

# E-NEWSLETTER

## Images and Messages

*Africa ... Tell it like it is!*

THIS PROJECT IS FUNDED BY THE EUROPEAN UNION



**ACSONI**  
Afro-Community  
Support Organisation  
Northern Ireland

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### **Images and Messages of Africa from an African Perspective, Public Awareness and Capacity Building Programme**

The European Development Education Programme aims to utilize positive images and messages of Africa and Africans in raising awareness of development issues and of factors fuelling migration of Africans to Europe and the impact of migration for Europe. This programme in three partner states, Slovenia, Ireland and Northern Ireland will mobilize public support for fairer relations between European and African countries by challenging the media and development sectors in their use of negative images and messages to encourage a Code of Conduct on the use of Media messages. A quarterly newsletter will be circulated among member states to with a focus on current development issues, analyzing them from an African perspective

### **Are Slovenian School Textbooks Archaic?**

Three weeks ago, I received an email from an acquaintance informing me that her daughter had resolved to no longer attend primary school geography lessons as she could no longer stand the portrayal of Africa in her school textbook as a continent exclusively struck by poverty and drought." With these words, Max Zimani, the facilitator, opened the roundtable entitled 'Africa in the Slovenian educational system' organised by the African Center of Slovenia on October 6<sup>th</sup>, 2010 in Ljubljana.

This roundtable discussion was organised to present the findings of the review of Slovenian primary and secondary school geography and history textbooks and workbooks, which was carried out as an activity in the framework of the project 'Images of Africa from an African Perspective', of which the African Center is one of three partners. The activity was co-funded by the Slovenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

At the beginning of the project, a 7 member review team was selected. It consisted of experts in the fields of geography, history, anthropology and global education. Two Africans were among the experts as it was considered of key importance to ensure an African perspective in the entire endeavour. The criteria and methodology of the review were put in place. An elaborate selection of 4 geography and 2 history textbooks was made and the review process begun. Each book was reviewed by four members of the review team as per predefined criteria. Report meetings were then organised for each book at which all comments were discussed and analysed in detail.

An 89-page report was then compiled, providing details from individual reports, concrete proposals for changes, a list of recommended resources for additional information and a list of all resources used for the analysis.



MAX ZIMANI AFRICAN CENTER SLOVENIA

This report was presented to the book publishers and the Board of Education and also used as a basis for the roundtable discussion.

Speakers at the roundtable included two members of the review team as well as a representative from the Board of Education, from the Rokus Klett publishing house, and a geography textbook editor from the Modrijan publishing house. Representatives of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had been invited to participate.

The roundtable ascertained that Africa is portrayed in a Eurocentric manner. African lakes and rivers are denoted to have been discovered by Europeans; parts of Africa are perceived to be 'suitable' for inhabitation by white Europeans; Africa is presented exotically, the most commonly presented peoples (who are in a derogatory manner described as tribesmen) being the Masaai, Bushmen and Pygmies.

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The used terminology is also very problematic. “It is hard to overlook the fact that the textbooks indiscriminately use outdated and controversial terminology and concepts such as racial fragments, Bushmen, Hottentots and Pygmies, cultural underdevelopment and tribes”, stressed Dr Janez Pirc of the Institute for Ethnic Studies and a member of the African Center and of the review team, who also added that the concepts were rejected decades ago by the scientific community.

Issues were also raised regarding the quality of the books and the level of knowledge that children are expected to gain from the school textbooks. “In the framework of this project, I had the opportunity to get an insight into the books situation, but unfortunately I believe that the representation of Africa is deficient in terms of content and quality. It is a stereotypical representation without a thorough analysis of the causes and effects of mentioned issues”, asserted Ibrahim Nouhoum, a member of the review team. The roundtable also ascertained that Africa was portrayed almost entirely negatively. Dr. Rajko Muršič of the Faculty of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology commented on the selection of images: The illustrations clearly tell the story of Africa as a continent of poverty, hunger, wars, backwardness and a chaotic political situation”. The issue of race was discussed at the roundtable as well as at a workshop organised by the African Center to present the findings of the review to fellow Africans. At this meeting Max Zimani said: “The biggest victims of this negative racist portrayal are children. The lack of knowledge on the part of Slovenian children means nothing else but lost opportunities. Children of Africans also suffer direct consequences from peers for this dehumanisation.” Nineteenth and early twentieth century categories of ‘race’, which have no scientific merit, have often been used to support racist doctrines. The concept persists as a social convention that all too often fosters institutional and uncoordinated discrimination. But the reviewed Slovene textbooks do characterize Africans in the prism of race.

