



Examples

The Church in Africa

A force for advocacy and democratisation

September 2010



advocate for social justice, peace and democratisation on the continent.

SECAM, which stands for the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar, brings together the African Church's leadership from 37 countries and 9 regions on the continent. In its position paper on the MDGs "Maximising our potentials for the Benefit of our people" (SECAM, September 2010), the African Church's leadership has stated: "(...) **Advocacy is the main instrument used to challenge the consciences of Heads of State and those responsible for the public domain**, in order to "guarantee ever more the liberation and development of their peoples. It is only at this price that peace is established between nations."

SECAM undertakes advocacy at various levels. At the national level, the Catholic Church and civil society often work in partnership with their own governments such as in Zambia and Nigeria (example 1 and 3). In other countries local organisations are vulnerable to being silenced by governments unhappy to be reminded of their responsibility to promote the common good of their citizens as is the case in the Republic of Congo (example 2).

At the continental level SECAM engages with pan-African institutions. At the international level it links up with the **CIDSE, Caritas** and ecumenical alliances to influence northern policies that have an impact on the lives and livelihoods of ordinary Africans. CIDSE shares SECAM's belief that Europe, having committed to the Millennium Development Goals, having enshrined the commitment to poverty eradication in EU law and given its special relationship with Africa, must live up to its responsibilities.

In particular SECAM and CIDSE jointly call attention to the following:

} The African Catholic Church has **an immense reservoir of knowledge and experience** coming from decades of service delivery, working towards reconciliation and community building. SECAM, as the representative of pan-African Catholic leadership is in a position to channel this knowledge and experience to policy makers at the national, continental and international level. Europe sends an important message to its peers in Africa by being open to dialogue with this pan-African organisation.

} Often supported by their leadership and international alliances, catholic organisations in Africa have criticised governments when they do not deliver on their promises, even in situations when opposition to government policy is taboo. The efforts of these **organisations working on the frontlines must not be undermined by European policy** - or the lack thereof - whether on issues of transparency of operations of European companies operating in Africa; or on European rules on bank secrecy, or on debt, aid and trade agreements; or on European foreign and security policies.

Example I

Organisation:
Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection,
Zambia

Theme:
Budget Monitoring

The Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR) has monitored the rising cost of living in Zambia since the early 1990s. At this time the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP) raised concern about the low wages that the Catholic Church was paying its employees. To investigate this further, JCTR made an assessment of the basic cost of living and 'living wage' through its first survey in March 1991 called the "Food Basket" survey.

In 1992 Zambia implemented a Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) which led to a reduction in protective tariffs (e.g. textiles, batteries), removal of subsidies of basic goods (e.g. agricultural inputs, mealie meal), and abolishment of price and exchange rate controls. The Zambian currency, the kwacha, depreciated and inflation skyrocketed at this time. To assess the impact of the SAP on the standard of living of ordinary citizens, the JCTR did another Food Basket survey in 1993. This survey revealed that the cost of living had increased by five times (compared to the first survey in March 1991) by January 1993 and more than six times in April of the same year. By January 1996 the survey revealed that the basic cost of living, based on the JCTR's *Food Basket* methodology had increased 11 fold. At this time, working with students of the University of Zambia, the JCTR started conducting their *Food Basket* surveys on a monthly basis.

The survey has since expanded in scope to monitor the cost of living in locations all across Zambia, including the rural areas. It has also increased in content, reflecting feedback from the survey's users and stakeholders and is now described as the "**Basic Needs Basket**" survey .

Recording monthly data has helped the JCTR and its major stakeholders to analyse how cost of living varies over intervals of time, to understand the reasons for trends in price changes over seasons or years and to make recommendations for policy-change to create the future socio-economic climate that allows people to afford a decent standard of living.

JCTR emphasises that advocacy based on the survey is decentralised and carried out by a variety of stakeholders ranging from community groups to members of parliament to researchers and trade unions. They even tell a story of a traditional chief using the Basic Needs Basket to encourage local youth to remain the village given the high cost of living in urban areas. An evaluation of the survey in 2003 revealed that the Zambia Union of Financial Institutions and Allied Workers (ZUFIAW) used the JCTR Basket in negotiations with 22 institutions during the first part of the year 2003. The organisation *Women for Change* was reported to find the basket a useful tool in helping rural communities understand why teachers go on strike. The assessment also revealed that the Finnish Government had taken into account the JCTR Basket in determining its level of support to Zambia's Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper.

At the grassroots level, the survey is used to educate local leaders of issues relating to the cost of living and to understand the reasons for the changing trends. At the national level, the JCTR uses the *Basic Needs Basket* to directly engage with leaders on national policy-issues and push for legislative changes to increase accessibility of basic goods nationwide. An important part of the advocacy strategy around the *Basic Needs Basket* survey is communication to the media of the monthly survey's findings as a means to inform the general public of the prevailing political or socio-economic events impacting household's ability to meet basic needs.

