

VESPER SOCIETY

***Network 21:
Expanding Leadership in the 21st Century***

Final Report

Network 21 – Final Report

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
I. Introduction – The Critical Issue	1
II. Executive Summary	2
III. Background	3
IV. Goals	4
V. Defining the Project	4
A. Phase I: Planning and Collaboration	4
B. Phase II: Training and Implementation	7
C. Phase III: Building Capacity	13
VI. Project Evaluation	15
A. Phase I: Planning and Collaboration	16
B. Phase II: Training and Implementation	17
C. Phase III: Building Capacity	21
VII. Final Word	23
VIII. Appendices	
Appendix A: Sample Schedule of Directors’ Workshop	
Appendix B: Finance Report	

I. INTRODUCTION – THE CRITICAL ISSUE

In recent years, electronic communication has become the lifeblood of most organizations throughout the world. Boundaries are rapidly changing as we all become members of one global community.

This globalization brings with it a unique set of challenges, especially as it relates to managers of organizations. With almost universal access to the Internet, the old boundaries and restraints on access to information are gone. Information from global sources is now directly available to any individual with a computer and a telephone line. This is bringing new opportunities for those who have the resources to access this abundant information and the skills to manage it.

In 1998, Vesper Society identified a special group that has much to gain from these changes but is least prepared—Christian Laity Centers in all regions of the world. At that time, Vesper Society initiated a five-year project, Network 21, to assist a selected group of laity centers from all parts of the globe to address this critical need.

Leaders of these Christian Laity Centers often work with people who are most impacted by the economic, political and social strains in our society. While management of these centers is highly dedicated to serving their local constituents, they often have limited resources to take full advantage of these new tools of electronic communication to support their programs. Often they do not have even a basic understanding of the tools themselves. Yet, to be successful in our rapidly changing world, today's leaders need to know how to take full advantage of emerging tools that are available to them.

Consequently, Vesper Society set out on a far-reaching project to enable local leaders in laity centers to easily and inexpensively become information providers to each other and to the global community in an attempt to deal with common problems. It is the goal of the project to help them share their solutions with one another and thereby fulfill the mission of creating opportunities for individuals, groups, and organizations.

II. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Network 21 project, with its focus on facilitating electronic communication on a global level, was designed to create opportunities for individuals, groups, and organizations in Christian Laity Centers in seven regions of the world.

In some regions, this effort might be seen as moving into uncharted territory, as creating a “new frontier.” Dealing with new beginnings is often challenging and this project proved to be no exception. There were the predictable challenges of language, the inevitable problems grounded in organizational structure and management philosophy, as well as the normal difficulties of implementation and integration in foreign lands.

On the other hand, several regions targeted by this project were well equipped technologically and had a good understanding of the intent of the project. With leaders already attuned to the benefits of technology, they were able to progress rapidly, employing the tools of technology to connect people and centers throughout their regions. In these regions, the project not only affirmed their current operating modalities, but also greatly improved their ability to connect and communicate, thereby building stronger relationships and enhancing their current communication systems.

As expected, people in all regions were of genuine good will. They were open to the ideas presented, eager to implement new ways of working, and desirous of change. Some dreamed dreams that, for one reason or another, did not materialize. Others were able to see those dreams realized, at least in some small, practical ways. These were the regions in which managers were able to create their own vision for their centers. Without such a vision and the energy and dedication required to see it to fruition, expectations were not realized and desired results not fully achieved.

Vesper Society learned a great deal from this project, benefiting from learning that occurred at every phase and through every relationship. Vesper learned that the dream of building a global network was, indeed, idealistic. Hindsight confirmed that a task of this magnitude required more than a single project manager and would have been enhanced by having an oversight committee or an advisory committee to ensure appropriate guidance. Although many of the components required for global success were included in the original project plan, several of these components were not implemented or fell short of full implementation.

Overall, the Network 21 project, despite some shortcomings, was well conceived, well received, and served as the stimulus for further development in many of the laity centers throughout the world.

The following pages provide further insights into the components of this project, its areas of effectiveness, and other evaluative comments.

III. BACKGROUND

The Network 21 project was developed in response to an identified need of an existing network of community organizations called OIKOSNET. The need for this project emerged directly from a conference on globalization held in 1998. The sponsors, OIKOSNET and the World Council of Churches, brought together leaders from affiliated centers around the world to discuss how global trends are affecting the work of local organizations. These organizations realized that to achieve their goal of working together on common issues, they needed to have a means to communicate efficiently and effectively.

From the 1998 conference, Vesper Society recognized the potential for using the new tools of electronic communication to respond to the need to support communication among centers throughout the world. Following a six-month preliminary period to test assumptions and work with various regions, Vesper Society launched the project in September 1999.

Customized Approach in Various Regions

OIKOSNET is a global organization comprised of approximately 285 community organizations and laity centers in seven geographical areas. The project was designed to provide opportunities and resources across regions, supporting communication among the centers worldwide and encouraging people to share information and to work together. From the outset, however, it became apparent that the OIKOSNET regions differ significantly in their awareness of emerging information technology and the implications for local organizations and services. Consequently, the project leaders found it necessary to adopt different strategies in each of the regions.

Collaboration

The Network 21 project was designed as a collaborative effort between Vesper Society and OIKOSNET. Such collaboration was facilitated by the fact that all member organizations have a global perspective, are faith-based centers providing basic social, educational, and human services at the local level, and attract self-identified leaders who are committed to social and human service.

