



Strengthening Media in the Pacific:

Country situational reports from Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu



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International Federation of Journalists (IFJ)
The Global Voice of Journalists



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Cover photo: VBTC journalist and TV news presenter Loic Teilemb presents the evening news in Vanuatu.
Credit: Kiery Mannasah

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1. Papua New Guinea: situation report

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Country Profile

The advancement of journalism and media in Papua New Guinea (PNG) can be divided into two phases: Pre-Independence and Post-Independence. During the pre-independence period, which carried through to the 1980s, the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) was a stand-alone radio broadcast medium controlled by the government and the *Post Courier* was the main and only print medium (newspaper). *Niugini Nius* newspaper began publication in 1975 but ceased a decade and a half later.

The advancement of journalism and media in Papua New Guinea (PNG) can be divided into two phases

The Post-Independence phase can be viewed as the era of transformation for media in PNG. This transformation can be attributed to the economic development phase that PNG has experienced. But with advancement have come a number of challenges for the media industry. This situation report for the media industry in PNG outlines the current media environment, highlights the major challenges facing the industry and gives insight into those involved such as journalists, reporters, photographers, camera operators, TV presenters, etc.

PNG Media: A Contextual Background

The development of media in PNG was initially slow after independence in 1975. However, there were significant developments in commercial and socio-economic sectors from the 1980s onwards which created demand and hence opportunities for a developing media industry. This included a significant increase in the number of entities whose core

business was media, both private and government controlled, and the number of people employed in the industry. The opportunities have also been due to the fact that, apart from English being the preferred medium of communication in daily business, PNG has two other national languages – Pidgin and Motu.

Since independence in 1975, when media was confined to one radio and one newspaper, television has also been introduced.

Today with the advent of new technologies virtually all media entities are now accessible online. PNG today has two major daily newspapers – the *Post Courier* and *National*, both foreign-owned and several minor newspapers that publish weekly and monthly papers. There is also a government monthly publication. Radio broadcasting has continued to blossom.

The main radio stations include NBC (which operates the *Karai* and *Kundu Services* within the provinces); *Kalang Advertising Limited* (which operates *FM100* and *HotFM*); and *PNGFM* (which operates *NauFM*, *YumiFM* and *LegendFM*). There are other smaller privately-owned radio stations including *FMCentral* (broadcasting in the *Motu Language*), *RaitFM*, *FMMorobe*, *Radio Fly*, *SepikFM* and *San Kamap FM* in the autonomous region of *Bougainville*. *EMTV* was the lone local TV Station from 1987 until *TVWan* was introduced in 2014. Both stations are foreign owned. Virtually all programs on these networks have foreign content excluding the news and weather and other minor current affairs and business programs. Foreign television stations are accessible through cable network operations except for the *Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC)* which has a presence in PNG and employs Papua New Guineans. Most foreign media services operate through their respective embassies, high commission and foreign missions.

Media freedom in PNG

Papua New Guinea enjoys some of the liveliest media coverage in the Pacific region and, comparatively, a relatively free media and news reporting environment with little to no direct government restriction, regulation or censorship. This is by and large due to the fact that the Constitution of Papua New Guinea provides for free speech, including freedom of the media, which is a qualified right under Section 46 of the Constitution, which stipulates:

“(1) Every person has the right to Freedom of Expression and Publication...”

While media freedom is protected by law, many individual broadcast journalists and reporters as well as camera operators have come under attack from some subjects of unfavorable news reporting. Many of these attacks have been at the hands of the police, acting in their own capacity or under instruction from affluent or influential people, including politicians. In virtually all instances, these attacks and harassment are perpetrated by those who believe that news stories negatively affect their integrity and popularity. While many of these incidences are reported through various forms of media, including social media, most are not reported to the police for fear of further attacks and harassment.



Blaise Nangoi, Chief Editor of PNG's largest daily, The Port Moresby Courier, showing the newspaper's printing presses during consultations with PACMAS. Credit: PACMAS

Both the government and the opposition alike remain sensitive to media reports that openly criticise their actions or the lack thereof, believing such reports affect their popularity. This has led to various governments attempting to amend legislations to impose restrictions on the media, but without much

success due to the potential threat of unrest, mostly led by activists. There have also been legal actions instituted to stop media from reporting various events, some of which have gone before the courts.

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Opportunities for women in media

A lot has changed since the early days of journalism and media in Papua New Guinea. This is largely due to the fact that Papua New Guinea is slowly changing from a predominantly traditional society to a more modern society. Today, there are more females in schools and many are excelling in education, allowing women to compete on a more equal footing with men in the job market. In the country's two universities teaching journalism – the University of Papua New Guinea and Divine Word University – there is an almost equal ratio of boys to girls enrolled in these degree programs.

On the work front, women are slowly but surely taking over the newsrooms of major media entities. Sadly, some are also being forced out of the mainstream media into public relations as they find their career advancement curtailed by office politics and/or nepotism. With females slowly outnumbering males as journalists or news reporters this situation may change for media companies where profit is a motive and recruiting the best person for the job is the means to achieving profitability and reducing or eradicating competition and threats.

However, the situation is quite different for senior management roles within media entities, which continue to be male-dominated. Except for the Post Courier where expatriate women hold senior management roles, the situation is that few PNG women hold senior management roles within media entities in general. One view is this may be attributed to a lack of management qualifications and/or experience, but considering the trend thus far, females should be expected to ascend to more senior and executive management roles in media entities within the industry in PNG in future.

Working conditions for journalists

Working conditions for journalists vary according to the respective media entities that employ them, but generally is influenced by the cost structure of the country. Aside from NBC and the Post Courier which provide institutional housing for most of their employees, many journalists (even some employed by NBC and Post Courier) live in low-cost housing suburbs.

There have been a number of very serious attacks on journalists at night during drop-offs in the suburbs, including attacks on women journalists.

Given the fact that journalism is a profession that requires many journalists work well into the night and return home late after shifts, this is a situation that in PNG has also rendered journalists prone to attacks. There have been a number of very serious attacks on journalists at night during drop-offs in the suburbs, including attacks on women journalists. Whether these attacks are random or perpetrated by disgruntled subjects of news reports is not known, however, the fact remains that this is an element of the working conditions that contribute to generally poor conditions of employment for journalists.

In terms of the salary and wage structures, journalists are some of the lowest paid professionals in the country. However, given the rise in the number of media entities and the competition this has created, things are slowly beginning to change with many of those journalists with broad potential and appeal being offered retention packages. While these packages are not sufficient to alter or improve the working conditions of all journalists, it is a move in the right direction.

