

REFLECTION OF THE BELGIAN PARTICIPANTS AFTER THE SUMMER SCHOOL ON DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION AND MEDIA

COMMUNICATION FOR DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION¹ PREPARATORY NOTE FOR THE WORKSHOP ON 'MEDIA' AT THE EUROPEAN CONFERENCE ON AWARENESS-RAISING AND DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION FOR NORTH-SOUTH SOLIDARITY (19-20 MAY 2005)

Stéphane Boucl'h (COTA), Olenka Czarnocki (Oxfam-Solidarité), Geneviève Georges (APRAD), Annick Honorez (ITECO).

INTRODUCTION

A diagnosis published in 2003 by the OECD² reveals that despite the recommendations of the UNDP, spending on information, communication and development education in the donor countries is insufficient. The UNDP recommends that 2% of spending on aid to the developing countries be devoted to this. Belgium is the only country achieving this proportion.

However, according to the same survey, even though the understanding among the populations in the OECD of the problems of poverty and the knowledge about the developing countries and co-operation policies are limited, the combined effects of global education, awareness-raising campaigns and media coverage are globally improving the degree of general knowledge.

But the media are considered to be the prime source of information on the developing countries. The major source for the public is television, followed by the print press. The reliability and objectivity of each one are, however, frequently cast into doubt, all the more so because those media tend to convey a negative image of the South, which is shown as unstable, dangerous and dependent (because of natural catastrophes, wars, poverty, corruption, etc) even though – still according to the OECD – the population would prefer to be told about the developing countries in more positive terms that would better reveal their qualities.

This tendency among the media to address current affairs in the South only when they coincide with crisis situations means that the public is more aware of humanitarian appeals than of the issues involved in development. The inference here is that the media contribution responds only very partially to the objectives of development education.

The media thus have an important role to play in the strategies around development education. Collaborations are entirely possible and even recommended. That being said, recourse to the media, while respecting the ethics of the free expression and independence of the press, needs to be better geared to the objectives of development education (as described below).

The comments and recommendations that we put forward in this sense derive mainly from the observations made during the reflection workshops organised in the framework of the last European Summer School on Development Education, held in Ostend in June 2004. These workshops looked at:

- 1- the possibilities and details of partnership between the media and development education NGOs,

¹ Cf. Postulates.

² Cf. Bibliographical sources.

- 2- the possible applications of the media as tools in development education,
- 3- the stereotypes peddled by the media,
- 4- the strategies implemented by NGOs in the South to approach, use and collaborate with the media.

POSTULATES

What is development education?

The definition that we adopt in describing development education is the one approved successively by the Development Education Forum and the CONCORD platform.

Development education:

- is an **active learning process**, founded on values of solidarity, equality, inclusion and co-operation;
- enables (...) basic **awareness** of (...) development and human development;
- opens the way to an **understanding** of the causes and effects of global issues;
- calls for personal **involvement** and informed action;
- seeks to **promote** more just and sustainable (...) national and international policies.

It thus involves **participation** by the beneficiaries and implies a certain **interactivity**.

The Maastricht global education declaration makes it a link in Education for Citizenship³.

Accordingly:

- The simple dissemination of information via the media is not development education. But this might be one strand in a communication strategy for development education.
- The appeals for solidarity (even though well-founded) as they are launched by the mass media are not appeals to encourage reflection and do not necessarily generate genuinely increased awareness. In such cases, they are not participating in development education.
- Fund-raising following a campaign to promote the activities of an NGO cannot be considered as an indicator of awareness-raising.
- A campaign of this type which fails to lead to a permanent raising of awareness among the target public is therefore not a development education activity, but rather an institutional communication activity.
- A communication strategy designed to justify development aid spending has the merit of improving the transparency of co-operation policies. It is a guarantee of good governance which derives from the duty of the State to provide information on the utilisation of public finances, but this cannot be considered as development education.
- There is a fundamental divergence of interest between the commercial mass media, which need a public of consumers, and the players in development education who, among other players, are seeking to stimulate citizenship.

Communication for development education

³ Cf. Bibliographical sources.

The reflections at the last European Summer School on Development Education led to the observation that the concept of 'the media' is too vague. It refers sometimes to the players, sometimes the tools and sometimes the actual media which refer in turn to legal, institutional, organisational and technical realities which are too disparate to be able to be tackled constructively in a reflection workshop such as this.

All the more so since a debate angled towards 'the media' would inevitably come up against the frequently observed difficulty of reconciling the interests, the constraints and the specific points of view of the media sector with those of co-operation. These questions also do not seem to us to be able to be addressed usefully and in concrete terms in the framework of the present workshop.

Accordingly it seems more relevant to tackle the reflection starting from the concept of 'communication' as a process of social relations, production, dissemination, exchange and debating of information.

The question thus becomes 'What communication processes should we focus on in meeting the objectives of development education? With which players and with which tools?'

OBSERVATIONS

Confusion between education and information

Many players in development education tend to confuse education and information. In addition, they generally cultivate conceptions of communication borrowed from the mass media, journalism and marketing, which distances them from educational communication strategies. Finally, they are unfamiliar with the rules for the production and dissemination of information in the various media, which means that they have difficulty in negotiating with their media talking partners and finding avenues for collaboration which give them complete satisfaction. Their shortcomings usually stop them from envisaging media involvement in their development education strategies. The NGOs' media approach strategies are not very effective in terms of development education.