Network 21 – Final Report

IV. GOALS

Network 21 is a global communications and leadership training initiative that seeks to:

- strengthen and expand the leadership and services of local service organizations and laity retreat centers around the world
- create opportunities for local centers to better serve their constituencies through the use of electronic technology
- facilitate the design and implementation of a basic Internet communications system
- implement the system among laity centers in seven regions around the world
- provide training in how to use the system and the information it provides

V. DEFINING THE PROJECT

A. Phase I: Planning and Collaboration

The Network 21 project used multiple strategies to create opportunities for leaders at the local and regional levels. The opportunity to participate in this electronic communication project was offered to all centers, academies and/or organizations. Each organization could decide the extent of its involvement and when and if it wanted to become active.

Objectives for Phase I:

- Create an infrastructure among Oikosnet centers to support electronic communication
- Conduct informational presentations to inform regional and local leaders
- Assess potential training centers for technological and managerial readiness as well as greatest areas of impact
- Confirm collaboration and implementation strategies with Oikosnet and regional leaders

Oikosnet, a global organization with community organizations and laity centers in seven geographical locations, was key to the success of the project and Vesper's main collaborator.

The seven OIKOSNET Regions include:

- Association for Christian Lay Centers in Africa (ACLCA) – 62 members
- Association for Christian Institutes for Social Concern in Asia (ACISCA) – 54 members
- Collaboration for Ecumenical Planning and Action in the Caribbean and South America (CEPACASA) – 31 members
- Southern Cone Network of Centers (South America) (CONOSUR) – 16 members

Network 21 – Final Report

- Ecumenical Association of Academies and Retreat Centers in Europe (EAALCEE) – 80 members
- Middle East Association of Training and Retreat Centers (MEATRC) – 23 members
- North American Retreat Directors Association (NARDA) – 20 members

Vesper Society entered into a five-year collaboration (1999-2003) with Oikosnet to accomplish its goal of bringing effective tools and training into the operations of their centers.

During the feasibility study, Vesper Society determined that the greatest impact could be made directly with the centers to:

- Have them fully understand the range of uses of electronic communication
- Assist them in formulating a new vision of the operation of their center in which key staff would have the tools of electronic communication available
- Assist them in designing and implementing a plan to incorporate those tools appropriate to the needs of the center.

It was the objective of Network 21 to have several model centers in operation in all regions of the world by the end of 2003. The early stage of the project identified several Network 21 training centers in selected regions. These centers and their leaders were to serve as examples of the best uses of electronic communication. In support of one of the project's basic assumptions, they would be sites for the development of skills and resources that would remain in place beyond the immediate scope of the project. Their motivation would serve as the source of inspiration for leaders of other centers in Oikosnet.

Getting the Word Out

The project developed a complex set of convening and training activities to mobilize people at the local, regional and global levels. During the first phase of the project, informational or marketing presentations were made to inform regional and local leaders about the project. OIKOSNET set a priority for its agencies worldwide to incorporate electronic communication into their activities, emphasizing the importance of this issue.

OIKOSNET – Annual Meetings

Project staff was also part of a global planning group consisting of OIKOSNET regional representatives and staff from the World Council of Churches (WCC). The purpose of this involvement was to support the use of electronic communication resources put in place as a result of the project and to help identify where additional support was needed.

During the year 2000, Vesper was represented at the annual meetings of six of the seven OIKOSNET regions (with the exception of MEATRC), delivering presentations on the projected benefits of the Network 21 project. Such presentations provided an overview of

Network 21 – Final Report

electronic communication and its potential impact at all levels in society. In addition, staff also worked closely with the global OIKOSNET planning committee to coordinate activities worldwide.

The staff participated in the following annual meetings of OIKOSNET:

- Initial Presentation of Project to OIKOSNET, Harare, Zimbabwe – December 1998.
- Presentation of Revised Project and Approval by OIKOSNET, Stony Point, NY – September 1999.
- OIKOSNET Meeting, WCC, Geneva, Switzerland – May 15-18, 2000
- OIKOSNET Meeting, Kingston, Jamaica – July 2001
- OIKOSNET Meeting, Chaing Mai, Thailand – 2002
- OIKOSNET Meeting, Cairo, Egypt – October 2003

The project plan and implementation strategy was well received at all of these meetings and the interest generated lighted the way to the next phase of the project.

Phase I Findings

- *Early education of all key constituents in all aspects of the project was essential.*
- *Unique cultural challenges exist in each of the OIKOSNET regions, requiring regionally specific implementation strategies.*
- *Developing an effective collaborative arrangement with OIKOSNET took more time than anticipated.*
- *Discussions at informational gatherings confirmed some strategies and suggested alternative strategies.*
- *Communication in all forms was essential to the building of trust.*
- *Electronic communication tools strengthen and expand the leadership and services of centers only if the center's management understood the potential impact and had a plan to integrate these tools.*
- *While the leaders of OIKOSNET were clear on the importance of technology and its role in the future, it was apparent that the message had not been communicated to regional or local leadership. Consequently, the first task for the project was to educate leaders of local organizations.*
- *Vesper's decision not to supply hardware was the right decision.*

B. Phase II: Training and Implementation

Based on input received at the end of Phase I, Network 21 created a plan to provide center directors and staff with an understanding of the various uses of electronic communication and to clarify what this tool could mean for their organizations.

