

NARRATIVE REPORT OF THE COMMUNICATION TRAINING WORKSHOP IN BUEA, CAMEROON

1. Introduction

A communication training workshop for Voluntary External Broadcasters (VEBS) took place at the Synod Office Hall Buea, Cameroon from Sunday February 24 to Saturday March 1, 2008. The one-week workshop sponsored by WACC and organized by the Christian Broadcasting Service (CBS) Radio FM 95.3, a radio service of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon, attracted over 70 participants and facilitators.

The workshop attendees included young men and women who have no background in Journalism or Mass Communication, but are offering voluntary services in various private radio stations in Cameroon. They came from the Cameroon Baptist Convention Radio station in Bamenda, Eden Radio in Limbe, Donga-Mantung Community Radio in Nkambe and the Christian Broadcasting Service in Buea the host radio station.

Unlike in some seminars, courses and workshops, the Buea workshop was not restricted to able-bodied participants. One of the resource persons was a handicapped person while two of the broadcasters in training included a blind presenter and the other a disabled producer.

Meanwhile, the Resource Persons and facilitators were media professionals from both the print and electronic media. Print experts came from such renowned newspapers such as “The Post” and from the Provincial Delegation of Communication for the South West Province. And radio professionals came from the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Buea as well as from CRTV Buea, Mount Cameroon FM 98.6 and from CBS Radio FM 95.3.

2. The Opening Ceremony

The Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon (PCC) who at the same time is the President of the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC), the Rt. Rev. Dr. Nyansako-ni-Nku, himself a trained journalist and broadcaster opened the workshop. He was assisted by the Synod Clerk (General Secretary) of the PCC, the Rev. Dr. Festus Asana who is also a member of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches (WCC). PCC Heads of Departments and Institutions joined the workshop participants to witness the opening ceremony.

3. Workshop Topics

Being a radio-focused workshop, the topics were carefully selected to suit what participants needed at their different radio stations to enable them produce and present programmes more effectively. Consequently, the subjects treated at the 7-day workshop were as outlined below:

1. **The Basics of Newsgathering**—By Jesse Konang (BA Journalism, 30 years experience)
2. **Interview and Interview Techniques**—By Triphine Atoh (BA Mass Com, 12 yrs exp)
3. **Writing for Radio and Writing for Newspapers**—By Charlie Ndi Chia (BA Mass Com, 35 yrs exp)
4. **Studio Signs and their Meanings**—By Fongu Diane Tebo (BA Mass Com, 15 yrs exp)
5. **Radio News Preparation and Presentation**—By Matute Menyoli (BA Mass Com, 25 yrs experience)
6. **Different Microphones and their Uses**—By Divine Bisong (MA Radio & TV, 18 yrs experience, University lecturer)
7. **Control Sheet, Programme Preparation and Presentation**—By Njomo Kevin (MA Mass Com, 30 yrs experience, Station Manager)
8. **Introduction to Media Law and Ethics**—By Henry Muluh (MA Radio & TV, HOD JMC, University of Buea)

9. **The Functions/Importance of the Broadcast & Copyright Service**—By Mondoa Joseph (BA Journalism, 15 years experience)
10. **Radio Editorial Policy**—By Achowah Umenei (MA Journalism, 31 yrs experience)

4. **Workshop Methodology**

The time allocated for each presentation was 60 minutes. That was immediately followed by questions and answers giving room for the resource persons and workshop participants to interact. In this way, the give and take created the opportunity for comments, remarks and straightforward questions for clarification. Some speakers took advantage of the exercise to add more to what they had presented.

5. **From Theory to Practice**

Morning sessions were devoted to presentations and discussions while the afternoons were slated for field work and studio recording. In other words, the participants went to various offices and businesses in Buea Town and Molyko for interviews. They talked to bankers, government and Church officers, traders in the market, President of Drivers' Union, Directors of Educational Institutions and many others. Then each participant turned his or her interview into a news story written in radio style.

All participants recorded two minutes of their stories in the CBS Studio and this was later auditioned by both the students and the teachers. Each recording was given an objective critique while the presenter took notes of his or her strengths and weaknesses.