The proximity, community or associative media

For want of adequate knowledge of the world of communication and the media, and also too concerned with raising the awareness of the public at large via the mass media, the players in development education neglect the potential offered by the proximity, associative and community media. While the latter probably have a lesser impact in quantitative terms, they do allow, *a priori*, a better-quality approach and more profound awareness-raising by virtue of the privileged and close relations they have with people. In addition, these media more frequently give a voice to migrants and populations coming from immigration (sometimes in their own languages), who can be important links in development education.

Involvement of the players in the South

The delegations to the Europe-wide Global Education Congress, representing parliamentary, governmental, local and regional authority and civil society structures from the Member States of the Council of Europe, pledged a continuous dialogue with the South on the shape and content of global citizenship education. However, few financing lines currently allow for the design and realisation of combined education projects/programmes between players in the North and the South.

This sort of North/South dialogue might look at a transfer of competences in terms of communication strategies. The development organisations in the South have developed skills in terms of education 'for' development which might deserve to be capitalised on in the

North. These skills relate to both leadership methods and alternative methods of managing the media, particular applications of audiovisual tools or NICT, forms of audiovisual activism, and so on. Proximity communication is a field in which several are outstanding. There are certainly lessons to be learned from these practices.

Better involvement of the players in the South in the NGOs' communication strategies might likewise have the effect if not of a more faithful presentation of the realities of the South, then at least of an image that tallies better with how they want themselves to be seen.

The distortion of the realities in the South

In response to the expert opinion published by the OECD, we have already addressed, in the introduction, the alarmist and negative vision which the mass media tended to convey to the public at large and their difficulty in showing the issues of development.

The media are not neutral, they convey values which are not always compatible with the objectives of development education. The public at large is not sufficiently aware of the need to decode and analyse the information put before it.

In addition, the media themselves are not always sufficiently specialised in or aware of the issues of development and the South in general.

The media are not the only ones to be called into question. The players in development co-operation can also be responsible for the distortion of the images of the South. Aware of the problem, some NGOs have drafted ethical codes designed to alleviate these distortions, notably the one adopted in 1999 by the members of the Liaison Committee of European NGOs.

The media are unfamiliar with the NGOs

The journalists and NGOs who met at the European Summer School on Development Education deplored the fact that the NGOs are given little recognition as players and references in terms of information. Yet their experience close to the realities in the South can make them into particularly reliable sources, and they can produce good 'second opinions'. There is little admission that with regard to their specific usages of communication, the NGOs are also information canvassers and need to assert themselves more as sources and disseminators of information, short of familiarising themselves more with techniques and practices in the mass media and developing their own (or daring to develop them), and being able to genuinely negotiate their relations with the media.

Deciphering and analysing the media

The capacity to understand, analyse and decipher the media and to express one's opinion encourages the exercise of citizenship. Media education is necessary for development education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **To promote the reinforcement of the capacities of the NGOs in terms of communication** by financing the capitalisation of good practices in educational communication and the utilisation of the audiovisual and digital media (which notably socialises the techniques and methods of leadership and communication developed by the NGOs in the South so that the NGOs in the North can draw inspiration from them).
- **To promote participative approaches to communication** by encouraging the financing of projects involving associative, community and proximity media.

- **To promote the reinforcement of the capacities of the media vis-à-vis the issues of development and co-operation, by:**
 - o encouraging the DE projects angled specifically towards awareness-raising and training for journalists and media staff (the perfect public interface);
 - o integrating courses into journalist training programmes to raise awareness of the issues of development and/or the objectives of DE.

- **To promote the creation of an interface between the media and development education NGOs by:**
 - o encouraging the creation of spaces for dialogues and exchanges between NGOs and the media centred on development education;
 - o organising meetings between the community/alternative/activist media/other artistic organisations and players in development education, in order to determine the concrete possibilities for collaborations;
 - o financing a database (of common resources and references on the tools and methods of communication for development education).

- **To promote the involvement of the players in the South in DE in the North by:**
 - o opening financing lines making it possible to implement joint strategies for development education and/or combined strategies between players in the South and the North;
 - o organising meetings between the sector of development education and that around the projects in the South, in order to determine the needs in terms of co-ordination and the potential terms of the exchange of services and information;
 - o opening the financing lines awarded to projects in the South to projects designed to reinforce the capacity of the partners in the South to communicate in the North, or to implement development education projects in the North;
 - o financing the organisation of meetings on the North/South partnership in terms of development education so as to improve the practices (with a fair representation of organisations from the South and the North).

- **To contribute towards limiting the distortion of the images of the South by:**
 - o including the principles in the Charter on the images of the South among the criteria for the evaluation of projects, both in the South and in Europe;
 - o promoting a wider presence for migrants and populations coming from immigration in the media;
 - o giving priority to the financing of development education projects which involve the so-called multicultural media (www.multicultural.net);
 - o financing development education projects whose objective is to give the beneficiary public the capacities to decipher the information regarding the South being peddled by the media in the North;
 - o promoting, among the media and the media observers present in the Member States, a greater presence for the South in the information and a representation that is more respectful of the developing countries and the dignity of their inhabitants in the media.

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