Ethical vs public service journalism

Ethical journalism is an issue in dire need of attention from all sides – including the journalists and the media entities they work for, the general public and those in positions of power. Many journalists are not aware of the PNG Media Code of Ethics, developed under the Papua New Guinea Media Council (PNGMC). This is due to PNGMC failing to develop proper follow-up training programs for journalists to remind them of their responsibilities as professional journalists and their duty to ensure factual and objective reporting.

The general breakdown in ethical journalism in PNG plays out in a number of ways and it is widely known that journalists accept money and other objects including paid trips and allowances to write and report stories, especially about politicians.



Local media interview a member of the US Air Force. Credit: US Air Force Photo, Senior Airman Peter Reft

This ultimately raises questions on the accuracy of the news and whether it is in the public interest or merely designed to influence public view. Such actions by journalists encroach on public service journalism and bring the integrity of the profession into disrepute. Further to this, it is little surprise there is a general feeling of indifference towards the attacks and harassment against media personnel.

Many journalists are not aware of the PNG Media Code of Ethics, developed under the Papua New Guinea Media Council (PNGMC).

Since the demise of PNGMC, there has been no enforcement of the Media Code of Ethics. PNG Media Workers Association (PNGMWA) has not been able to pursue cases or enforce the code due to a lack of membership and funding, except to raise concerns in public forums such as Media Monitors on Facebook, on the need to maintain proper and ethical standards of reporting.

Professional training & development

Professional training and development is an important aspect of journalism that must be given due consideration. Business and management continue to evolve and journalists must keep abreast with the changes therein to ensure free, fair and comprehensive reporting. The degree and diploma programs in journalism offered by the University of PNG and Divine Word University have a scope focused on journalism. This leaves graduates limited in their appreciation of broader subjects and areas of expertise.

When PNGMC was fully operational, it was able to organize training workshops in various strands to up-skill and enhance journalists' knowledge and appreciation of specific areas. However, since the demise of PNGMC, the responsibility of training has been left to the respective media organizations. In most cases, those trainings are tailored to suit the organization's needs. Sadly, there are many organizations that do not budget for and do not provide any training and development of reporters/journalists.

The PNG Media Initiative (PNGMI) is a program developed and supported by AusAID. It is administered through the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) and as such, only NBC Staff attend all training programs initiated under PNGMI. It is not

known if this is by design or is done deliberately by NBC but whatever the case, this program by AusAID needs to be managed through an independent body for the benefit of all and for the advancement of Journalism in PNG.

Opportunities and challenges

There are a number of challenges for the media industry in PNG. Central to improving the media landscape in future, is the need for the creation of an all-inclusive organisation that works towards restoring trust and harmonising relationship between media outlets and journalists, as well as between the media, the government and the general public. PNGMC has long been deemed a pro Media Industry Employers' Association. It is for this reason that the PNGMWA was incorporated to advocate for employees. However, both interests could be streamlined and aimed at advancing journalism as a profession. What is clear is that executives of both organisations need to work together to address the current issues affecting the advancement of PNG's media or the problems will continue to persist.

The focus of the media industry after the creation of a one representative organisation should be on developing a legislative framework that recognises the media industry and journalism as a profession. In the long term, this will bring respectability to the industry and also ensure other challenges can be addressed for the media industry and the journalism profession in the country.

There has not been any notable achievement in the more recent past within the industry as a whole. Each media entity tends to operate in isolation since the demise of PNGMC. However, the executives of PNGMWA did meet with the Prime Minister of PNG seeking assistance to develop programs that would enhance the industry, especially in terms of restoring credibility and ensuring proper standards in all facets of the media are maintained.

While the Prime Minister was unable to commit funding assistance, he said the government may consider providing a legal framework to give the industry an opportunity to develop recognised and accepted standards similar to what is practiced by the PNG Law Society and the PNG Institute of Accountants. This is an opportunity that exists within the tenure of the current government but it is now up to the media industry to organise itself and pursue it.



Komuniti Tok Piksa (KTP) in a filming session, an initiative of the Centre for Social and Creative Media of the University of Goroka.
Credit: PACMAS, the Centre for Social and Creative Media, University of Goroka

Recommendations:

The one single significant recommendation is the need for resources to assist PNGMC and PMGMWA to streamline their respective functions and responsibilities to create a strong single entity to pursue the advancement of journalism and the media industry in Papua New Guinea.

High-level international assistance is needed to focus on the following:

- Review and develop a PNG media code of ethics taking into account current trends in business and management and incorporating best practice standards so that PNG's media can be supported to become a respectable and trustworthy industry;
- Provide induction training for aspiring journalists and reporters including an oath to comply with the Media Code of Ethics;
- Formulate a plan for an independent media representative organisation with a clear vision and strategies on developing and supporting strong and independent media in PNG;
- Collaborate with the government to develop a legislative framework for the media industry to:
 1. Represent and pursue the interest of the media and media workers;
 2. Ensure it has standing to independently investigate and discipline ethical breaches;
 3. Ensure those who attack media professionals are prosecuted for their actions;
 4. Do all that is necessary and within law to pursue the advancement of the media industry in PNG.



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2. Solomon Islands: situation report

*By Lisa Williams-Lahari
Media Association Solomon Islands (MASI)*

Country Profile

The Solomon Islands is part of the Melanesia subregion with its surrounding neighbours being Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu, Fiji, and Australia. It has been independent since July 7, 1978, and has a constitutional monarchy with a governor general serving as head of state. Parliamentary democracy is based on the multi-party system in the Solomon Islands. The role of non-elected, traditional chiefs and leaders plays a key role at provincial level, where local government assemblies across the nine provinces and town of Honiara, provide the framework for state-funded governance and administration.

As a result of ethnic issues covering a ten year 'tension' period from the early 90s, the country experienced huge internal breakdown and disorder. It subsequently went through a period of restoration and recovery which identified major challenges and the need for reform across key sectors.

During this time, special assistance for media (SOLMAS) was part of a Regional Assistance Mission to the Solomon Islands (RAMSI). The RAMSI intervention has since been replaced by a transitional phase, with the Solomon Islands Partnership being primarily led by the government with help from Australia, New Zealand and range of development partners. The current population is estimated at 560,000 and projected to rise to about 930,000 by 2030. Christianity is the largest faith group in the Solomon Islands—as noted with all 27 respondents identifying as Christian. While culturally Melanesian, there are facets of

Micronesia (Kiribati) and Polynesian heritage, with an economically active Chinese community, a significant European population and others adding to the diverse national demography.

Solomon Islands Media: A Background

While the leadership in management tiers of most media organisations in the Solomon's reflects the national trend of being largely older and male, there is a rising group of young media leaders either working for themselves as freelance consultants or embarking on new media ventures. The majority (84 percent) of the survey group was aged 35 and under – with 15 percent aged between 18 and 25 years of age. Only 18% of the group surveyed were over 36 years and above.

