A

gola has almost 15 million inhabitants, but since many years have passed
without a population census, it may be much more than that. According to some stud-
ies, six million people, hailing from a total of 18 provinces, live in our capital, Luanda. Angola is poor: 70% of my compatriots live on less than US$1 per day.

The media, at least the private media, are poor too. The sector receives no state support and depends on the sale of publications as well as the sale of space and (in the case of broadcast media) airtime to advertisers. Foreign donors as-
sist some of these private media institutions. This is also the case with Radio Ecclesia.

State-funded official media do not provide for the information needs of Angolan citizens. People in areas that are far from the capital do not even get to know what the state policies, in relation to the needs of these areas, are. When the Cabinet approves a plan for a certain commu-
nity, no one broadcasts the news in an intelligent manner: asking what is being done, what is planned and what is needed.

This is why alternative media, like Radio Ecclesia, work hard to investigate policies, compare them with needs, and look for manners to pressurise the authorities to ensure that needs are addressed and plans are properly imple-
mented in the communities.

Often, however, it is difficult for us to cross-
check the information. The big problem here is that, as a rule, our leaders do not speak to the private media. It is only occasionally that we receive responses to our questions.

This is not the only difficulty. Often, authori-
ties get really upset with the activities of the alternative media, and as a result many investi-
gations are left unfinished. Some journalists are pressured psychologically, are threatened or lose
their jobs. The unsolved murder of Ricardo de Melo, editor of Imparcial Faz, in 1995, is still fresh in our memories.

Journalistic investigation is still an uncertain adventure here in Angola. Corporate interests of media houses, prescribed political editorial lines, interference by political power, lack of press freedom, lack of money, the nonexistence of freelance journalists, lack of training and a culture of fear stop
journalists from looking for truth.

In the face of these challenges, Radio Ecclesia particularly focuses on the following three areas, that represent three principal aspects of present day Angolan society:

1. National reconstruction: investments in civil construction is important, since Angola is at a stage of accelerated reconstruction and many tenders, projects and contracts materialise as a result. After the war ended five years ago, the president of our country promised the construc-
tion of 20 houses per day. The public was elated when the news was broadcast in the state media, but the reconstruction did not happen.

2. The Police violence: Recently, there have been

many unexplained murders of young men in Sambizanga, considered Luanda’s most vio-

lent area. These are attributed to a police death squad. Groups of national policemen are accused of “fighting crime” (mostly muggings and armed robberies) by simply and randomly shooting young men.

The following community radio work by Radio Ecclesia in these three areas can be reported.

National reconstruction

We found that house construction programmes continued at the same slow pace as before, with no acceleration. In the electoral campaign in 2006, our leaders promised that one million houses would be built during the next four years. Again, until today, this has remained an empty promise. Building is slow and all the enterprises that got contracts belong to people who are con-

nected to those in power, and to army generals in particular. Even the Minister of Housing is a general. This very fact makes it difficult for us to investigate the contracts and the implementation. Suspicions of corruption abound, but as yet we have been unable to find evidence.

HIV/Aids and antiretroviral roll-out

A few months ago we discovered that about a hundred children, in the biggest paediatrics hospital in Luanda, were in need of second-line antiretroviral medicine, but were not receiving it.

We went to the hospital and listened to doctors, parents and children; we reported on their trau-

ma, their dreams, their agony and much more. We contacted the government but, as usual, they didn’t want to talk to us. We published the recordings in a series, broadcasting our findings: that the Angolan state spent US$5-million per month buying the needed drugs, but that the principal hospital of reference in the capital did not receive any. Finally we succeeded in contact-
ing the minister of the sector, who had been the vice-minister in the same health portfolio for the past five years, and he said that he didn’t know. He only announced an enquiry, which is still underway. During this investigation, the national director for the fight against poverty verbally attacked one of our reporters, accusing her of “poking her nose in his business”. Radio Ecclesia continues to investigate those accusations that there is large-scale embezzlement of medicines for the purpose of fraudulent sales to private clinics.

The killings in Sambizanga

The Sambizanga area is one of the poorest, and most crime- and violence-ridden in Luanda. According to inhabitants of Sambizanga, for the past few months, groups of men in civilian cloth-
ing have entered the area in the evening, looking for “criminals”. They then shoot young men they seem to suspect of being criminals, often close to their homes. In one incident, an armed group in civilian clothes, which had arrived in a civilian car, murdered some actors who had been in Sambizanga to film a scene for an action film about juvenile robbery. Clearly, this death squad was not aware that these were actors working for a film, or that the making of the film even had received permission from the authorities. Some time before that, a musician called Amizade, who was a member of the group Os Lambas, was shot by armed men, who had confused him with someone else. Another supposed “delinquent” was killed near his home. In the same municipal-

ity, near the Roque Santeiro market, excessive police shooting caused the death of a youngster and a woman who had been selling her wares.

Our investigation of these incidents acceler-
ated when, on 23 July 2008, four armed men ambushed eight young men at a meeting. They shot them at point blank, many times. Witnesses said they referred to their actions as “a frescura” – a breath of fresh air. The witnesses identi-
fied the men as policemen of the Sambizanga division. Though police for a long time refused to entertain the issue, or to answer any ques-
tions, eventually the special pressure through Radio Ecclesia led to the arrest and the prosecu-
tion of seven men thought to be involved in the massacre. What we did was the following. Our reporter went to the terrain, and gathered and counted the bullet casings. There were 57 bullet casings of the same calibre as used by the men, proving that this had really been a massacre. We then approached some witnesses, and with their help, were able to produce a reconstruction of the crime. A specialist also assisted us and, in the end, the investigation file was presented at the public hearing and some of the accused were sentenced.

By Manuel Vieira

TRAFFICKING INVESTIGATION

From 2000 to about eight million African men, women and children have been trafficked to Europe, America and the Middle East. They have ended up as unpaid labourers in construction sites, in food processing plants, in brothels, as household slaves, on plantations, in the criminal underworld, in prisons, dead, or simply on the streets. Many have paid large amounts of money for this “privilege”. Last year between May and December 2008, FAIR conducted an investigation into human trafficking involving eight African investigative journalists from seven countries, led by Ghana-based investigative editor Edem Djokoto. The team concluded that the combination of victims’ despair, criminal intent, trickery and official collusion are the reasons why human trafficking is the third most lucrative criminal enterprise in the world today.

A better life elsewhere: human traffic in and from Africa is available at www.fairreporters.org/portals/fairnew/docs/FAIR_Summit_2008_proofs.pdf