The assessment focused on the grammar, writing and presentation style, voice and breathe control as well as poise before the microphone. Participants found the critique interesting and very educative, though it was irritating in some cases where a few individuals were pretty sharp on their colleagues.

6. **Certificates of Participation**

Before the participants left, each received a Certificate of Participation designed by the workshop organizers. To some, this was like the first degree in Journalism and Mass Communication to which they attached a lot of importance and appreciation. The Certificate came as a moral booster to the participants and they valued it so much as it was co-signed by the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon who is also the President of the All African Council of Churches (AACC).

7. **Women Participation**

Female participation in the workshop was not as high as the organizers expected. In the letter of Invitation sent to Station Managers of Radio Stations, they were requested to send equal number of women and men. But the reality was different. Of the 60 broadcasters present, we had 14 women and 46 men. The imbalance of women to men was also reflected among the facilitators made up of four women and 10 men.

This is indicative of the low numbers of women in the Cameroon media landscape. In most Radio Stations and newspapers establishments, men still outnumber women. This has orchestrated the development of gender policies in some media houses that would gradually alter the situation in future. For example, in CBS Radio FM 95.3 where we have a permanent staff of seven, the proportion is three women to four men.

8. **Workshop Evaluation**

The participants evaluated the one-week workshop before leaving Buea. On the positive side, they appreciated what the organizers did to think of equipping untrained broadcasters. Some wrote that the food and accommodation was excellent, adding that it was the first high standard workshop they ever attended. They praised the organizers for selecting appropriate topics for the workshop and dubbed up

their caps for the skill and experience of the resource persons and facilitators. The attendees requested the organizers to transmit special words of gratitude to the World Association for Christian Communication for providing the funds for the workshop.

On the other hand, most participants thought the duration of the workshop was short. They suggested it ought to be for at least two weeks. The broadcasters wished for more practical work than was done, particularly as some admired the CBS Studio which by comparison was better equipped than the cubicles in their respective Broadcasting Houses. Many complained of sore feet as they trekked to various places to conduct interviews, though as will be seen below, the long walks were not caused by the workshop organizers.

9. Difficulties Encountered During Workshop

The Communication Training Workshop started on Sunday February 24. And the next day, an unprecedented nation wide strike caused by Taxi Drivers crippled most of the country, affecting seven of the 10 provinces of Cameroon. Private cars and taxis could not move within or out of the towns affected. People trekked long distances to work and workshop participants went on foot to do their interviews. It was very risky to walk the streets because of road blocks, burning of tyres and the tear gas and shooting by the police, gendarmes and the army. In fact, much property was destroyed and about 30 people were killed nation wide.

Because of the strike, some Radio Stations such as Lakeside, Ocean City, Revival Gospel, Radio Bonakanda and the Christian Gospel Radio could not send participants to the workshop. Even some producers and presenters of CBS Radio who had traveled out of Buea hoping to be back Monday February 25, were blocked in transit and held hostage for one week.

In the course of transporting some workshop participants in the night, a new-used CBS Toyota Corolla vehicle that was only one week old before the workshop was shot by some vandals. The crown and bonnet were broken and the driver and car occupants were almost lynched.

10. Conclusion

Despite the few problems caused by the strike, it was a successful workshop from the perspective of the organizers and the participants. All resource persons and facilitators invited answered present and did a good job in their presentations and practical exercises. The spirit of commitment and enthusiasm of the broadcasters was exemplary. This was demonstrated through active participation in the lectures, trekking to distant places to interview total strangers for practical exercises and constant presence in the workshop from beginning to end.

One participant stood out very conspicuous in the workshop and attracted much attention as she went around doing her work diligently. This was a lady about eight months pregnant who created jokes and spiced the workshop in a variety of ways. And she was among those frequently pleading with the organizers to call for a follow up workshop in no distant future so that she can attend it with her son or daughter.

We cannot forget to thank the top officers of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon (PCC) who accepted to open the workshop and the Heads of Departments and Institutions who witnessed the opening ceremony. Of course, without the sponsorship of WACC, nothing could have happened.

By Achowah Umenei