In July, 2015, a youth at work collective launched YOSI, a monthly magazine for the youth of the Solomon Islands.

In July, 2015, a youth at work collective launched YOSI, a monthly magazine for the youth of the Solomon Islands. This distinctive feature of the Solomon Islands industry is also trending in Fiji and, to a lesser extent, Papua New Guinea. It is part of the same demographic trend reflected in those Melanesian neighbours – the youth bulge. More than two thirds of the Solomon Islands population is now aged under 29. But difficulties in access and completion rates for formal education in the country mean a lack of higher education qualifications and pressure for workplace-based 'learn-as-you-go' training. English language reporting, ethics and professional standards is bemoaned by the public almost as much as by industry leaders,

with high turnovers and movement between media outlets of those with experience.

The state broadcaster in the Solomon Islands, SIBC, provides radio news across the country and has greatest reach to rural populations. Founded by award-winning journalist and media manager, the late John Lamani, *The Solomon's Star* is the country's longest running daily newspaper. Its news content gains leverage via the family's commercial broadcaster, PAOA FM Radio, which is the leading private sector broadcaster to the capital city.

The past decade has seen the emergence of another newspaper, *The Island Sun*, and the weekly *Sunday Isles*. The last five years has also seen the launch of a range of other themed print publications aimed at women, youth, faith-based groups and also monthly news 'business' publications. Another business/tourism magazine is pending launch at the time of this report.

In keeping up with online convergence, all three leading mainstream newsrooms— The Star, The Sun, and the SIBC, have websites with links to news as it happens.

In keeping up with online convergence, all three leading mainstream newsrooms— *The Star*, *The Sun*, and the SIBC, have websites with links to news as it happens. This combined with social media provides a platform for Solomon Islanders to drive their public/private conversations. While not covered in the survey, social media is mentioned here because it has dramatically influenced (for better and worse) the quality of the public conversation and its diversity of opinion on the issues that matter to Solomon Islanders. In turn, it has also influenced mainstream news coverage and practice in the country. Cyberspace provides an effective alternative networking space between infrequent face-to-face meetings for

established national media groups such as the Media Association of the Solomon Islands, MASI, and new groupings such as Women in Media Solomon Islands, WIMSI.

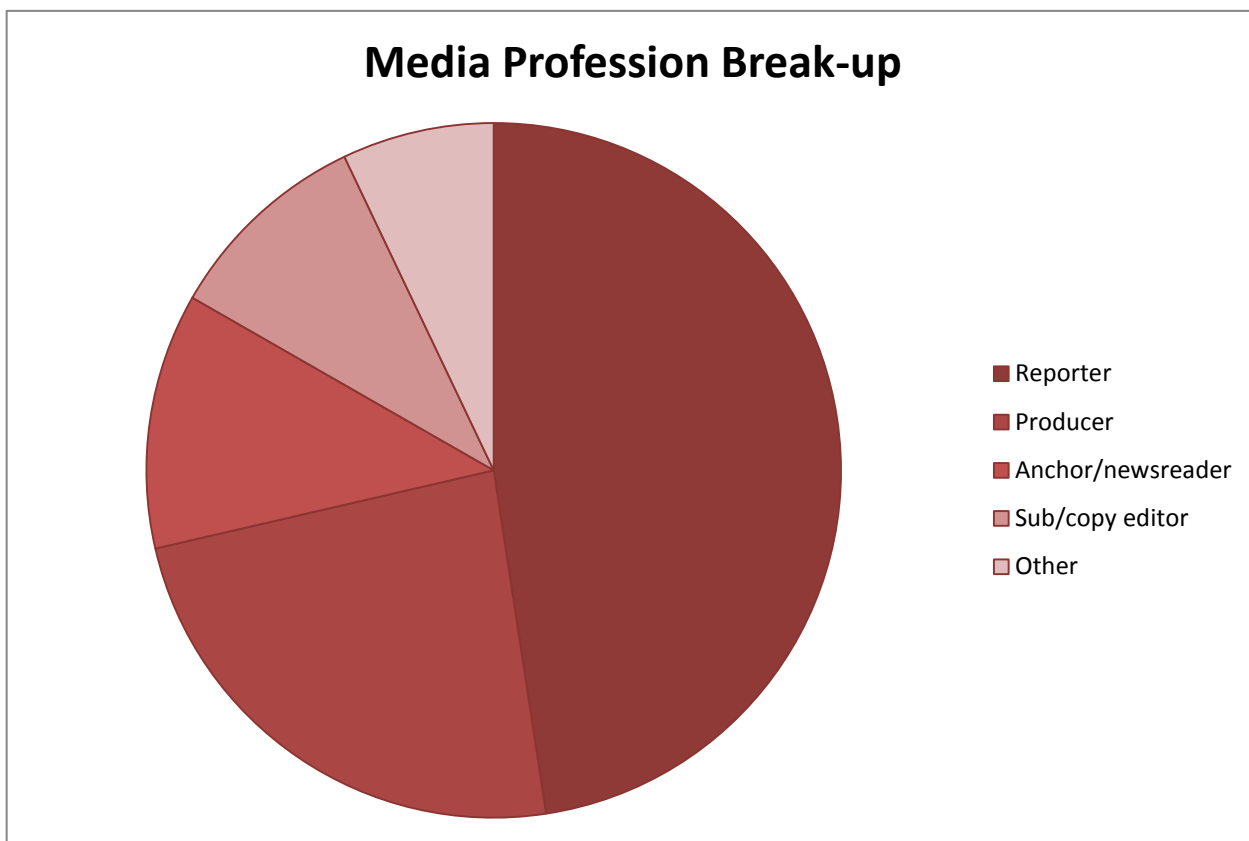
Apart from one privately-owned station broadcasting local news content from 2007 until 2012, SIBC does not have a local TV broadcaster. There are plans to take up the opportunity by a range of interested stakeholders, including the spectrum provider Telecom SI Ltd and the former news provider, ONE TV.

Wearers of many hats: media diversity

While explicitly stated in the survey, the key base for nine out of every ten journalists in the Solomon's is in the capital, Honiara, in Guadalcanal. Stringers, usually linked to radio but also those filing from provinces for the newspapers, provide a key sense of what is happening across the rural areas of the Solomon Islands where the vast majority of Solomon Islanders live.

Most of those surveyed noted their main area of work as being a reporter (74 percent, with producers forming the second largest selection, at 37 percent). Anchor/newsreader was selected by 18.5 percent of those surveyed; sub/copy editor was selected by 15 percent, and 11 percent of those surveyed selected photographer, camera/sound operator, editor and design layout. These results indicate that journalists often work in more than one area.

