelical politicians have yet to demonstrate that their performance in public office differs substantially from the rest of the political field. Traditional politicians in Latin America, whatever their religious affiliation, learn to consolidate their hold on public office by developing their ability to sense the ebb and flow of public opinion, to provide services to their constituency and to take orders from their political bosses. When Evangelicals are thrust into this world, they often find themselves in over their heads.

After a careful study of the Evangelical federal deputies related to Neo Pentecostal mega churches in Brazil between 1999 and 2006, sociologist of religion Saulo Baptista documents that the Pentecostal pastors most likely to run for public office tend to be self-made charismatic leaders who have developed a powerful sense of their own spiritual gifts. Baptista concludes that traditional Evangelical discourse rooted in sobriety, honesty and reliability – values inconsistent with their actual performance in office – were no match for the dominant values of Brazilian politics: clientelism, corruption and authoritarianism (Baptista: 2009,66). As many of these pastors have taken the plunge into electoral politics, they end up demonstrating to their constituencies both their lack of experience in the public sphere and their lack of understanding of how government actually works.

Concluding words of advice

In my experience understanding our context is the first step in developing a strategy for influencing public policy as people of faith. Let me conclude with several concrete recommendations based on what I have observed in Latin America:

- If you are seeking to influence public policy, you need to have a clear sense of what you bring to the table. What is your negotiating position? What are the acceptable alternatives? Who are your allies? (The broader based your coalition, the better. Can you bring in representatives of other faith traditions? Of the academic and NGO communities? Can you forge useful alliances with the private sector without being perceived as “selling out” to mercenary interests? Can you include groups representing other ideologies, political affiliations or points of view?) What kind of public pressure can be brought to bear by you and your local allies? What international partners are prepared to support your position and how?
- What are the ethical principles rooted in your lived experience as communities of faith that support your position? The need to clearly state these principles is one of the reasons that WACC has recently updated its core values statement, now called *Communication for All*. The product of an ongoing conversation with our members, we have been able to offer this document to members and allies as a clear statement of what we are about. We are thankful that WACC was given the opportunity to walk alongside the Council for World Mission (CWM) as it developed its own statement of communication principles. *Communication for All* describes who we are as WACC and who we aspire to be. It is a statement of the moral and ethical capital that we bring to the negotiating table, but it is also an open document, an invitation to further conversation that recognizes that we have no monopoly on moral discourse (WACC, 2013).
- Offer training to journalists, including the journalists in your own shop. For a time I served as an informal communication advisor to the Guatemalan conference of Catholic bishops. I recall one press conference when a journalist asked the bishop leading the conference: “What is a diocese”? Most journalists don’t know how churches work. Nor are they familiar with our history or our contribution to local culture. In today’s world, religion, increasingly, is front-page news. Your local editors may be open to a course on “Religion in the News” to help them improve their coverage. As a starting point, check out the many resources produced by the Religion Communicators Council in the USA. With time, you can produce and share additional resources rooted in and appropriate to your context. (<http://www.religioncommunicators.org/resources>).
- Training should focus less on the minutiae of denominational politics and more on the role of religion and religious institutions in the current context and on human culture in general. In the same sense, your own journalists might lack the breadth of lived experience that would allow them to understand well a particular issue. Help them to grow! Provide them with the resources they need to expand their world, and the confidence to bring their own experience, their own language and culture, their own faith story to their journalistic task.
- Finally, you need to develop your credibility as sources and as honest brokers with serious journalists, academics and opinion leaders in your community. When a journalist calls you asking for background information on a particular issue, have something coherent and useful to say that won’t be discounted as partisan bunk. (If no serious journalists, academics or opinion makers ever call you, you need to begin to develop and circulate thoughtful, constructive positions on the key issues facing your community. You need to be present in the forums where such issues are discussed.)
- Maybe the journalist or academic that comes to call has never been to a poor neighbourhood where the local church is the beacon for life and justice that offers women a safe space when confronted with domestic violence or offers kids a place where caring adults can help them with their homework after school so they don’t get involved in gangs. Intro-

duce them to the pastor of that church; to the woman that organizes the after-school program. Take the time to talk to him or her even if the piece isn't about you or your group.

