



FOR DISCUSSION

**WCC Communication Department  
5-year strategic plan (2009 - 2013)**

**Introduction**

*The goal of the WCC Communication Department is to promote the work of the World Council of Churches (WCC) with the aim of enhancing and building the ecumenical movement and witness of the church in the world. Through the promotion of the core values and activities of the WCC the department works to strengthen the overall profile of the organization for the purpose of educating, informing and gaining the support of a broad international audience, including the WCC membership and its committees, boards and commissions and the church and public at large.*

**The Strategy**

The WCC is an ecumenical fellowship of churches and as a membership institution it strives to facilitate and strengthen the movement toward church unity, common witness and service to the world. It represents 347 churches in 120 countries and represents more than 550 million Christians. It also works closely with the Roman Catholic Church and other Christian communions.

Much of the work of the WCC requires some level of communication work, whether it a basic introductory brochure, a consultation, conference, assembly, advocacy initiative, or speaking in the public and church media. This communication must be clear, concise and effective if it is going to contribute to the overall profile and image of the WCC.

This communication strategy lays a foundation for developing a long-term approach which will strengthen the role of communication within the overall vision and purpose of the WCC. To accomplish this there must be an increase in the capacity and resources of the communication department at a time when the framework budgets for the next several years project tighter budgets and diminishing resources. This strategy was developed in response to a Sept. 2006 Central Committee call for the strengthening of the role of communication within the WCC.

The fundamentals of this strategy are focused in the following areas:

1. Strengthen the overall profile and image of WCC.
2. Find agreement on a focused message to reinforce the WCC profile and image.
3. Link communication work more closely with fundraising.
4. Build internal and external communication skills among staff.
5. Provide WCC programme areas with strategic communication planning.
6. Develop advocacy communication to strengthen the witness of WCC.
7. Improve communication impact and reach with WCC member churches.
8. Restructure the communication department to meet needs of this strategy.

## **WCC audience**

All communication efforts require an audience in order to be effective. The WCC is committed to reach key audiences around the world through its print and electronic media, networks of commissions, boards and round tables and the church and secular media.

For the sake of this strategy audiences have been described rather broadly. There remains a need for research and gathering more detailed descriptions of the various WCC audiences, however, this would take significant resources and time to develop.

The most comprehensive definition of the WCC audience or constituency centres on the more than 550 million people represented by the WCC member churches. An even broader audience could be claimed if one includes reaching out to those from other religions and communities around the world who relate to WCC or have similar interests.

Realistically, however, the WCC audience must be more narrowly defined with the understanding that the broadest of the audiences will only be reached proportionally and otherwise there will be some segmentation. With this in mind here is a short list of the primary WCC audiences.

- a. Broad constituency
- b. WCC stakeholders
- c. Church and public media

The **“broad constituency”** audience is the grassroots audience who has varying degrees of awareness about WCC, positive and negative. They stand outside of the staff, board, committee and commission circles. For them WCC is one of many church agencies vying for their attention. This audience must be viewed proportionally and while it represents the potential of an extraordinarily large number of people, the reality is it includes fewer of the WCC membership than 550 million persons.

The **“stakeholders”** can best be described as a half dozen groups related primarily to the WCC as staff, board members, programme networks, church leadership, activists, decision-makers and interested church leadership. This is the inner circle of the WCC and is a highly educated group with a tendency toward the academic and steeped in the language and issues of the WCC and ecumenism. Numerically this is a small group of people and they tend to move around in the same circles.

The **“church and public media”** audience is meant to supplement the communication efforts targeted to the broad constituency and stakeholders. They are an “instrumental” audience and are crucial partners at specific times, although not the only partner in the presentation of the WCC to the broad constituency. They also play the unique role of reinforcing and legitimizing WCC for the stakeholders. This is a very small and narrowly focused audience, but influential.

## **Strategy Part One**

### **Strengthen the overall profile and image of the WCC**

The WCC position in the arena of faith-based organizations has changed in recent years and there is a strong need for differentiating itself from similar organizations and articulating a clear organizational promise and message.

Anecdotal evidence shows that while the name recognition of the WCC remains high, few know what WCC does. This concern has as much to do with the image of the WCC as it does with its positioning within the ecumenical movement.

Because of this, the effectiveness of the WCC voice on the world stage as a competent representative of its membership and constituency is being severely challenged. To lift the WCC from a position of one organization in the midst of many requires a commitment to differentiate itself from others and to reinforce its relevancy.

While part of accomplishing this goal lies with communication, an equally significant part lies with programming and the overall organizational vision offered from leadership.