Objectives for Phase II:

- Select specific sites for training
- Identify a Regional Representative/Mentor/Trainer in each area
- Conduct training and technology needs assessments
- Conduct and evaluate Directors' training, train the trainer, and staff training

Site Selection

The project focused on in-depth training of directors and staff of regional offices in five regions:

1. Africa
2. South America
3. Caribbean
4. Middle East
5. Asia

The remaining two regions, North America and Europe, participated in the informational sessions of Phase I, but due to already well-developed systems of communication, did not participate in further phases of this project.

The project staff assessed the capabilities of Internet-based communication in these regions and initial training was focused on three areas in Africa: Uganda, Zambia, and Tanzania.

Directors' Workshops

The Directors' Workshops lasted five days plus travel days. The workshop curriculum was designed to provide practical hands-on training and included a detailed presentation of each electronic tool and its potential uses in the organization. A sample curriculum is included in the appendix.

During the workshops, the directors:

- Identified ways in which increased communication would be helpful in their local situation
- Addressed potential advantages as well as anticipated obstacles

Network 21 – Final Report

- Became aware of applications that they had not previously considered
- Prepared a vision of their center using these tools and then drafted a plan for implementation, a plan that included a listing of actual steps they would take upon returning home
- Pledged to stay in touch and to provide each other with ongoing support.

Network 21 Training Centers

To be designated as a Network 21 Training Center, the organization had to have center management who understood and supported the objectives of the project, facilities (a computer lab that provided direct access to the Internet with at least one computer for every two students), trainers and management staff to provide hands-on training in all aspects of electronic communication and use of the Internet. A center also needed to have staff available for basic technical support.

In Africa, three centers considered to become Network 21 training centers:

- Lweza Training and Conference Centre, Kampala, Uganda
- Mindolo Ecumenical Foundation and Africa Literature Center, Kitwe, Zambia
- Christian Council of Tanzania Conference and Training Center (CCT-CTC). Dodomo, Tanzania

Train-the-Trainer Strategy

The need for staff training was consistently identified as the major need by local organizations in all regions. From the beginning, it was apparent that project staff would not be able to conduct a fraction of the training that was requested; therefore, a plan to train trainers in each region was soon developed.

Training of Trainer workshops were developed for the purpose of providing trained individuals who could, in turn, share their knowledge and skills with others. The workshop involved a two-week course based on a comprehensive curriculum. The course was divided into two parts. The first part, Training of Trainers, taught the tools of electronic communication and how to use them. The second part, Staff Training, was a practicum in which the new trainers taught others, usually staff of the local center who served as students. Several sessions were devoted to showing trainers how to customize future training sessions to meet the hardware and software needs of the local centers.

A comprehensive resource workbook supported the Training of the Trainers Workshop with curriculum materials for virtually all possible situations.

Network 21 – Final Report

Center Staff Training

The project had planned that regional trainers would conduct training sessions in local organizations; however, project staff provided training for center staff in selected situations.

The goal of Center Staff Training Sessions was to increase staff's knowledge of basic tools of electronic communication to enable the optimum use of these tools both within an organization and between organizations in a region. Training in basic skills included: understanding and accessing different methods of accessing the Internet, electronic mail, conducting research on the Internet, creating links, and the like. Additional basic skills' training was available for developing and maintaining websites, creating databases, and accessing the databases of other networks.

Leadership Development

Underlying all project activities was the commitment to convene, communicate, and develop leaders. Virtually all the people participating in the project were leaders in the local community and responsible for future leaders in their centers. Therefore, basic principles of leadership were built into all project activities. Consistent efforts were made to teach the application of electronic tools to leadership activities such as:

- Conducting research on the Internet to access information that leaders could use to improve or expand services already offered by their organization
- Collaborating and working with others to dialog on common issues or to plan further activities and conferences
- Developing newsletters to reach colleagues
- Developing information targeted to reach new segments of the community

OIKOSNET offers a number of courses that are specifically designed for lay leaders in centers throughout the regions. These Courses in Lay Leadership Training (CLLTs) are four-week courses that prepare young leaders to serve in local laity centers in each OIKOSNET region. Network 21 staff was invited to participate in several CLLTs for the purpose of introducing participants to the issues and opportunities of electronic communication.

Early on, the project developed a listserv as a means to support communication between participants in the training sessions. The objective was for the participants to use the listserv to maintain communication once they returned to their own community and thereby foster regional and eventually global communication. During the course of the training, all participants joined the Network 21 listserv.

Network 21 – Final Report

Overview of Project Activities in Seven OIKOSNET Regions

The following section details project activities in the seven OIKOSNET regions– in rough chronological order. This listing includes some Phase I planning sessions as well as Phase II training courses.