The Solomon Islands shares a regional trend for many developing Pacific nations, where the media industry experiences a high internal turnover. Individuals shift within the industry and out of it to similar roles linked to their skills and preferences, from one news outlet to another, from media roles in development projects or NGO advocacy into freelance news journalist or consultants, then back to fulltime status.



Survey results from the IFJ Pacific Survey, conducted in Solomon Islands, PNG and Vanuatu in 2015.

The unique blend of development projects in Solomon Islands requiring media and communications support creates an outlet for mainstream workers to ‘time out’ from newsroom roles for the life of projects, before returning to newsrooms or linking up to other projects.

Ten-year standard: Solomon Islands’ media

Direction and leadership in any industry takes its cue from its long-serving practitioners. In Solomon Islands’ media circles, those long-serving leaders are increasingly hard to find! Of the survey group, only 15 percent had more than 10 years’ experience and, of that group, only 11 percent had worked for more than 20 years. Another 4 percent had worked for between 15 and 20 years.

Apart from this small cadre of those who have made a name and lasting career in the field, the face of journalism in the Solomon Islands is youthful, up and coming, and on the move. The vast majority (85 percent) of those surveyed, had worked in the media industry for

10 years or less, with a third of that group working between 5 to 10 years, 18.5 percent between 3 to 5 years, and 26 percent between 1 and 3 years. A smaller percentage (7.5 percent) had worked for less than 12 months in the media industry.

Current working conditions for journalists

The minimum wage in the Solomon Islands is less than one USD an hour, making the daily wage less than 10USD a day. There are no formal unions for media workers and therefore no standards for workplace agreements and contracts. More than half of those surveyed earned between 80-250 USD monthly (63 percent). On fifth (22 percent) earned between 251-400 USD per month, and 15 percent were in the two groups earning between 401-600 USD, or more than 800 USD per month. No one surveyed earned less than 80 USD monthly. Reflecting the trend for the paid workforce in the capital city, the majority of those surveyed indicated they were paid fortnightly (92.5 percent). The remaining selected ‘other’ (after 3 months, and per invoice). When asked if they

were paid their last wage, 92.5 percent said 'yes'. When asked if they have ever been denied wages, 85 percent said 'no'. A small number (11 percent - equating to 3 respondents) said they had been denied wages.

More than half (63 percent) of those surveyed indicated that their workplace offered professional training, while 33 percent said this opportunity was not offered to them. Professional industry training often relates less to in-house workplace-based support and is more likely to come from national and regional opportunities funded by development and project partners along with PacMAS (Pacific Media Assistance Scheme) and PINA regional media development assistance programs.

Press freedom: balancing rights with responsibility

The Solomon Islands' penal code features defamation and libel laws which have been enacted with the oft-quoted 'chilling' effect on free speech and vigorous reportage—but the country also enjoys constitutional guarantee of press freedom, straight from the global human



Solomon Islands Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare. AFP PHOTO/Torsten

rights standard. Sandwiched between Article 11 (on freedom of conscience), Article 13 (providing protection for freedom of assembly and association), and Article 12 (protecting freedom of expression) quotes word for word the provisions of Article 19 of the UN Declaration on Human Rights.

A new partnership with the current elected leadership signals a healthy attitude to the role of the Fourth Estate by the legislature, judiciary and executive. In 2015, the MASI patron is the prime minister, and the president is a leading journalist in the state-owned national broadcaster, SIBC. Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare announced on MASI Media Freedom Day on May 29, 2015: "As Prime Minister, I can say that Solomon Islands has and continues to enjoy media freedom in a large measure and the government I lead will continue to lend support to an enabling environment in which journalism thrives." At the same government-funded dinner event, the prime minister announced the launch of a Prime Ministers Media Excellence Award for outstanding journalists. The awards, to be presented for the first time in 2016, will be an annual government funded scholarship for the recipient for studies either in the Solomon Islands or overseas. Announcing the award, he stated the challenge to turn Solomon Islands into a better place is a shared responsibility and, as a force that shapes and influences public opinion, journalists and the press having a duty to the people of Solomon Islands in much the same way as the government does.

"As Prime Minister, I can say that Solomon Islands has and continues to enjoy media freedom in a large measure and the government I lead will continue to lend support to an enabling environment in which journalism thrives . . ."

While there is generally an appreciation from Solomon Islands journalists of that rare acknowledgement of their role by the government of the day, some also wonder in

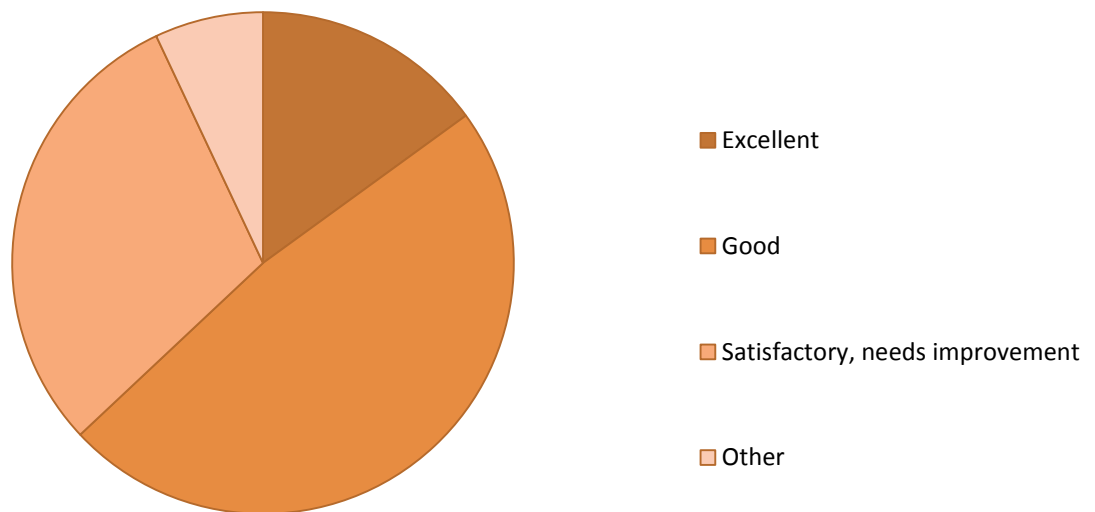
private just how independent news journalism can be when the prime minister is the patron of the organisation tasked with being the eyes of the public on how their nation is run. That aside, the headlines around government and transparency issues and fiscal accountability attest to a willingness to keep that relationship and media independence separate.