Talking with journalists

On a few occasions, I have been privileged to spend hours talking to serious journalists or academics about serious issues like "What does the church have to say about corruption in government, or the bill before the Guatemalan congress on the rights of children, or the role of the churches in the peace process." Sometimes my name won't even appear in the piece as a source. But, if I've interpreted my position well, when I read the story I can see that I was able to shape the argument of the journalist and deepen his or her understanding of a complex issue.

In this same vein, I have received calls from journalists saying, "Can you suggest a reliable Evangelical source that will talk to me on the record, before Thursday, about the new municipal ordinance that won't allow churches to play loud music after ten in the evening?" I'll check with my pastor colleagues and they'll often respond: "A journalist? To be quoted in the newspaper? Forget it! They'll get it wrong! And I'll be presented as a whining buffoon!" Sometimes, no doubt, the journalist will get it wrong. So you go back to them and you continue the conversation. And maybe they'll run a follow-up. Maybe next time, if they are good journalists, they'll do a better job.

This never gets easy. It is not only messy but dangerous work. As communicators we must always be wise as serpents but gentle as doves. But in our globalized world, experience has taught us that silence and self-censorship are not the way of Jesus. Gently, insistently, clearly – we must participate effectively in the debates that shape the lives of our communities, we must work to broaden the debate and open media platforms to include the voices of the silenced (not just our voices), and the faces of the invisibilized (not just our faces). This, I am convinced, is the way of Jesus.

Presentation given at the Council for World Mission

(CWM) Communications Consultation 19-20 January 2015, Singapore.

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Mission today and the uninvited guest

Karin Achtelstetter

Mission today must be seen in the context of the relationship between church and society and include the church's response to global and local crises that impact the lives of people worldwide. Mission must be viewed against the background of an ideology which argues that the global market will save the world through unlimited growth. This is a pernicious myth that threatens not only social but spiritual life, and not only humanity but also the whole of creation.

There is a distinction between communication as a “tool”, as a means of conveying information and a means of pursuing change, and communication as an essence of being, as a way of changing the world. The phrase, “Be the change you wish to see in the world,” is attributed by some to Mahatma Gandhi. I would like to formulate a different version and say, “Be the communication you wish to see in the world.” What do I mean?

If the medium is the message, as the Canadian philosopher Marshall McLuhan argued, then as a person I am my own message. Whatever values I hold, I convey them through word, gesture, and deed. My communication has a purpose: it reflects the world I would like to live in. If I am not personally engaged in creating that world, using communication as a mere tool will not bring it about. To illustrate this idea, I shall pursue the theme of hospitality and its opposite, inhospitality, that pervade the world's cultures.

From Ancient Greece to present-day Afghanistan

To the ancient Greeks, hospitality was a right. Hosts were expected to meet the needs of their

guests. *Xenia* is the ancient Greek concept of hospitality, the generosity and courtesy shown to those who are far from home. The rituals of hospitality created a reciprocal relationship between guest and host expressed in material benefits (such as the giving of gifts) as well as non-material ones (such as shelter and protection). In Greek society, a person's ability to abide by the laws of hospitality indicated nobility and social standing.

Consequently, in Homer's *Iliad*, when King Priam slips by night into the tent of his enemy Achilles to beg for the return of his dead son's body, Achilles offers him food, drink and rest before assuring his safe passage back to the city of Troy. And in the *Odyssey*, Odysseus is given hospitality wherever he lands during his long voyage and, on returning to Ithaca, punishes the abuse of hospitality in his own home.

In medieval literature, the concept of knightly chivalry – which is not so far removed from hospitality – can be found in songs and ballads as well as tales such as the 8th century *Chanson de Rolland* and the 15th century *Le Morte d'Arthur* by Thomas Mallory. Given this context, it is no surprise that William Shakespeare often treats both the social and political dimensions of hospitality. In *Macbeth*, the inhospitable murder of King Duncan, a guest in Macbeth's castle, corrupts every relationship and leads to tragedy. And in *King Lear*, the “foolish fond old” king is forced to become a homeless beggar dependent on the charity of his merciless daughters.

In India, hospitality is based on the principle of *atithi satkara*, a Sanskrit expression meaning “doing something good for a guest”. This notion is reflected in several stories in which a guest is revealed to be a god who rewards the provider of hospitality. Today it has become a social awareness campaign aimed at providing tourists with a greater sense of being made welcome to the country!