1. ACLCA (Africa)

- ACLCA Executive Committee, Abertifi, Ghana-- July, 1999 (14 attending)
- Regional Staff Training, Harare, Zimbabwe – Nov.-Dec., 1999 (5 participants)
- ACLCA Annual Assembly, Abokobi, Ghana – Feb. 15-16, 2000 (120 attending)
- Directors’ Training Workshop, Kitwe, Zambia – July 10-14, 2000 (12 participants)
- Directors’ Training Workshop #1, Kampala, Uganda – July 17-21, 2000 (14 participants)
- Directors’ Training Workshop #2, Abokobi, Ghana – July 24-28, 2000 (15 participants)
- Training of Trainers Workshop #3, Kampala, Uganda – November 6-18, 2000 (6 participants)
- ACLCA Executive Committee, Ibadan, Nigeria – May 25-31, 2001 (15 attending)
- Directors’ Training Workshop #4, Kampala, Uganda – June, 2001 (9 attending)
- Center Staff Training #1, Kampala, Uganda – April 21-29, 2001 (11 attending)
- Center Staff Training #2, Kampala, Uganda – May 5-13, 2001 (6 attending)
- Center Staff Training #3, Kampala, Uganda – June 9-16, 2001 (8 attending)
- Center Staff Training #4, Kampala, Uganda – July 21-29, 2001 (5 attending)
- Directors’ Training Workshop #5, Dodoma, Tanzania – December 4-7, 2001 (6 participants)
- Course in Lay Leadership Training (CLLTs), Ibaden, Nigeria – May 7-30, 2001 (22 attending)
- Web Site Design Workshop, Kampala, Uganda – December 1-8, 2002 (9 participants)

Note: A major achievement was the announcement of Thomas Ndayiragije, Johannesburg, Republic of South Africa, as full-time Network 21 representative in Africa. He assumed his duties on November 1, 2000, and conducted all site visits and much of the training that followed.

Network 21 – Final Report

2. ACISCA (Asia)

- Annual Meeting, Bangkok, Thailand – 1998 (36 attending)
- Asian Consultation: Ecumenical Perspective Beyond 2000, Chiang Mai, Thailand – October 1-8, 1999 (27 attending)
- Director's Workshop – June 25-July 3, 2003, Bangkok, Thailand (16 participants)

3. CEPACASA (Central American and Caribbean)

- Consultation on CEPACASA Planning, Kingston, Jamaica – August 2-7, 1999 (11 attending)
- Regional Staff Training, CEPACASA, Kingston, Jamaica – October 1999 (5 participants)

Due to the challenges facing the CEPACASA regional organization, Vesper incorporated another organization, Cristiana Comunidad Mesoamericana (CCM), into the project. CCM is composed of 17 local organizations and laity centers in the Central American region.

The following training was conducted for members of the CCM organization:

- Center Staff Training. Martin Luther King Jr. University, Managua, Nicaragua – June 16-17, 2001
- Center Staff Training, Martin Luther King Jr. University, Managua, Nicaragua – June 28-29, 2001

4. CONOSUR (South America)

- CONOSUR Annual Assembly, Punta de Tralca, Chile – November 1998 (12 attending)
- CONOSUR Annual Assembly, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil – October 8, 2000 (14 attending)

In April 2001 Ramiro L. Argandona from La Paz, Bolivia was selected to be the project representative for this region. He conducted the following training:

- CONOSUR Training Activity, Sao Leopoldo, Brazil – May 2001 (10 participants)
- Center Staff Training, Managua, Nicaragua – June 14-15, 2001
- Training of Trainers Workshop, Montevideo, Uruguay – September 20-24, 2001 (15 participants)
- Optimum use of the Internet, Santiago, Chile – April 2002 (12 attending)
- Optimum use of the Internet, Sao Leopoldo, Brazil – May 2003 (16 attending)
- Design of Web Pages, Santiago Chile, - July 2003 (6 attending)
- Advanced Uses of the Internet, Buenos Aires, Argentina – July 2003 (11 attending)

5. MEATRC (Middle East)

- Regional Planning Meeting, International Center. Bethlehem, Palestine – October 2000 (cancelled due to Israel-Palestine conflict. Shifted to Cairo, below)
- Regional Planning Meeting, Cairo. Egypt – October 2000 (25 participants)
- Center Staff Training. Bayad Retreat and Conference Center, Beni Suef, Egypt – April 23-27, 2001 (11 participants).

Phase II Findings

- *Planning meetings during Phase I necessitated a shift in Phase II strategy, namely, the shift from a focus on technology to a focus on working with and through managers to ensure commitment and support for the technology implementation.*
- *The original training approach proved to be effective in some areas, not so effective in others. Expectations established at Directors' Training sessions were not always achieved nor action not taken as far as expected.*
- *In Africa, the Lweza Center was well equipped and center personnel captured all the technical concepts. This center has followed through with some local training, but did not meet full Network 21 expectations due to some institutional obstacles. In the Mindola Center, the program failed to get fully implemented due to management changes shortly after training. Implementation in the Dodomo Center was likewise interrupted when responsibility for implementation was delegated.*
- *In at least one region, obstacles were experienced at the regional level. Without regional support, there was no access to the centers.*
- *Language proved to be a challenge in some regions, requiring strategy and methodological alterations in mid-stream.*
- *Poor communication structures inhibited access by center staff. Leaders in Africa, for example, were not empowered to provide access for their employees.*
- *Flexibility proved to be a necessary competency in the project team and with the regional leadership.*
- *Timing was critical to achieving objectives in a project of global impact. Project leaders needed to be able to make accurate assessments and timely adjustments.*
- *Building trust in all relationships is crucial to the success of such an effort.*
- *In hindsight, the “training” centers functioned more in terms of “hosting” centers, with the Director hosting the educational events, but failing to utilize the centers for extending the knowledge and skill to the local staff.*
- *One of the key deterrents to successful implementation in Africa was a financial constraint. Because of tight budgets, the Africans are only able to bring people together every 3-4 years. This in itself prohibits timely and aggressive implementation.*

C. Phase III: Building Capacity

One of the primary strategies of the Network 21 project was to conduct training for the purpose of building capacity in the various OIKOSNET regions. For this reason, Vesper implemented a number of strategies that would effectively transfer the responsibility for the technological implementation to center personnel once training had been completed.