This strategy calls on the WCC to re-discover its promise message to its membership and constituency and once found, proclaim it.

Work has been done during the past few years developing a three-fold vision as a framework for interpreting the vision and mission of WCC work. The context of this vision is:

1. Living out Christian unity more fully.
2. Being neighbours to all.
3. Taking greater care of creation.

While “living out Christian unity” needs little explanation, the second and third require more interpretation which falls in later stages of communicating the promise and message of an organization. The third in particular reflects more specific programmatic intentions.

To regain its position within the ecumenical movement, the promise and message of the WCC must be more outward, reflecting the heart of a mission in simple yet poignant terms. This strategy recommends the core promise and message of the WCC be expressed through the use of the terms **unity, witness and service**.

While these are starting points they are also common threads which run through the organization, including its constitution, and the membership at all levels. The terms express what both the WCC and its membership have in common. The profile and image of the WCC will be strengthened when the audience and the organization are in agreement about who the organization is.

The implementation of this part of the strategy takes place in Strategy Part Two.

## **Strategy Part Two**

### **Find agreement on a focused message to reinforce the WCC profile and image.**

Short of engaging in an expensive and time consuming organizational visioning exercise this communication strategy proposes sharpening the focus of the WCC promise and message through the use of the terms **unity, witness and service**.

Internally, WCC leadership and staff must engage in dialogue to reach agreement that **unity, witness and service** represent the historical legacy of the WCC vision and are in fact a way to move forward. In one sense this strategy is proposing WCC go back to its core values and then make them relevant in the new ecumenical dispensation.

For example, the WCC is still about church unity, but how is that unity defined and carried out today. The witness of the church is equally relevant now as it was 60 years ago, but the powers and principalities have changed. How does the expression of witness change? The understanding of common service is different today than a decade ago and reflects the changing role of organizations such as the WCC.

This strategy is recommending that through the 2013 assembly the core promise and message of the WCC be focused on **unity, witness and service**.

Implementation of part one and two

1. Internal agreement of core values of **unity, witness and service** needs to be discussed at the leadership level within six months or sooner of the approval of this strategy.
2. With the assistance of communication professional, the leadership and staff need to engage in a discussion which leads to agreement of focused message around **unity, witness and service**.
3. The communication department will set a strategy for 2009-13 which includes the promotion of this focused message through promotional materials such as a brochure series, etc. A new brochure and promotional material would be released late 2009, early 2010.
4. Staff would integrate this focused message into their communication work.

## **Strategy Part Three**

### **Link communication work more closely with fundraising**

The goal of a focused core message is not only to state the promise and vision of the WCC but also to enhance and strengthen the WCC image and “brand” in the mind of staff, board members, member churches and the public.

Once this goal is implemented it influences nearly all aspects of a functioning organization. In many non-profit organizations, public relations and advertising words such as “brand” are rarely spoken of. The reality is every organization has an identity. That identity is what people outside the primary circle of the organization believe the organization is. Ultimately, the identity of an organization is not what the staff say it is, but what the constituency or audience say.

This strategy recommends that through the use of focused message communication initiatives begin to work more closely with fundraising and donor methods. A caution is that not all communication work is fundraising and vice versa.

However, for the financial health of the organization both communication and fundraising must work cooperatively if not at times hand-in-hand to reach mutual organizational goals.

In one sense communication, fundraising and programme all have the same goal, furthering the image of the WCC and enhancing the resources to get the job done.

### **Implementation**

1. Communication and fundraising work together to establish core message of WCC.
2. Communication and fundraising establish annual strategic goals for synergy in areas of promotion, web donations, etc.
3. Communication provides high quality communication tools for fundraising.
4. Both departments join in cooperative training with staff.

## **Strategy Part Four**

### **Build internal and external communication skills among staff.**

No matter how clearly focused and prepared the core message of the WCC is, if staff have not bought into the message and learned how to integrate it into their work and expression of their work, the message will not move forward.

If staff does not believe in the WCC promise and message, how can they be expected to speak about it with honesty, integrity, excitement and passion.

At the same time, if staff do not have the awareness, skills and resources to effectively communicate internally amongst themselves and externally to their audience, even the most well intended message could fail.

This strategy recommends communication training for staff around the issues of organizational profile and image, a focused message, identifying and understanding external audiences and internally, and keeping in touch with one another. In other words, staff must be aware of the role communication plays in their work inside and outside.

This strategy recommends staff be involved in various levels of communication training and that along with the communication department programmes work to develop strong internal communication links.