In Afghanistan, Pashtunwali is an ancient code of ethics that includes offering hospitality and profound respect to all visitors regardless of race, religion, nationality or economic status. It is reciprocal, which goes some way towards explaining Afghani bewilderment and outrage when

American soldiers violated their homes during the recent war in that country.

Recognizing “otherness”

In current political and social debate, hospitality is a “hot potato” because it invokes the question of human rights: the rights of migrant workers and those of local residents; benefits and entitlements; duties and responsibilities. This raises controversial and ambivalent notions such as identity, homeland, security, and surveillance. Public debate around these issues often reflects real or imagined fears exacerbated by political and social realities such as the so-called war on terror, food security, climate change, economic migration, and disputes over land ownership and resources. At their heart lie fear, racism, and a refusal to recognize what has come to be termed “otherness” or alterity.

Alterity refers to the process by which people are treated as “other” or alien by being understood or represented as different from the dominant view, due to race, class, gender, religion, ethnicity or other defining traits. Apartheid in South Africa, Aboriginal Australians, the Tutsi in Rwanda, and the Roma people of Eastern Europe are just a few who have suffered in this way.

And we cannot speak of alterity without referring to the long history of political and social domination that accompanies empire-building – both in its colonial sense and in its modern counterpart: globalization. Nor can we ignore the long history of mission and evangelization that often went hand in hand with the colonial enterprise and, today, with the expansion of the ideology of neoliberalism and so-called prosperity theology.

The politically, socially, and culturally constructed notion of the “uninvited guest”, the asylum seeker, the migrant, the “other” challenges our willingness to see differently, to hear differently, to read differently the images foisted on us by global mass media. The word itself is the language of empire and it seems to deny the right of an “other” to be treated equally, to be accorded full human dignity.

And this “otherness” begs the question of

the human right that demands that people accept the reality of human differences, that they show hospitality to others. I shall return to this concept later, but for now I shall quote Professor Cees Hamelink, one of the pioneers of communication rights:

“A right to communicate proposes that societies learn to live with the ‘permanent provocation’ of living with ‘others’ that exist in widely differing universes. Mature societies are ‘agonistic’ arrangements, which means that people are forever in dispute about the quality, the purpose, and the direction of their co-existence. Only the full acceptance of this reality creates the social environment in which a right to communicate is a sensible proposition.”¹

As we consider mission in an age of new empires, I shall offer some reflections from a communications perspective. But first, the Bible.

A biblical view

There are numerous references in the Bible to the treatment of the “stranger”. Judaism has always extolled the principle of *hachnasat orchim*, or “welcoming guests”, based largely on the example of Abraham and Sarah in the Book of Genesis. Hosts provide nourishment, comfort, and entertainment for their guests. At the end of the visit, hosts customarily escort their guests out of their home, wishing them a safe journey. One of the best known biblical exhortations is, “Be not forgetful to entertain strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares” (Hebrews, 13:2).

Others include Exodus 22:20-23, “You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. You shall not ill-treat any widow or orphan.” Exodus 23:9: “You shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the feelings of the stranger, having yourselves been strangers in the land of Egypt.” Deuteronomy 10:19: “So you are to love the sojourner, for sojourners were you in the land of Egypt.”

There is also clear evidence of hospitality in the New Testament, where the Greek word used



Abraham entertains unknown guests (Genesis 18: 1-16) in this painting by Chagall.

is *philoxenia*, which literally means “love for strangers”. In this sense, the story of the Good Samaritan can be read as hospitality:

“There was a man who went down from Jerusalem to Jericho and was waylaid by robbers, who stripped him and beat him and made off, leaving him half dead. Now a priest happened to be taking that road, and seeing him there gave him a wide berth. It was the same with a Levite who came to the place, and seeing him gave him a wide berth. But a travelling Samaritan came upon him, and moved to pity at seeing him, approached him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then laying him across his own beast he conveyed him to a hostelry and took care of him. When departing on the morrow he gave two dinars to the host with the injunction, ‘Take care of him well, and I will reimburse you for any additional expense on my return journey.’ Which of these three, do you think, acted as neighbour to the man waylaid by robbers?” (Luke’s Version of the Good News

of Jesus Christ, 10: 25-29. *The Original New Testament*, 1985: 159-60).

Much can be (and has been) said about this parable of Jesus. To begin with the man waylaid by robbers is anonymous. We do not know his name, or his appearance, or his class. He has no clothes that might help identify him and he is “half dead”, presumably unconscious. The man cannot speak: he is voiceless. He is a stranger both to the Samaritan and to us.