Objectives for Phase III

- To assist center Directors in their implementation of electronic communication
- To identify and train regional representatives to assume leadership responsibility for ongoing training and development of staff at local centers
- To build the center into a model for the community, making intentional contacts
- To implement various processes (e.g. monthly newsletter, Technical Advisory Committee, technology needs assessment) that would ensure consistency and sustainability of the project at the end of Vesper’s commitment
- To assist center Directors and staff in creating a plan of action that is consistent with their capabilities and projective of future needs

In conjunction with the series of training events conducted during Phase II, project staff was working to effectively build capacity in the various regions and centers where training had been conducted. Strategies were developed to address the various components of effective implementation and potential growth. The challenge remained: *How can we move this project forward?*

Components of Building Capacity

One of the key components of building capacity was the selection of regional representatives to assist in the training and to be the driving force for further development in their respective regions. In Africa, this regional representative was Thomas Njayiragije. In South America, the regional representative was Ramiro L. Argandona.

Another essential component of building capacity was the need to develop leadership at the centers. It became obvious that if such a project were to take root and grow, center leaders would have to develop or acquire a unique set of competencies, competencies that would include-- in addition to technical competency—visioning and strategic planning skills, the ability to lead and direct others, and the desire to build and sustain a network that would enhance communication and provide managerial support locally, regionally, and globally.

Another critical component of building capacity and sustenance is the need for vehicles of communication, e.g., newsletters, website announcements, etc. The original plan called for a number of such communication vehicles in order to advance the project and create increased awareness of the power of electronic communication. The website was envisioned to facilitate collaboration on projects, staff exchanges, volunteerism, publicizing meetings, etc.

Phase III Findings

- *The task of “passing the torch” was more difficult than previously envisioned*
- *Organizational “protocol” often impeded progress*
- *It was difficult to establish trust in some areas*
- *The intended exposure via a newsletter could not be sustained; articles were not written; communications were lacking*
- *The original intent of having cross-regional communication did not happen, due to delays in building web sites in some regions*
- *Without appropriate managerial and organizational structures in place, capacity building could not take place in the manner intended. To be successful, there needed to be a clear strategy, someone to shepherd the development and capacity-building process, and a system of monitoring and evaluating effectiveness.*

VI. PROJECT EVALUATION

Evaluation processes were built into the project from the outset. Vesper Society placed a high emphasis on evaluation processes and attempted to solicit input at all levels of the project, from planning and development through implementation and impact.

Objectives for Evaluation Process

- To evaluate the project in terms of its efficacy in supporting Vesper’s mission, vision and strategic plan.
- To measure the effectiveness of the project against the established objectives
- To document the extent to which project activities occurred at all and in which regions
- To determine the effectiveness of regional representatives to the goals of the project
- To utilize both subjective and objective measures based on data gathered from project participants, collaborating organizations and others related to the project
- To define/develop tools that gather feedback *before, during, and after* project implementation
- To go beyond “reaction” evaluation methods to obtain information related to actual learning and application/impact in the organization
- To establish processes that enable ongoing learning and skills transfer long after Vesper has turned over the project to local centers

Evaluation Processes and Outcomes – Phased Approach

The Network 21 project was varied and complex. This was due, in large part, to the diversity of cultures, unique regional and local management practices, and broad range of knowledge, particularly knowledge of technology, represented in the various regions. Consequently, project personnel developed and/or adjusted training and evaluation methods and strategies to meet the unique needs of the regional audiences.

The evaluation processes and outcomes are presented in a phased approach, to parallel the phases described above. These three phases are:

Phase I: Planning and Collaboration

Phase II: Training and Implementation

Phase III: Building Capacity

A. Phase I: Planning and Collaboration

Evaluation Processes/Outcomes

The project began with the largely educational activity of explaining OIKOSNET's interest in improved communication and then working with leaders to help them understand what such communication would mean for their local organizations. The objective at this stage of the project was to ask how new electronic tools might be used to bring effective change in the world.

Phase I Outcomes

- For most regions, the information provided in Phase I was *new* information. Although receptive to the power of electronic communication, local organizations needed time to consider the implications of being receptive to working with other agencies in their own regions as well as globally.
- Project staff developed and administered evaluation documents at the conclusion of each conference/information session during Phase I. Although this evaluation process was largely subjective and reactive in nature, it gave the project staff valuable information related to:
 - The varying levels of need at the centers
 - The degree of readiness of the center leadership to take on this project
 - The challenges faced by the centers, both technological and managerial
 - The need for training to focus on the practical, not just the technical aspects
 - The need to create clear expectations up front
 - The need for integration into all aspects of operations
 - The importance of identifying and acknowledging cultural differences, even in different parts of the same country
- Many organizations in ACLCA (Africa), CONOSUR (South America), and MEATRC (Middle East) considered the opportunities offered by the project and chose to participate. Organizations in ACISCA (Asia) were not as involved in the project. Centers in EAALCE (Europe) and NARDA (North America) were not targeted as prime participants in the project.
- As a result of Phase I, project staff was able to make adjustments that would greatly facilitate the success of Phase II.