Just under half of those surveyed (48 percent) rate press freedom in the Solomon Islands as 'good'; 30 percent selected 'satisfactory, needs improvement'; and 15 percent thought press freedom in the Solomon Islands rated as 'excellent'. Asked what they thought the biggest challenges to press freedom in the Solomon Islands (ranking responses with the most important rank '1'), survey responses were varied with 30 percent indicating the biggest challenge was 'political influence or sanctions'. Another 22 percent selected 'pay and working conditions', while 18.5 percent selected 'media ownership and/or economic influence on media operations'. A small percentage selected 'media worker safety' (7.5 percent), 'access to information' (7.5 percent) 'laws and legal impediments' (3.5 percent), and 'media laws' (3.5 percent).

When asked if they had ever felt restricted reporting on sensitive topics, 63 percent of participants said yes. Another 48 percent felt journalists in their organisation practiced self-censorship 'sometimes' and 11 percent agreed self-censorship was an issue. This indicates a massive 59 percent of the group affirming self-censorship takes place in their organisations – sometimes multiple times. This response provides context then to the issues of 'sensitive' or 'taboo' coverage, where self-censorship is more likely to occur. Importantly, 18.5 percent of survey participants thought this occurred 'rarely' and 15 percent did not know.

On the issue of official guidelines or directives on coverage to their media outlet, 48 percent indicated this had occurred while 22 percent indicated 'no' and another 11 percent 'did not know'. Survey participants were asked, on a scale of 1 to 5, how balanced they thought media reporting was in the Solomon Islands. Seventy (70) percent indicated media reporting was 'fairly balanced', 7.5 percent thought it was 'well balanced', while 15 percent thought media reporting was 'poorly balanced' or 'not at all balanced'.

Perceptions of Press Freedom in Solomon Islands



Survey results from the IFJ Pacific Survey, conducted in Solomon Islands, PNG and Vanuatu in 2015.

Ethical journalism vs public service broadcasting

Solomon Islands journalists often discuss the priorities of ethics in journalism, but there is an ongoing need to put discussions into practice. Calls for training and workshops around ethics and journalism are made as much by journalists as their audiences.

How widely are ethics and the duty of independent media to serve the public interest practiced and understood? Asked if they had ever faced ethical dilemmas at work, one respondent noted: “Not yet—probably (because) my workplace reports only accurate and straight forward information”.

But 45 percent of the survey group did report being confronted with ethical dilemmas — which varied from being pressured by politicians to ‘tone down’ political coverage, others being insistent that their stories be aired and concern over government or commercial advertising influences on the editorial news agenda. There was admission that pressures arose through a lack of awareness in general of the independent role of the media and the need for that role to be respected. Publisher directives and the surfacing of lazy, careless reporting without proper subbing or editing was identified as an ethical issue. This illustrates the need for journalists themselves to understand the technical aspects versus the moral aspects of their work. The problem of writing stories about someone known personally to the writer is indicative of many small communities where there are fewer the degrees of separation. Self-censorship is likely to occur for those journalists unable to step back and be objective about the



Story written by PACMAS Budget Reporting Workshop participant Daniel Namosuaia. Credit: photo by Jemima Garrett. take from PACMAS website.

context of reporting on friends, relatives and others they know in personal capacities.

The problem of writing stories about someone known personally to the writer is indicative of many small communities where there are fewer the degrees of separation.

Enshrining Article 19 in the Solomon Islands constitution is not enough to guarantee the nation’s people that they can enjoy an independent and professional news industry. Two record defamation judgements against the country’s main news organisation in the last five years provide evidence of areas where ethics and integrity in reporting on the political leadership were sadly lacking. A 75,000 SBD (USD 9,400) judgement in favour of former Prime Minister Dr Derek Sikua (now an Opposition MP), and a 200,000 SBD judgement (USD 25,000) in favour of the former cabinet minister and politician Matthew Wale have so far provided the ‘warning signals’ of libel and defamation within Section 19 of the Solomon Islands Penal Code.

That red flag proves such cases what can potentially drive media outlets out of business when rights are not balanced with ethical responsibility. It is little surprise then, when asked what value is most important to them as a journalist, most selected ‘Truth telling and accuracy’ (41 percent). This was followed by ‘impartiality and balance’ (18.5 percent) and ‘Ethical reporting’ (18.5 percent), and ‘Defending the public’s right to know’ (15 percent). One participant selected ‘Accountability’.

Survey respondents were asked what the biggest ethical challenges facing journalists in their workplace (more than one answer could be selected). The most common challenge selected was ‘low wages or non-payment of wages’ (59 percent). ‘Personal interests undermining accuracy, fairness and independence’ (55.5 percent) and ‘conflicts of interest’ (55.5 percent) followed this. ‘Political influence or pressure’ also rated high with 48

percent of respondents selecting this as a challenge. Asked if they ever had to publish/broadcast a piece that was not ethical due to internal/external pressure, 26 percent said 'yes', while 67 percent said 'no'. Of those surveyed, 67 percent indicated that their employers had a code of ethics. Another 11 percent said their organisation did not, while 15 percent indicated they did not know, or 'other'.

Rating ethical standards among journalists in the Solomon Islands, just under half (44.5 percent) selected 'Medium, half of the journalists follow ethical practices', 33 percent selected either 'very good' or 'good', while 15 percent selected 'low, not many journalists follow ethical practices. Asked how they thought ethical practices in journalism could be improved, 55.5 percent indicated that more media ethics training for journalists would help. Another 22 percent indicated this could be achieved by accepting a common code of ethics. Only one survey respondent indicated they thought standards might be improved by punishing those that behave unethically.

Gender issues in the newsroom

Given the low number of female respondents - only 4 (15 percent) - for the survey, follow up gender auditing work to assess the state of media through a gender lens is important. Women in the Media Solomon Islands, WIMSI is a new network founded in 2015 for and by Solomon Islands women media practitioners. Within the first month of its set up, its social media platform received join requests from men in media in Solomon Islands on a scale that outnumbered the total WIMSI membership.

In the mainstream, women currently lead two of the top five regular news outlets

In the mainstream, women currently lead two of the top five regular news outlets: Cathy Lamani took up the helm as publisher of the Solomons Star newspaper following the death of her husband Fr. John Lamani in 2012 and 2015 saw the launch of the weekly Solomon

Woman newspaper by Sunday Isles managing director Lynda Wate Seni.

Sustaining media organisations and leadership is not easy. It has been two years since the National Express, owned by publisher Pamela Zolodeke, closed its doors. At the same time, ONE NEWS TV, the nation's first and only local news content broadcaster, went off air after its launch in 2005. Managing Director, Dorothy Wickham, hopes to relaunch the Honiara-based news service in 2015.