The parable deals with a first-hand experience that was common then and is still experienced today. Who has not seen someone lying in the street, possibly in need of help? The priest actually sees the man lying by the side of the road and crosses over to avoid him. He does not attempt to ascertain if he is alive or if he is a Jew or not. The priest risks ritual defilement if he approaches closer than four cubits since restoring ritual purity was time consuming and costly. He chooses, therefore, to ignore the victim of violence. The Levite also chooses to pass by on the other side of the road. Levites assisted priests in the temple and who knows but that this Levite was hurrying to

catch up with the priest? Perhaps he saw the priest avoid the man and thought, “If the priest can do that, so can I.”

The person who stops and displays genuine concern and a sense of hospitality is the outsider, a descendant of that mixed race of the Jews of captivity and the Samaritan people of the land in which they were once captive. At the time, the relationship between Jews and Samaritans was one of hostility because of past conflict. Yet, the Samaritan, who is clearly well off, is “moved to pity” and takes it upon himself to assist the man. He pours oil and wine on his wounds – an act customarily done by the priest before the high altar in the temple. The Samaritan takes him to a place where he will be cared for and pays all the expenses. He is going to return that way a few days later, so he tells the man running the hostelry not to spare any expense. The Samaritan does not know whom he has helped; nor does he have any expectation of being rewarded.

And in Luke 24:13-35 we learn more about hospitality. Cleopas and another disciple are walking to the village of Emmaus after Jesus’ crucifixion. A “stranger” joins them on their journey, who is the resurrected Jesus unrecognized. As the disciples reach their home in Emmaus, the stranger makes to continue onward, but the disciples insist that he accept their hospitality. Once inside, the hosts prepare a meal for the traveller, and when he breaks the bread, the disciples recognize Jesus.

In these two examples we see that genuine hospitality has no limits. As the French philosopher Jacques Derrida argues, true hospitality poses no conditions, seeks no reward, and distinguishes itself dramatically from codified law and the concept of justice. It is not contingent upon situation, event, history, or consequence; neither does it seek to establish a logic. It is merely a gift, in the purest sense.²

Mission today

In September 2012 The Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) of the World Council of Churches (WCC) published a document called *Together towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes*. It noted that:

“Mission has been understood as a movement taking place from the centre to the periphery, and from the privileged to the marginalized of society. Now people at the margins are claiming their key role as agents of mission and affirming mission as transformation. This reversal of roles in the envisioning of mission has strong biblical foundations because God chose the poor, the foolish, and the powerless (1 Cor. 1:18-31) to further God’s mission of justice and peace so that life may flourish. *If there is a shift of the mission concept from ‘mission to the margins’ to ‘mission from the margins’, what then is the distinctive contribution of the people from the margins? And why are their experiences and visions crucial for re-imagining mission and evangelism today?*”(6) [emphasis added].

The WCC Report goes on to suggest that new information and communication technologies have an important role to play in bridging gaps in knowledge and understanding. It affirms that:

“The church lives in multi-religious and multi-cultural contexts and new communication technology is also bringing the people of the world into a greater awareness of one another’s identities and pursuits. Locally and globally, Christians are engaged with people of other religions and cultures in building societies of love, peace, and justice. *Plurality is a challenge to the churches and serious commitment to interfaith dialogue and cross-cultural communication is therefore indispensable.*”(9) [emphasis added].

If this is the case, we might ask how that cross-cultural dialogue is to begin. Do we sit back and wait for a knock at the door? Do we make visits bearing gifts and offering to show the way? Or do we ask humbly to get to know the other, to begin to see the world from his or her perspective, and to exchange experiences? In short, are we prepared to listen?

As the WCC Report makes clear:

“In order to commit ourselves to God’s life-

giving mission, we have to listen to the voices from the margins to hear what is life-affirming and what is life-destroying. We must turn our direction of mission to the actions that the marginalized are taking. Justice, solidarity, and inclusivity are key expressions of mission from the margins.” (107)

It is my contention that none of this can happen – not genuine hospitality, not genuine dialogue, not genuine understanding, not solidarity, not inclusivity, not justice – without the implementation of what WACC recognizes as communication rights. The implication being that the churches need to move beyond narrow understandings of mission to embrace the unknown and to recognize and restore the rights of the marginalized. What do I mean?