B. Phase II: Training and Implementation

Evaluation Processes/ Outcomes

The major part of the Network 21 project focused on the activities of Phase II. Training modules were conducted at OIKOSNET centers and sub regional networks on the use of Email and ListSers. Members were instructed on using e-mail to communicate at the regional and global levels. Email was used to plan meetings, disseminate minutes and carry out meetings locally, regionally, and globally.

The project contained several distinct activities, including workshops, training sessions, online and Internet discussion, and other targeted leadership training. It was during this phase that project leaders initiated and delivered Directors’ Workshops, Train the Trainer Sessions, and Staff Training.

In evaluating the effectiveness of each of these training interventions, the Vesper model for project evaluation was employed. This is described below.

Vesper Society’s Evaluation Methodology

In an attempt to accurately assess the impact of its programs, Vesper focuses on four types or levels of project evaluation measures:

- *Reaction Evaluation* – This is the participant evaluation that immediately follows a project and is usually provided through written or oral input. This is the first level of evaluation and is largely subjective and reactive and tells of satisfaction as opposed to real learning.
- *Learning Evaluation* – This is an evaluation that attempts to get beyond the “good feelings” to a deeper level that assesses the actual learning that took place. With regard to skill development, this can be measured using pre- and post-tests.
- *Application Evaluation* – This is an evaluation that shows the degree to which skills and knowledge learned in the training have been applied to the work environment. Data for this level can be observed from colleagues and supervisors.
- *Impact Evaluation* – This is by far the most challenging aspect of evaluation, as it calls for an ability to link project effectiveness to organizational improvement. This is successful only if there are systems in place to link individual behavior to organizational performance and strategic initiatives. (This level is often confirmed in longitudinal studies that can trace development over several years).

In evaluating the following, reference will be made to one or more of these levels of evaluation.

Directors' Workshops

The intent of the Directors' Workshops was to *inform*. Directors were made aware of the expectations of the project and were provided an overview of the components of training that would be conducted at their various centers.

Evaluations of these workshops were conducted on site, immediately following the workshop. They are, therefore, basically *reactive* and *qualitative*, recording the Director's immediate impressions. Some of these verbatim impressions/reactions are listed below.

Previously I viewed these tools as only extras or sophisticated gadgets for the affluent. Now I see them as a means of opening the whole wide world to my centre with resources and experts all put at our disposal.

My opinion about the potential use of electronic communication has changed as a result of this workshop. My initial opinion was that electronic communication was fine for people who had the means and could indulge in speedy communication methods. However, I have come to realize that there is more involved than speedy communication. It also means being part of a wider community.

I see my centre as a central point that will benefit the community, the churches and the public at large in making it possible for them to communicate far and wide. It can also provide growth for the centre as a generator of new activities by having more seminars and workshops; thereby, helping it grow and develop.

I thought the Internet was much more complicated and I was scared of so many things regarding the World Wide Web. But it has become so easy for me. I have more confidence.

While the above is not comprehensive, these comments convey the thoughts and reactions of the more than 75 Directors who participated in the Directors' Workshops throughout five OIKOSNET regions. Project staff was satisfied with the results of these workshops and utilized the input obtained from participants to make adjustments to subsequent presentations and to training methods.

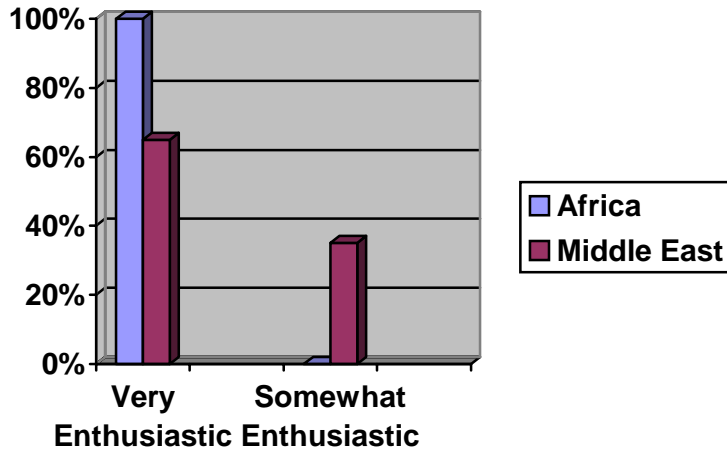
Train-the-Trainer Sessions

For this training, Vesper employed two levels of evaluation: *reactive* and *learning* evaluations. A pre-training evaluation asked questions related to the participant's level of comfort about the upcoming training.

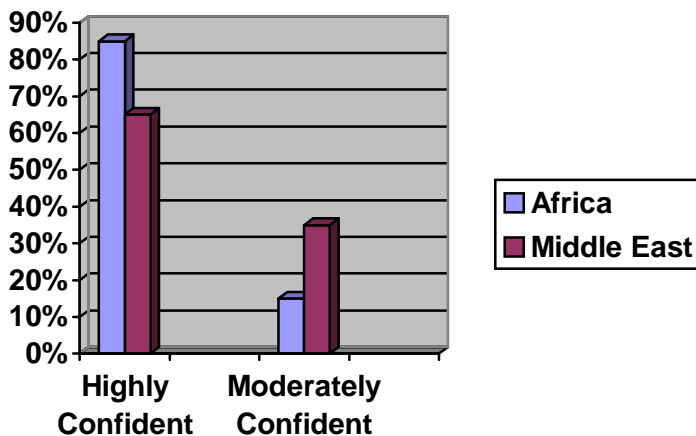
Network 21 – Final Report

Both Africa and the Middle East responded to these questions. Results are shown in the following graphs:

Question #1: How do you feel about attending this training?