The Solomon Islands is also host to one of the region's longest-established information and media advocacy network for women, Vois Blo Mere Solomon (Voice of the Women of the Solomon's). VBMS continues to play a strong role in community awareness of gender, rights and development issues affecting all Solomon Islands, and takes a focussed cue from Section J (identifying women and media as one of 12 critical areas of concern) of the UN's Beijing Platform for Action on Women and Equality (1995). This, coupled with the leadership of the director of VBMS as the vice president of the MASI, and the proactive requests from men in media to join WIMSI, provides an indication of the wish of men in newsrooms to understand and improve the gendered dynamics of the media industry where males form a large part of the workforce at all levels. It is especially relevant when it comes to leadership and decision-making, and the levels where women in media begin to drop off — usually after childbirth and or marriage, when gender roles and cultural values on the social mores surrounding women, careers and public spaces, especially during evenings, are more pronounced.

Up until February 2015, when Solomon Women launched its print and digital versions, women's stories were reflected in content produced by VDMS and releases by women's and gender networks for pickup by the mainstream where a women's issues page was considered 'ample' progress for including 'women's interest stories'. Faith based organisations such as Catholic Communications had also highlighted the need for content and outreach and

produced regular radio and newsletter type information. The current emergence of the Solomon Women's newspaper and leadership of YOSI by a woman editor, along with digital storytelling initiatives led by UNWomen Solomon Islands and VBMS, also bode well for promoting and engendering diversity and content in news media.

MASI IN 2015

In 2015, MASI's distinctive difference lies with its elder leadership reaping the energy of its largely young membership who are willing to push their industry in new directions without cultural 'filters' on awaiting endorsement from the 'old guard'.

The launch of WIMSI and the emergence of more diverse media outlets covering youth and women bodes well for a future where decisive action is required to progress ideas and build on them. Whether individual members will be able to sustain long-term progress with MASI general members support and donor partnerships remains to be seen. The last 20 years have seen the Solomon Islands weather a transition from turbulence to stability, and the

media have mirrored much of that development. The last decade has been punctuated by the increasing impact of the internet and online/digital media on public conversations and mainstream media and the rise, demise and current bid for resurgence around news content for television.

Along with that has been the growth of citizen-led debate and conversation via social media, a continued surge in mobile telephones aiding media and information access, and two record awards in defamation suits between politicians and newspapers. Add to this the traditional 'kastom' law around payment of compensation for grievances. In the absence of a clear and contestable public complaints/feedback process, there is little doubt that the outlook for MASI in serving the needs of its members in the Solomon Islands is busy! What is also certain is that support and donor partnerships such as the targeted national media assistance scheme which were part of the RAMSI 'helpem fren' assistance to the country, will continue to be necessary until a viable long-term media model is in place.



The MASI Executives discuss ways to strengthen the Association in 2012. Credit: PACMAS

Conclusion and recommendations:

From the survey results, individual feedback from media practitioners, and insights into the history and development of the media industry in the Solomon Islands, there are five key recommendations aimed at a handful of key areas providing a 'first steps first' response to this situation report. These recommendations are tipped at MASI as the national focal point for media organisations, and can be adapted to suit specific timelines and resource availability. They provide a starting point for furthering the feedback and ideas provided by the journalists who have reflected so richly in their participation, on the state of media in their country.

1. Media rights and accountability via an annual 'state of the media' report:

A 'state of the media' report to be issued annually by MASI, perhaps as part of WPFDF or its own anniversary. Such a report would update the public, government and development partners on activities and progress, flagging alerts from the previous year and feature a statement from the MASI leadership on challenges and opportunities around media practice, ethics, public feedback and careers. The publication launch could also provide a report card point for the issues raised across recommendations in this list—gender, workplace standards, ethics, outreach, and organisational sustainability.

2. Public access and awareness:

Through its membership, MASI should promote more spaces for public feedback and commentary on news content and to also encourage less reliance on compensation demands in the absence of a well-known and transparent grievance/complaints or feedback channel. Coordinate public awareness sessions promoting Codes of Ethics and educating members of the public on complaints procedures to build a process for feedback/grievance/congratulations on media reporting and to promote self-regulation and accountability.

3. Promoting diversity in and through the media – engendering the mainstream

MASI should take up opportunities in country and within networks and with individuals keen to promote gender diversity to address the imbalance of leadership in the media. A targeted campaign or action building on that potential would promote discussions on the challenges and solutions to ensure diversity in the workplace. This could be timed around International Women's Day on March 8 or the Solomon Islands national day for women, and the annual 16-Days against Gender Violence Campaign or the annual WPFDF May 3 date. An internal media campaign would help drive education and industry/public awareness of the benefits to the news (and any) industry when women and men are represented in equal numbers at the decision-making levels of news (and all) organisations.

4. Better work for better pay- promoting news careers:

Consider the outcomes of the survey around work and pay, MASI should progress a campaign for media outlets to have a flyer on their basic pay structures and entitlements so that workers are aware of their rights and responsibilities. At least one Solomon Islands journalists has successfully taken an employer to court over wrongful dismissal, and the responses noting no formal wage payment for an extended period of time should be of serious concern to industry leaders. Without a credible and decent workplace, the professionalism and attitude of journalists, and news organisations overall, will suffer.

5. MASI- strengthening the national body:

MASI leadership pursue options for institutional strengthening of the national body through bilateral/development project funding for a MASI coordinator position. Reporting to the board, the contracted position should ensure MASI performs training programs and outreach, promotes ethics, reporting and community outreach on the role (rights and responsibilities) of the media, longer-term sustainability, and in providing information to members. IFJ could potentially assist with oversight and transparency and best-practice guidance for this role.



International Federation of Journalists (IFJ)
The Global Voice of Journalists



3. Vanuatu: situation report

*By Kiery Manassah
Media Association blong Vanuatu (MAV)*

Country Profile

Formerly known as the New Hebrides, Vanuatu is an island nation of some 83 islands located in the South West Pacific. It is inhabited by a population of well over 279,000ⁱ (VNSO, 2015) found in over 60 inhabited islands. Up to 80% of these live in the rural areas. The country has two main urban centres in Port Vila and Luganville and six provinces—Tafea, Shefa, Malampa, Penama, Sanma and Torba. Each province is administered by a provincial administration that is headed by an elected president.

The country follows a type of Westminster model of governance where national leaders are elected every four years with the executive headed by a prime minister.ⁱⁱ The country also has a president as the head of state who is regarded as the embodiment of the country's national unity. The 52-members of parliament, six provincial presidents, and lord mayors of the three municipalities elect the president every five years.