- Not “granting” recognition, but living in genuine acceptance.
- Not paying lip service to inclusion, but dismantling the barriers that prevent it.
- Not conferring equality, but struggling against inequality.

Communicating human dignity

Both in its revised Principles and in its *Strategic Plan 2012-2016*, WACC has underlined its belief that a rights-based approach to communication provides a framework for everyone to be able to engage on an equal footing in transparent and informed debate. *Communication for All: Sharing WACC's Principles* affirms the centrality of communication – including mass, community and social media – to strengthening human dignity and to promoting democratic values. In particular, the principle of “communication for all” restores voice and visibility to vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in a spirit of solidarity and in the knowledge that structural transformation is a prerequisite of social justice.

Communication rights have a crucial role to play in recognising and accepting those who have been politically, socially and culturally marginalized, in abandoning notions of empire in order to

create a new world in which all are equal. Implicit in communication rights is a process of reconciliation with those whose freedom has been denied – a process based on truth-telling, commitment to justice, freedom in solidarity, and respect for human dignity. Such reconciliation can only take place in a context of mutual trust in a shared reality.

And, as the Buddhist social activist Sulak Sivaraksa has written, “Reconciliation requires seeing the world as it is, not as we wish it to be. We cannot make compassion dependent on a transformation to the ideal; we must begin with reality if we want to have any hope of influencing reality.”³

If we are going to see the world as it really is, we must include the reality of the marginalized. The view from the margins must find a transformative place at the centre, or the centre must move to the margins, so that the whole is in communication with itself: “Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body” (1Cor. 12:12).

In other words, be the communication you wish to see in the world! ■

Keynote speech given at the Council for World Mission (CWM) Communication Consultation, 19-20 January 2015, Singapore.

Notes

1. Hamelink C.J and Hoffmann J. (2009). “Communication as a Human Right: Picking Up the Challenge?”. In *The Right to Communicate: Historical Hopes, Global Debates, and Future Premises*, edited by Aliaa Dakroury, Mahmoud Eid, and Yahya R. Kamalipour. Dubuque IA: Kendall Hunt.
2. Derrida, J. (2000). *Of Hospitality*. Two lectures derived from a series of seminars in Paris in 1996. Stanford University Press.
3. Sivaraksa, S. (2001). “Culture and reconciliation.” *Media Development* 4/2001. London: WACC.

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On the screen...

WACC-SIGNIS Human Rights Award 2014

The WACC-SIGNIS Human Rights Award 2014 has gone to the film *Taxi* directed by Jafar Panahi (Iran, 2014), a feature-length documentary highlighting contemporary society in Iran.

The jury decided that *Taxi* demonstrates “an unusual and creative way of promoting the human right to communicate, challenging censorship and breaking the taboo of silence within and about Iran. A yellow cab driving through the vibrant streets of Tehran plays host to diverse passengers who express candid views while being interviewed by the driver, who is none other than the film’s director Jafar Panahi.” The film won the Golden Bear at the 2015 Berlin Film Festival.

Taxi plays a dual role visually mediating freedom of expression while ironically showing how new technologies are part and parcel of life and social interaction today. The film underlines and critiques how media images often govern people’s understanding of what is official, authentic, and

legal as opposed to what is unofficial, false or downright criminal.

Panahi achieved international recognition with his feature film debut, *The White Balloon*, which won the Caméra d’Or at the 1995 Cannes Film Festival, the first major award won by an Iranian film at Cannes. Although his films were often banned in his own country, he continued to receive international acclaim from film critics and won numerous awards, including the Golden Leopard at the Locarno International Film Festival for *The Mirror* (1997), the Golden Lion at the Venice Film Festival for *The Circle* (2000), and the Silver Bear for Best Director at the Berlin Film Festival for *Offside* (2006).

Panahi’s films are known for their humanistic perspective on life in Iran, often focusing on the hardships of children, the impoverished, and women. In his own words, “I’m a filmmaker. I can’t do anything else but make films. Cinema is my expression and the meaning of my life. Nothing can prevent me from making films. Because when I’m pushed into the furthest corners I connect with my inner self.”

Abbas Kiarostami, who made Iranian cinema world-famous, often set his protagonists in cars so that the audience sees what the actor sees. The

car and the eyes of the viewer became one, a large moving camera, so that the film director shares observations and thoughts with the viewers.