Question #2: How do you feel about learning technology skills?



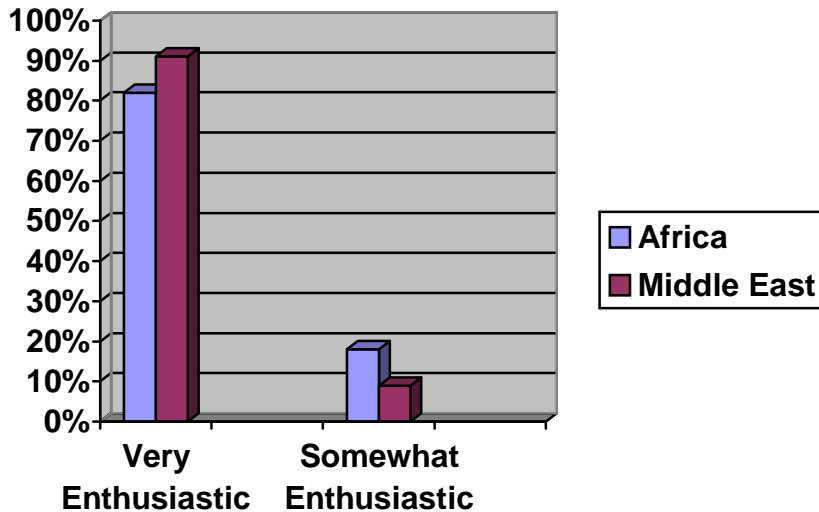
Participants from all three regions were generally enthusiastic about participating in the training. But it should be noted that the participants were selected by center directors as people who were capable and who could put these skills to use for the benefit of the local organization. Consequently, it was no surprise that the response was so positive.

When asked if they thought they could learn the skills, there were differences between participants in the three regions. Participants from Africa were more confident that they would be able to master the skills than participants from the Middle East. The difference may be largely the result of alternative ways of approaching issues among regional groups.

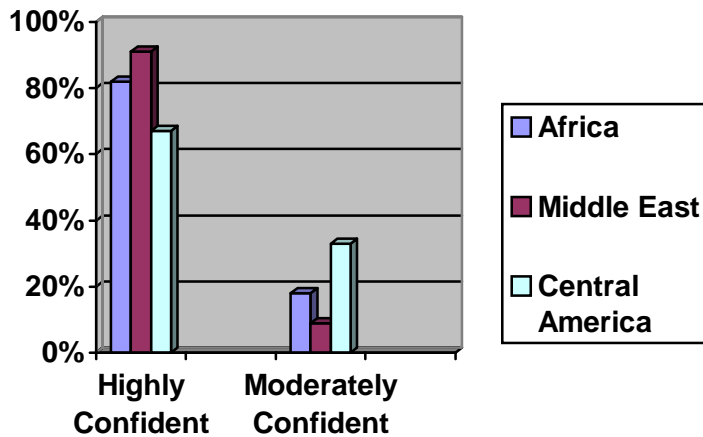
Post-Training Evaluations:

The post-training evaluation asked detailed questions about the participants' mastery of particular skills.

Question: After the training, how do you feel about the technology?



Question: After the training, how do you feel about your Internet skills?

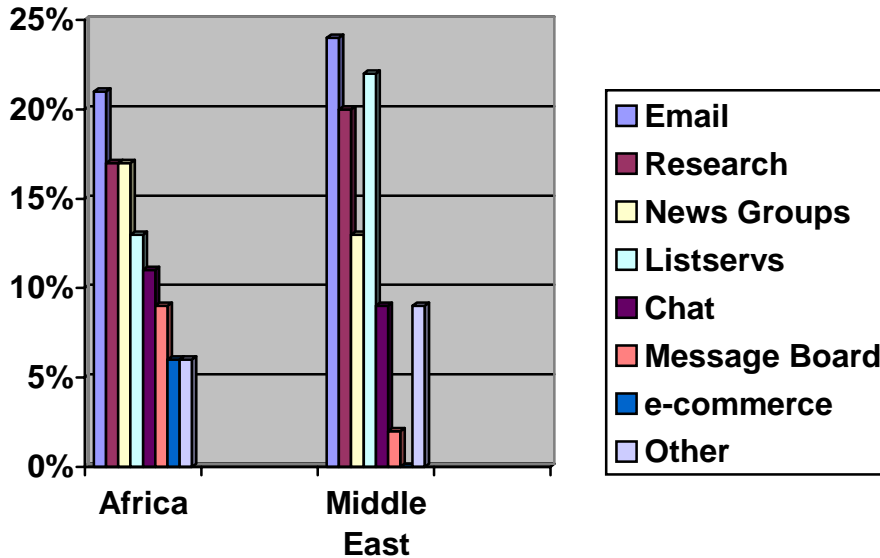


After the training, participants still felt very positive about electronic communication technology. However, the training created in them a greater awareness of the scope and complexity of technology and, as a result, made them a bit more uncertain of their own skills.