### **Implementation**

1. Programme communication training - Each of the six programmes will select one to two staff who are primary contacts with the communication department. These staff would be responsible for communication planning and implementation within their programme and would receive communication training. The goal is to provide skills for thinking strategically about communication and how it harmonizes programme expectations and the core message of the WCC.
2. Focused communication training as needed. This training is focused on individuals within programmes, beyond the one or two persons designated as primary communication contacts, who are carrying out specific tasks related to project communication work. It could include specific training in advocacy communication, book publishing trends, writing seminars, web development, publicity and promotion, photography, etc. The intention is not to supplant the services provided by the communication department, but to enhance the understanding of communication around specific tasks. This training moves beyond communication theory and strategy to practical issues.
3. Work with programmes and other departments within the WCC to strengthen internal communication. This task cannot be done solely by the communication department but must be an organization-wide task.

## **Strategy Part Five**

### **Provide WCC programme areas with strategic communication planning**

Each WCC programme has specific communication goals. These goals must be integrated into annual programme planning and well as budgeting. The communication department has been asked to assist programme in articulating these goals. The effectiveness of this effort is directly related to the implementation and success of part four on staff training.

The WCC communication department works with WCC programme in two ways:

1. The department assists programmes annually in developing their communication goals. This work will be organized primarily through the director of communication office with support from communication staff.
2. The department offers professional services to meet programme communication needs such as web development to text editing, photography and video, publication, language services, etc.

Within the WCC there are six programme areas encompassing dozens of projects and hundreds of programme activities. Realistically not all aspects of a programme, project or activities can or need to be promoted or reported on.

There are three considerations to take into account when developing programme communication strategies.

- a. Is the strategy developed within the overall focused message and WCC profile?
- b. Do the staff within the programme have an understanding of the value of communication and the skills to discern between what will be effective communication and will not be?
- c. Is the programme staff willing to make the tough choices within their programme as to which project receives communication attention and which does not?

Communication will bring the tools and recommendations for how programme makes decisions to utilize scarce communication funding. For each programme this will require difficult decisions. Programmes will need to prioritize their efforts and focus on what are the most compelling and relevant activities to share based on the needs of their audience and the needs of the programme.

For example programme staff may feel passionately that their consultation deserves media coverage, when the reality is the effort involved covering the event may be out of proportion to realistic communication outcomes.

As communication training among programme staff increases, many of these decision will and can be made within the programme itself.

It will be incumbent upon Communication staff to familiarize themselves with the various programmes they are working for. This does not mean developing a detailed understanding of the programme but instead being aware of programme activities in a broad sense, knowledge of all but mastering of none.

### **Implementation**

- 1) The initiative for this process would be the annual programme planning and budgeting process. The overall coordination of this effort will be done by the Director of Communication office in conjunction with communication and programme staff.
- 2) During the programme planning stage programme staff meet with the director of communication and assistant administrator and a core communication staff group (i.e. web, publishing and media managers) to establish programme communication objectives.
- 3) The communication staff develops cost projections and offer comment on the feasibility of the plans – from a communication, marketing and distribution perspective.
- 4) Once the programme communication plans and budget are accepted and approved, programme staff begin to work directly with the communication staff related to a specific project. (i.e., a web project would involve web staff, etc.)
- 5) Throughout the year the director of communication and staff would monitor the communication goals set by programme and involvement of communication staff.

## **Strategy Part Six**

### **Developing advocacy communication**

There is a call within WCC, its committees and commissions for strengthening the advocacy component of programme work, particularly around the WCC United Nations Liaison Office (UNLO).

Often advocacy efforts result in statements, studies, booklets and reports. Time and time again these releases come with little attention paid to strategic advocacy communication thinking. Church agencies, as well as NGOs, are learning that it is no longer enough to release a statement about a particular issue. There must be something for members to act upon and become involved.

The combining of advocacy and communication allows programme to take complex and important issues to broad audiences for awareness and action. Audiences are not looking for statements; they are

asking agencies “what can I do.” As the WCC moves toward stronger advocacy initiatives and speaking to the sources of power, they must also offer concrete ways for audiences to “do something.” Communication will work with those programmes involved in advocacy to strengthen their efforts by providing advice and resources to strengthen advocacy communication work.

### **Implementation**

1. Communication and the public witness programme will develop a long term strategy for strengthening the profile of the UNLO. This could mean an exercise in branding for the office.
2. Communication and the public witness programme will strengthen the use of online resources for churches and individuals, placing an emphasis on the UNLO.
3. Communication will explore ways to link educational materials and advocacy campaigns on the web for stronger impact in public witness.