Vanuatu is considered one of the most culturally diverse nations per capita in the world.^{iiiiv} This means communication in the early days has historically been problematic. Thus the use of a lingua franca (Bislama) developed from the Queensland sugarcane plantations in the nineteenth century, which proved useful in unifying people towards independence.^{vvi}

Vanuatu Media: A Contextual Background

Vanuatu gained independence acrimoniously in 1980^{vii}, after 74 years of condominium rule - unique arrangement that meant the needs of the natives were grossly neglected because of the two colonial masters' reluctance to invest in a territory that they both shared.^{viiiix}

Vanuatu is considered one of the most culturally diverse nations per capita in the world.

Barely three years after independence a British editor of the first independent newspaper, The Voice of Vanuatu, was expelled by the first Prime Minister Fr. Walter Linx, whose party at the time campaigned on a platform focused on the return of alienated land, the development of Vanuatu and respect for "Kastom".^{xixixixixivxv} Eight years later in 1991, the then-government media services editor was dismissed "for refusing to cease publishing political news".^{xvi} In reprimanding the editor, the prime minister told parliament that while he supported freedom of expression, "foreigners should not threaten the security of a foreign nation".^{xvii} The newspaper was the only medium the opposition could get their views and criticisms of the Lini administration across to the public.

It is obvious the country's 'founders' were more concerned about consolidating their grip on the country and maintaining unity amongst a culturally diverse people. As such, media freedom was quite clearly not a priority from the start, as long as they were informing and creating the country's new national identity. The founders' attitudes were often

characterised by “ideological boldness, confrontational foreign relations and domestic partisan rivalries”.^{xviii} The country’s new leadership since the Walter Lini era has not tolerated any negativity^{xix} that undermined hard-won national unity.^{xxxi} These attitudes have remained throughout and transcended most generations of Vanuatu’s political leadership.

Media and democracy in Vanuatu

Just as western concepts of democracy have been problematic in much of the Pacific, so too have been the media. This is no different for much of Melanesia, including Vanuatu. In this island archipelago, leaders have often regarded the media more as a political propaganda tool, rather than an agent for positive social change. For leaders in the 1980s, driving out foreign elements and justifying Vanuatu statehood and sovereignty was paramount.

In this island archipelago, leaders have often regarded the media more as a political propaganda tool, rather than an agent for positive social change.

The ni-Vanuatu^{xxii} people were not so used to private media providing the “other-side” of the

story and this remained so up until the 1990s. As a direct result, after 35 years of political emancipation, the Vanuatu public has somewhat remained ambivalent about the exact role that the media should play although they are slowly opening up and adapting, thanks to the arrival of new media and mobile communication technologies. The country does not have specific provisions within the Constitution that relate to the media except Article 5 1(g), which gives some provision for freedom of expression.

While great strides have been made, a significant portion - particularly within the political circle and among government officials - still look upon the media with a sense of trepidation, suspicion, and distrust— and often have the view it has overstepped their boundaries at times.^{xxiii} Some have shown their disapproval by either directly or indirectly resorting to threats, intimidation and outright violence.^{xxiv}

Most recently with the change in government in June 2015 there was literally uproar within both traditional and social networking groups. Most were quite critical of the new Sato Kilman government, especially in relation to his government’s unclear policy towards the independence movement of West Papua and other issues. This public reaction would have



Daily Post printery manager John Leeman examining the fine prints before the final run. *Credit:* Keiry Manassah

been unheard of 20 years ago. In reply, the Sato-led government publicly stated that it wants to bring in new legislation to make the media—including administrators of social media networks accountable and more responsible for what they publish or broadcast.

Media establishments

Up until the 1990s, no private media company survived, largely due to the small size of the economy and the market, but more importantly due to political pressure. Consequently, it can be argued that the success of the Vanuatu Daily Post greatly helped to open up the media to private interests, albeit with a heavy price.

Vanuatu Daily Post

Starting off as a foreign owned A-4 size trade and business directory then known as Trading Post newspaper, the Vanuatu Daily Post has had its publisher and part owner deported once, thrown in jail once, badly assaulted three times and threatened many times. Interestingly, when it started, the owners did not see the value in targeting overseas readers. But times have changed. Readers can now download their own Daily Post app onto their devices to keep abreast of all that are happening in Vanuatu. Vanuatu Daily Post is Vanuatu's only daily paper.

The Vanuatu Broadcasting and Television Corporation remains the country's biggest media establishment with over 60 employees.

VBTC

The Vanuatu Broadcasting and Television Corporation remains the country's biggest media establishment with over 60 employees. It was incorporated with its own Act in the 1990s but was previously an extension of the government's former media services department under the Prime Minister's Office.

Over the years, the national broadcaster has come under different names. Then when commercial radio arrived in the late 80s; and later television in 1993, the government

decided to incorporate the service as a semi-government owned entity that would generate the bulk of its own revenue through advertising and selling of airtime. It still receives 40% of its budget from the government through quarterly grants.

- ***Independent***

The Independent newspaper started out as a direct competitor to the Vanuatu Daily Post in the early 2000s. Since then, its ownership has changed hands from being a foreign-owned entity to a local company. It is the second biggest news print media, publishing on a weekly basis and targeting more or less the same market as the Vanuatu Daily Post: expatriate investors and the ever-growing middle class ni-Vanuatu finishing university and joining the workforce.

- ***FM107 Group***

The FM107 group is the only locally-owned media company that operates a successful and popular commercial FM radio FM107 and publishes a weekly paper called Vanuatu Times. It has plans to venture into TV broadcasting in future. Its FM station has an extensive coverage network (PACMAS report, 2013), which gives enormous advantage in terms of commercial advertising and talkback shows. Its popular radio hosts keep the airwaves busy and many listeners have come to appreciate the time and space made available through FM107 for them to openly discuss the various socio-economic and political issues that confront them on a day-to-day basis. Some of these shows have focused on quite controversial issues—often drawing attention from politicians. The new Sato-led government has reminded talk show hosts to exercise their freedom with more responsibility and curb callers from criticising the government without 'proof' or it may be forced to consider tougher measures against media.

- ***Newcomers: Vila Times and Yumi Toktok Stret***

Towards the end of 2014, from the print side, two more weekly newspapers were launched in Port Vila. These are Vila Times and Yumi Toktok Stret newspaper, adding to the three existing newspapers: Daily Post, Independent and

Vanuatu Times. However, Yumi Toktok Stret, an extension of the popular social media network (YTS) has since reverted back to its original platform of maintaining a strong social online presence after only a few publications, perhaps due to financial constraints. On the other hand foreign-owned Vila Times arrived on the scene quietly in 2014—targeting a specific niche market of a growing community of Chinese investors in Port Vila who otherwise had very limited choices. It publishes predominantly in English and Chinese languages. It was launched despite calls from some quarters within the industry that the media should be reserved only for ni-Vanuatu.