A number of proposals to rectify the situation were tabled at the roundtable discussion, including encouraging publishers to engage African co-authors or at least involve the African Center in reviewing books before they are published.

The Board of Education also resolved to invite the African Center to its seminars with teachers so that the Center can directly engage with the teachers. The roundtable ended with participants being encouraged to forge links for change. “The fact that one book was republished in 2007 as a direct result of the endeavours of the Center and other interested parties is proof enough that things can change.

We have reasons to hope for change for the better”, concluded Amy Skinner, the Assistant Programme Manager at the African Centre



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MR SAMWEL MOHOCHI

### **Africa Centre, Dublin hosts a conference on The Use of Images and Messages – A Human Rights Issue!**

The 2010 Africa Centre conference *'The use of Images and Messages – A Human Rights Issue'* was held in Dublin Castle on 14th and 15th July. The theme of the conference, emphasized that images and messages not only influence the way people think, but also how they react. The aim of the conference was to generate discussion and debate on the use and influence of images and messages from the South, linking this issue with human rights legislation. The keynote speaker, Mr Samwel Mohochi stressed that the issue of images and messages impacts on African nationals and Southern development practitioners most directly. As a development and human rights practitioner Mr Mohochi was conscious of how competition for funding and donor fatigue can lead fundraisers to employ drastic strategies.

He alluded to research by Jessica Wishart, which showed that while fundraisers are careful not to infringe the law, they continue to employ 'poverty pornography' as a fundraising strategy. So, there is a disconnect where charities present themselves on the one hand using a rights-based approach, while on the other adopting a needs-based 'saviour and savages' approach while fund-raising.

The speaker went on to define development/poverty/famine pornography, emphasizing that the stereotype is the African malnourished child, blank expression, awaiting salvation. Such disempowering images, allow the viewer to 'commoditize' apparent suffering, creating a commoditization of poverty.

**Elaine Mahon**, representing the Dóchas Development Education Working Group reminded delegates that the Code of Conduct on Images and Messages was adopted by Dóchas members in 2007, building on a previous Code which had been written in 1989 by Concord members. The Dóchas Development Education Group had set up a working group which redrafted and reworked the Code.

She referred to the Africa Centre initiatives on the Code, including last year's joint Dóchas/Africa Centre seminar (Portraying the Developing World: the Whole Truth and Nothing but the truth' and also the 'Africa Also Smiles' poster campaign, which aim to challenge and change stereotypes about the Global South.

Ms Mahon asserted that the influence of images and messages on perceptions, beliefs and attitudes cannot be underestimated and it is crucial that we use images and messages which are as fair and accurate as possible, so that the Irish public understand the complexities of development and the varied living experiences of people living in the Global South, and also that the many people from the Southern diaspora in Ireland are treated with dignity and respect and don't experience negative stereotyping or discrimination based on "ill-informed messages".