Jafar Panahi uses a similar technique in *Taxi* (still left), although the decision to do so was not entirely voluntary. Panahi is currently banned from making films in his home coun-



try and is not allowed to travel abroad. Although sentenced to a term in prison, his was freed as a result of pressure from abroad. However, he has chosen to disregard the work ban imposed on him.

Taxi is a courageous act of resistance. The director plays the taxi driver in his own film, making conversation with numerous passengers as he drives them around Tehran. Some of these passengers address Iran's democratic abuses very directly. In this respect, *Taxi* is a politically committed film.

Berlin 2015

At the 65th International Film Festival Berlin (February 5-15, 2015) the Ecumenical Jury awarded prizes in the International Competition, the Panorama and the Forum. The Panorama and the Forum Prize are endowed with € 2500.- each, donated by the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) and the German Bishops Conference (DBK).

The Prize in the International Competition went to *El botón de nácar* (The Pearl Button) (still below) directed by Patricio Guzmán, France, Chile, Spain, 2015.

Guzmán's documentary shows a moving history of the people of Patagonia and Chile reminding us that human suffering and injustice go beyond political and social systems. Using water not only as a symbolic tool but also as a natural element it puts the concrete story of the region's victims, including precolonial indigenous persons and those who opposed Pinochet's regime, into the vast perspective of humankind.

In the Panorama, the jury awarded its Prize to *Ned Rifle* directed by Hal Hartley, USA 2014.

Motivation: The final instalment of Hartley's trilogy, *Ned Rifle* stands on its own as an engaging study of human nature and religious motives. Lead character Ned Rifle leaves his adoptive religious household when he turns 18 to kill his father in pursuit of his mother's revenge (the subjects of the two previous films in the trilogy, *Henry Fool* and *Fay Grim*). On his journey Ned interacts with the family stalker, his uncle, his mother and his father as he seeks redemption. Beautiful cinematography and an engaging script combine drama, comedy and a keen exploration of good and evil.

In the Forum, the jury awarded its Prize to *Histoire de Judas* directed by Rabah Ameur-Zaïmeche, France 2015. This timeless historical drama about the life of Jesus is told from the perspective



of Judas, one of his disciples, who traditionally has been seen as the betrayer of Jesus. In this film he is portrayed like Jesus, a victim of the power and oppression of the Roman rulers.

This passion play asks viewers to look beyond prejudices and attempt to understand the life and message of Jesus. With an awareness of current world political events *Histoire de Judas* makes a strong case for our need to listen to the stories of the marginalized.

Members of the jury: Lukas Jirsa, Praha (Czech Republic) – Jury President; Gustavo Andujar, La Havana (Cuba); Gregg Brekke, Portland (USA); Piet Halma, Baarn (The Netherlands); Inge Kirsner, Ludwigsburg (Germany); Joachim Opahle, Berlin (Germany).

Fribourg (Switzerland) 2015

At the 29th Festival International des Films de Fribourg (21-28 March 2015) the Ecumenical Jury Award of INTERFILM and SIGNIS consisting of CHF 5'000 is given jointly by two institutions of the churches working in development

cooperation, Fastenopfer (Catholic) and Bread for All (Protestant).

The award goes to the director whose film best reflects generally ethical and spiritual questions, especially questions of the meaning of life in the situation of men and women in Eastern Europe, Africa, Asia and Latin America, and stands for Human Dignity and Rights, Solidarity and lasting Development.

The Ecumenical Jury at the 29th Festival awarded its Prize to the film *Flapping in the Middle of Nowhere / Dap cánh giua không trung* (still below) directed by Diep Hoang Nguyen (Vietnam, 2014).

Citation: In a way that is both expressive and loaded with emotion, the film shows the daily struggles of a young couple, living in a poor environment and confronted with a pregnancy that was not planned. The efforts of the couple to rise above the limits of their environment are shown in a way that is realistic as well as poetic. The director emphasizes respect for life, the dignity of people, and conveys a hope for the future.

Members of the Jury in 2015 were: Michèle Debidour, Dieulefit (France) – President; Rosemarie Fährndrich, Lucerne (Switzerland); Peter Meier-Apolloni, Twann (Switzerland); Bo Torp Pedersen, Copenhagen (Denmark). ■