In their own words, the JCTR believes that: "**By sparking fires at both a local and national level, the *Basic Needs Basket* really turns up the heat on any person, institution or policy standing between the Zambian people and accessibility of basic human needs.**"

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Example II

Organisation:
**The Justice and Peace Commission
of the Catholic Church, Republic of Congo**

Theme:
**Revenue Transparency and
combating corruption**

The Catholic Church in Central Africa has been engaged in advocacy on revenue transparency for the benefit of the populations of the region's resource-rich countries for almost a decade. In the Republic of Congo, one of the largest oil producers in Sub-Saharan Africa where oil sales account for 94 percent of the country's export earnings, the Catholic Church's Justice and Peace Commission from Pointe Noire, the oil capital on the coast, first began **an advocacy campaign on oil revenue management**. The leaders of the Catholic Church in the country, the National Catholic Bishops Conference, took up their demands and in June 2002 issued a statement calling on President Sassou-Nguesso and his new parliament to pass a new oil revenue management law that would determine how revenue would be spent, and to establish a committee to monitor the fair management of oil revenues. The Congolese Catholic Church also called on the church in Africa and worldwide to participate in this struggle. Thanks to the efforts of the Congolese Bishops, the Angolan Catholic Church also initiated advocacy towards their own government on revenue transparency. At the international level, the French Catholic Development organisation Secours Catholique/Caritas France along with the US development organisation Catholic Relief Services (CRS) arranged a lobby tour for a group of Congolese to France during which the delegation also met with the directors of Total, the largest oil multinational operating in the country. During the visit, **Bishop Louis Portella-Mbuyu noted that up until the Church had spoken out, it was taboo to even talk about what was happening to oil revenue.**

In 2003, the Justice and Peace Commissions of the Bishops Conferences of the region formally committed to work on the issue of human dignity in the extractive industry in Central Africa. Closely following this declaration in the Republic of Congo, the Evangelical Church of Congo and the Congolese Observatory for Human Rights (OCDH) formed a joint front to promote transparency of revenues coming from the petroleum industry and to combat corruption. Joining up with the international movement to promote revenue transparency of the extractive industry, the coalition adopted the name *'the Congolese coalition Publish What you Pay.'*

The coalition closely monitors international commitments that the Congolese government makes on issues related to transparency and the revenue from the petroleum sector. They pressure the government to translate these commitments into national regulation to lift the secrecy in petroleum contracts.

The activism of the Coalition and its outspoken criticism of government corruption and mismanagement have not gone unnoticed by the authorities. Efforts have been made to silence them. Brice Mackosso of the Justice and Peace Commission was arrested on 6 April 2006 along with Christian Mounzéo, the coordinator of the Coalition. After being released the day after, the two were again held in custody for a further three weeks charged with a "breach of trust" and "complicity in breach of trust and forgery." The charges were allegedly related to the misuse of funds from a non-governmental organisation that Mounzéo founded. The arrests generated widespread international attention and led Paul Wolfowitz, the president of the World Bank at the time to criticise their arrests on April 24. After their arrests, a number of international organisations such as Human Rights Watch called on the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative to re-evaluate their dealings with the government of the Republic of Congo because of its lack of commitment to good governance and transparency.

Most recently, the Congolese Justice and Peace Commission along with a coalition of international organisations including Misereor (the German member of CIDSE), Secours Catholique/Caritas France the Heinrich Böll Foundation and Friends of the Earth, have been monitoring the operations of Italian oil company Eni to develop tar sands and oil palm in the Congo Basin. The report that the coalition published in November 2009 documents the threatened impact of the company's operations on the region and received worldwide media attention.

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Example III

Organisation:
Justice, Development and Peace Commission (JDPC), Nigeria

Theme:
Good governance and community empowerment

The leadership of the Nigerian Catholic Church put in place the **Justice, Development and Peace Commission (JDPC)** in the year 2000 to enable the Church to more vigorously work on social justice and peace issues in the country. The JDPC uses basic communication tools and access points for shared community activities. The use of the **'Town Hall Meetings' instrument** is an innovative and effective instrument to implement **democracy monitoring**. These meetings are essentially information sharing and dialogue forums between public servants and the community. For instance, public servants present their budgets and plans to the communities, who are then encouraged to contribute and help shape these plans. Subsequent meetings are organised for the public servants and communities to evaluate the progress made on the goals.

To ensure that the Town Hall Meetings are held in as many communities as possible, the JDPC collaborates with the National Orientation Agency (NOA), the Federal Government's information and awareness raising agency, in organising and mobilising public official attendees for the meetings. The partnership enhances NOA's mandate to inform citizens on government activities while bringing increased human resources for the project.

A monthly newsletter the *Democracy Monitor* compliments the Town Hall Meetings. Information on the federal, state and local budgets are published in the newsletter. It also provides current information on government activities, especially the abuse of public funds. In some cases this newsletter is the only source of information communities have to explain how their taxes and public funds are spent. Even public officials have been reported to use this tool as a source for planning budgets.

Once the Town Hall Meetings gain participants and momentum, the JDPC organises pressure groups to monitor government budgets and planning. An entire department within JDPC is dedicated to running education programmes for these pressure groups. Since 1999 JDPC has put together more than 500 such programs.

The JDPC also includes a strong democracy monitoring component. It trained and deployed 30,000 election observers for the 2007 elections for example. The Commission organises seminars and workshops about the electoral process, political rights and responsibilities, and policies that directly affect their communities. The pressure groups and the election monitors help take the energy generated by community education and translate it into action; they also provide an avenue for deeper participation for those citizens who want to be more involved.

Thanks to its outreach through its Town Hall meetings and civic education work, the JDPC has become the centre of a myriad of initiatives which promote a vibrant community. It has built up a micro-credit system based on the Grameen Bank model and infuses a civic education component into this model. It also runs an agricultural programme involving over 5,000 farmers who analyse the local, regional and national agricultural budgets and are equipped to challenge their leadership when they find questionable budgeting practices.

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