**Ms Fionuala Quinlan**, Press Officer for Irish Aid, drew attention to the Code of conduct. She underlined Irish Aid's strong support for the Code, and for the work of the Africa Centre in bringing an African perspective to development education, promoting good practice, fostering skilled educators and engaging a wider African perspective in DE. She acknowledged the proliferation of negative images and the challenge of counteracting them. She pointed out that work is being done to promote a positive view of Africa and cautioned that focusing on disasters, for instance, is only a fragment of the story and ignores the long-term causes of such events. She stressed the importance of looking at stories of hope and of Africans building their own futures sustainably. She alluded to VSO research<sup>1</sup> which indicates that audiences want positive hopeful news and what people have in common. News reports emphasise either the exotic or the misery, with little contextual information. Ms Quinlan quoted Mark Goldring in the research: "We have taken part in an intricate dance that sacrifices the long-term building of a balanced view for the short-term gain of raising funds for or awareness of our work". This tension, however, is not new, and regardless of their different functions, all images and messages should communicate dignity and respect.

For a full report on The Use of Images and Messages – A Human Rights Issue go to [www.africacentre.ie](http://www.africacentre.ie)

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### A Busy First Quarter for ACSONI's Development Education Programme!

The Afro-Community Support Organisation Northern Ireland (ACSONI) has had an extremely busy few months. The Development Education Programme, *"Images and Messages of Africa from an African Perspective"* kicked off in the middle of July 2010. Since then things have been very hectic at ACSONI. Two new project staff (Programme Manager, Alfred Abolarin and Programme Officer, Catherine Parkes) were appointed. In addition, ACSONI moved to a new office space on Lower Crescent in the Botanic area of South Belfast – the heart of Northern Ireland's Black and Minority Ethnic community. At the same time, ACSONI continues to work towards the achievement of its three-year Strategic Plan (launched at Stormont in December 2009 by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister) by supporting and representing the Afro-Community in Northern Ireland. A 'Training for Trainers' Development Education course will begin in November 2010. The course will provide the opportunity for between 15 and 20 participants to explore a range of Global Development Issues from an African perspective. The group of participants will comprise members of the Afro Community, living in Northern Ireland and also parties who have a long-standing interest in Development Education. This autumn, ACSONI's Youth Network is focusing on the production of a DVD/ Documentary about the lives of African Young People in Northern Ireland today. The group of young people are being supported by ACSONI staff, volunteers and the staff from Northern Visions TV (NVTv), who are experts in the field of Community Television. The DVD/ Documentary will show African Young People in the workplace, in school, at youth clubs, in sports teams and bands etc. It is intended to realistically capture a glimpse of the reality of life in Northern Ireland for young African people.

ACSONI's first annual essay writing and picture/ photograph competition was launched in October 2010. The competitions are open to all young people living in Northern Ireland who are aged between 11 and 14.

The essay competition focuses on the title "Some positive things about Africa that I think everybody should know". The Picture/ photograph competition invites young people to consider how the Continent of Africa could be visually represented in a positive way. Details of both competitions have been sent to every post-primary school in Northern Ireland. The closing date for the competition is the last Friday before the Christmas holidays.



**L-R: Mr Alfred Abolarin, Programme Manager, ACSONI; Ms Deborah Howe, Equality Commission Northern Ireland (Manager, Promotion and Education Division); Mrs Catherine Chungwe, Head of ACSONI Women's Network; Dr Assia El-Zarruk, Acting Chairperson, ACSONI; Mr Eric Yao, Co-ordinator, Africa Centre Dublin; Mrs Jacinata McCaffrey, Social Worker and ACSONI Member.**

ACSONI will be overseeing an important piece of research into the legal implications of the use of negative images of Africa and Africans in the context of UK legislation. The research will focus on the lack of legal protection for people from the Global South who are pictured in degrading ways. Such pictures are used in fund-raising campaigns by charitable organisations and also in the media. The research will explore whether such images contravene international and domestic Human Rights law.

ACSONI is running a series of twelve 'Intercultural Dialogue and Networking Events' during the year 2010/11. The seminar-style workshops are being held in Northern Ireland's two biggest cities, in order to ensure that as many people as possible are able to attend. Each month's event focuses on an issue that is relevant to the Afro Community living in Northern Ireland. The events are widely advertised and everybody is welcome to attend. Please visit [www.acsoni.org](http://www.acsoni.org) for more information on ACSONI activities and programmes.

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The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Commission.