## **Strategy Part Seven**

### **Improve communication impact and reach with WCC member churches**

When measuring the usage of WCC communication products from books to news stories to the World Wide Web, the results clearly show we are successfully reaching a northern hemisphere audience, although there still remains much need of improvement.

What does not show in our measuring, is solid long-term indication we are not adequately member churches in the global south, eastern Europe, China and others outside of the northern hemisphere.

The goal of this strategy is to continue broadening our reach among the full WCC membership. This means different audiences will need different emphasis, such as printed material to some members of our audience before reaching them with web materials.

This approach will be part of the process when working with programmes on their communication planning as well as the overall communication department work.

In the end the goal is to build and strengthen the impact of WCC communication at all levels, but at times more emphasis will need to be placed in one area or another.

### **Implementation**

1. The communication director’s office will increase contacts with global south communicators seeking partnerships and counsel on speaking to local audiences.
2. Issues of language and translation need to be addressed when considering broader audiences.
3. The communication director’s office will seek out partnerships with major WCC donors for the production of various media pieces directed to these audiences.
4. The WCC press office will increase story usage in the global south and with member churches, along with development of stories useful to these audiences, through usage of local media outlets, such as newspapers, radio stations, etc.
5. The WCC publications team will seek new relationships with publishers in the global south and direct marketing and distribution to these audiences. The team will look for new opportunities to work with authors from these audiences.
6. Web office initiatives include the strengthening of the WCC membership on the WCC Web Site. This process began in 2007 already.
7. Communication staff will work with programmes to strengthen their focus on these audiences when conducting annual plans for communication work.

## **Strategy Part Eight**

### **Restructure the communication department to meet needs of this strategy**

The current configuration of the communication department has served the WCC well, however, this strategy calls for some realignment of the department into sections (“programmes and projects” if one uses WCC programme planning language). The groupings reflect programme emphasis of electronic media, press and public relations, visual media and print media.

#### **Implementation**

The WCC communication department sections can be identified as:

(Presented in alphabetical order)

1. Director’s office, C101
2. Language Services, C102
3. Press Office, C103
4. Publications Office, C104
5. Visitors Programme, C105
6. Visual Arts and Design, C106
7. Web Office, C107

Each communication department section will annually review their work within the context of its purpose, goals, audience, contribution to the WCC profile, departmental and programme synergies, establishment of 3-5 goals, the measuring of effectiveness and the needs around staffing and budgeting.

#### **Conclusions**

Once this strategy is approved the hard work begins, particularly around the reality of increased communication capacity and resources. The need for increased funding and staffing is not being suggested without the awareness for the needed gathering additional funding, the possibility of cutting some programme and the limitations of WCC funding. A prudent course for fulfilling the capacity and resources needs is to develop new streams of funding.

The implementation of this strategy also means the necessary commitment from the WCC to developing culture of communication. As a 5-year plan this strategy has limited goals and outcomes. However, it is meant to lay the groundwork for a deeper and more challenging organizational communication process which should on a continuing basis focus the WCC message, position within the ecumenical movement and meeting the needs of its membership.

This strategy can be implemented in phases with more details being offered on the earlier phase. Phase One begins initiatives that will not impact the communication budget for 2008 and will rely on funding from other parts of the organization, particularly around staff training. From 2009 on, new funding and staffing resources must be found for the full implementation of the strategy and the long term strengthening of a communication culture within the WCC.

#### **Phase One (2008)**

- Approval of strategy and discussions on financial implications begin.
- Begin discussions with potential donors for added funds directed to communication work.
- Training sessions during WCC week of meetings to build enthusiasm among staff for focused message. (Part One, Two, Four)
- Complete web-based initiatives already underway to increase visibility of member churches on WCC Web Site. (Part Seven)
- Develop and implement process for programme communication planning. (Part Five)
- Develop strategy for higher visibility for UNLO and advocacy. (Part Six)
- Restructure communication department without increase of staff. (Part Eight)



- Press Office and Web Office strengthen relationships with member church communication offices. (Part Seven)
- Bring continuity to the IMD strategy and communication strategy and begin increasing cooperation and planning between the two offices. (Part Three)

Phase Two (2009)

- Ongoing training of specific programme staff in various aspects of communication. (Part Four)
- Communication budget and staff increases, hiring designer and second press officer. (Part Eight)

Phase Three (2010-2013)

- Continue implementing goals of strategy.
- Complete hiring of communication staff and strengthening budget.

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