The post-training questionnaire went on to ask more specific questions about detailed skills.

Question:

What skills do you see as most helpful?



Email topped the list for both groups of participants, with research being second. Several of the African participants listed specific activities that could help their centers. These included: communicating with their various publics, putting the newsletter on the web, downloading resources, advertising programs, taking distance learning, etc. Participants in the training in the Middle East reported that their plan to use the Internet focused on obtaining information that they could use in their local centers.

Observations/Conclusions

- *Participants from Africa focused on communication outward, sending and receiving messages from other centers, using other email-based tools (newsletters, discussion groups, etc.) collaborative planning and getting the word out to the community.*
- *Participants from South America generally had good facilities and were knowledgeable about how to put this technology to use for their center*
- *With the exception of South America, most of the local centers do not use the web or the Internet on a regular basis.*

C. Phase III: Capacity Building

Evaluation Processes and Outcomes

The Network 21 project had, from the outset, the intention of developing Center leadership in each of the regions. The focus, following the training initiatives, was to support and encourage leaders to develop both the technical and managerial skills necessary to effect positive change in

Network 21 – Final Report

their various organizations. This required that the Directors be open to change and knowledgeable of the benefits of electronic communication. But, beyond this, it required that these Directors be able to act as *agents of change*, utilizing their skills to create new visions for their organizations and new hopes for their communities.

To what extent did this happen?

While some Directors felt strongly that they had support for the communication technology offered by Network 21, their best intentions were often shattered by both internal and external obstacles. Sometimes these obstacles took the form of a hierarchical structure with various political perspectives and layers of approval; at other times, there was simply a lack of support from antiquated structures and disparate management systems.

Impact Evaluation

In early 2004, Vesper staff conducted an assessment in order to obtain data necessary to begin to gain information about the long-term impact of the workshops. This assessment focused on gathering data from center staff on how participants have progressed in their knowledge and skills since the original training took place and the impact these have had on the operation and management of the centers.

Eight centers were selected for this survey. In most cases, staff from these centers attended more than one Network 21 workshop. All centers responded with a numerical measurement plus comments. The following 1-5 scale was used:

- 1 – No change since the workshop
- 2 – Small changes in a few areas
- 3 – Many changes in a few areas
- 4 – Great changes in many areas
- 5 – Complete changes in most areas

The average cores to these questions follows:

1. To what extent has the workshop(s) affected the vision of your Center for the future?
2. What has been the impact of technology on your center since the workshop(s)? **3.4**
3. How have the workshops affected the management of your Center? **3.2**
4. Have you introduced new programs that specifically use e-technology? **3.2**
5. Because of e-communication, has your center been able to broaden its base of sponsors, at regional, national Church, and/or global levels? **3.2**
6. To what extent have you expended your regular communication intra-regionally, inter-regionally, and globally? **3.4**

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Observations/Conclusions

Perhaps the major lesson learned throughout this project is this: When dealing with a project of such complexity, one that crosses so many cultural boundaries, one needs to have a well-constructed /well-published *integration plan as well as a dedicated integration team*. With an effort the size of Network 21, it is imperative that all structures and relationships be intimately connected with each other. It was not enough, for the OIKOSNET regions to be bound by a common commitment to Christianity. That was, of course, a strong bond. However, this project called for *an organizational construct* that was strong enough to connect diverse cultures yet flexible enough to deal with the multitude of challenges that were inevitable in a project of this scope.

While Vesper personnel worked untiringly to manage the myriad of facets in this project, hindsight confirms that it could not achieve the idealistic goals upon which it was grounded with the limited staff dedicated to this project.

- *By hiring project-specific consultants, the project consciously adopted a model of working with resources at the local level*
- *By providing training to trainers in the local community, the project also fulfilled its intention of keeping the value of electronic communication and skills in the local community beyond the life of the Network 21 project*
- *There was distinct evidence of a change in thinking and changes in practice on the part of local centers*
- *The project put an infrastructure in place so regions had the potential for future growth and development*
- *Many centers have taken ownership of the training activity and have demonstrated their ability to move forward with training others in the skills they have learned*

VII. FINAL WORD

As we look back over the past few years, it is clear that the Network 21 project has been successful in forging a new frontier in many of the regions it has touched. We come to that frontier, however, at a time when the economic resources and political climates necessary to support a transition to electronic communication are already strained.

We have seen and experienced success in many of the centers in Africa, South America, and the Middle East. We have experienced a lesser degree of success in other regions; however, the seeds of change have been planted and we feel confident that they will take root and grow.

Vesper Society is pleased with the success that its Network 21 program has achieved. The accomplishments of the past five years did not come about by mere coincidence. Our strategy directed us to strengthen our relationships with the various OIKOSNET regions, and we have. It

Network 21 – Final Report

challenged us to build center leadership, and we have. It demanded that we work with regional leadership to build infrastructures in the communities they serve, and that is what we have done.

These forward leaps have infused Vesper Society with a spirit of energy and enthusiasm. They also coincide with a global recognition of the need for and the power of electronic communication, especially in developing countries. Vesper Society is grateful to have been a part of a project that, by its nature and results, was supportive of Vesper’s mission of “creating opportunities for individuals, groups and institutions”...of functioning “as a convener and catalyst, bringing key people together for in-depth dialogue or problem-solving...by providing such resources as technical assistance, research, and materials.”

APPENDICES