- **Community Media**

In the community media sector, Tafea province's Crest FM, which is located on Tanna, has been serving a vital role in connecting the people of Tafea with their provincial administrators at Isangel since 2004. Crest FM was originally funded under UNICEF's Child Friendly School program. Churches have also played a significant role in community broadcasting, particularly radio and TV, with

Hope TV (Seventh-day Adventist church-run) and TBN leading the line. But no community has tried to venture into print media.

Opportunities and challenges

Despite the country's historical challenges, more and more politicians are warming up to the reality that independent media will always be part and parcel of the country's young democracy.

Most are rethinking their strategies. And like the rest of the region, the Vanuatu media continue to undergo transformations in an exciting new era of new media and communication technology. This is also opening up an array of opportunities for many ni-Vanuatu.

The rise of social media and consequently 'citizen journalists'—many of whom are young—means that the powers-that-be can no longer have the sort of control Vanuatu's founders exercised during the heyday of independence. That is, unless the government pushes further with suggestions to try and regulate media activities, especially Facebook. New media



One of Vanuatu's most experienced print journalists, Len Garae Television Blong Vanuatu. *Credit: Kiery Manassah*



Newsroom journalists, Vanuatu Daily Post. Credit: Keiry Manassah

technologies have no doubt ushered in an awakening of the consciousness of the Vanuatu public about their rights to be informed, and to be part of national conversations.

New media technologies have no doubt ushered in an awakening of the consciousness of the Vanuatu public about their rights to be informed, and to be part of national conversations.

The vibrancy within the industry is expected to be boosted further, with the Vanuatu Broadcasting and Television Corporation's earlier calls this year for Expressions of Interest (EOI)—inviting media companies to indicate how they might help Vanuatu migrate from analogue to digital television broadcasting.

Most notable has been the interest shown by telecommunication service providers such as Digicel, who are jumping at the opportunity and looking to widen their area of business by moving into television broadcasting. It's relatively new trend but one which authorities are hopeful that Vanuatu will need to have the proper legal frameworks in place first as a matter of priority in order to guide its development into the future. The Vanuatu government, through VBTC, is addressing this on two fronts: first by separating the dual functions of the state broadcaster so that the corporation can concentrate on its broadcasting

role, while its regulatory functions potentially come under a completely new entity.

Working conditions for Journalists

But certainly, the increase in the number of media companies not only helps broaden consumer choices, but it also means opportunities for journalists and media workers are bountiful. Yet within VBTC itself, the government recognises that if the company is to have any chances of succeeding as a business, more needs to be done to restructure the organisation and resize staffing to keep the company's head above water financially. Excessive overhead costs and poor management have been the main cause of stagnation since the decision to corporatize the former radio Vanuatu in the late 1980s. VBTC management and staff may also need to embrace new opportunities presented by new communication technologies.

Due to the challenges faced by the national broadcaster over the years, many former staff can now be found in most new industry players—some taking up very senior positions within these organisations, most notably within the FM107 group, Independent and Vila Times. It is probably fair to say there are now private media companies in Vanuatu (not all) capable of offering quite comparable, if not better, working conditions for their staff just like any government department or private sector organisation.

It is worth noting also that a good number of journalists operate as stringers—some for more than one news organisations.

Part of the reason is because of the small market space, most companies may not be able to hire experienced journalists and/or workers, unless they agree to accept lower salaries. This is especially hard if they have been with the government-funded VBTC where staff might have been used to being paid other entitlements and benefits, on top of their basic salaries.

Since 2008, there has been a steady output of bright and upcoming young journalists from the AusAID-funded journalism program at the Vanuatu Institute of Technology, which means companies do have the luxury of selecting employees based on their specific needs and requirements. And they often do this while negotiating with the more experienced ones on how to use their talents. In many respects the type of content experienced journalists produce could have specific value and cannot be compared to those produced by their younger colleagues.

Opportunities for women in media

Working conditions for journalists—more pointedly for women, will continue to be a major challenge in the foreseeable future depending on the economy. Over the years the industry has witnessed a few high profile departures by well-qualified women journalists who left the industry for high paying PR jobs in the private, NGO, regional and the public sectors. However, it could be a source of encouragement that the deputy editor of the country's only daily newspaper is female; the head of the newsroom at VBTC is female and the Independent's deputy editor is also female. A few others hold senior positions within all media establishments as program managers and team leaders.

Ethical vs public service journalism

With a couple of exceptions, few recognise the need to pull readers and listeners in through effective use of public service journalism. Most seldom use it, albeit because of the lack of understanding in this area. The exception to this is the Vanuatu Daily Post, which has probably championed this area since its inception in the 1990s. Starting out more or less as a trade and business directory for cafés and restaurants in town, the paper has grown its own market and built a firm readership



VBTC journalist and TV news presenter Loic Teilemb presenting the evening news. *Credit: Kiery Manassah*

following that stands between 8,000 and 10,000 when considering the high rate of pass-on readership. The pass-on readership may be more.

In 2014 the company relaunched its partnership with the Port Vila Municipality by erecting public seats around Port Vila City. Editorial-wise they have published numerous special editions and lift-outs to boost readership by building advertorials around significant events and happenings in the country including Independence Day, restaurant guides and real estate property sales. There have been similar approaches by the FM107 group through their capitalisation of their main strength — commercial FM radio.

Otherwise most media companies are more familiar with ethical journalism, which evidently, is under immense pressure because of the rise of social media and other new media forms.



IFJ union workshop in Vanuatu 2014. *Credit: IFJ*

Recommendations:

- Most media companies need to adapt to an environment that has changed dramatically, with an exponential growth in the use of social media, in part due to a government decision in 2007 to break up its telecommunications monopoly;
- Media organisations need to improve their working relationships by strengthening the local media association to push for the public's right to know and be taken seriously by government authorities;
- More could be achieved if better working relations were established between the media and the political machinery and if journalists were more sensitive to local Kastoms. Importantly, it should be understood that respect for local Kastoms does not necessarily lead to suppression of information;
- Efforts to push for better working conditions would gain more traction if journalists and media workers were working together in a united front;
- Government efforts to separate the dual functions of VBTC should be continued to create a level playing field within the electronic media sector;
- The industry would benefit more if trained journalists remained long enough within the industry to mentor the younger generation of reporters coming out of the VIT journalism school;
- Increasing women's participation in the news production process might help bring more balance to the coverage of issues concerning women and girls and other marginalised groups;
- More can be done to encourage community media establishments to increase meaningful participation in the development process and empower citizens to make informed decisions.



Visit <http://www.ifj.org/regions/asia-pacific/> for more information.

The IFJ is a non-governmental, non-profit organisation that promotes coordinated international action to defend press freedom and social justice through the development of strong, free and independent trade unions of journalists. IFJ Asia-Pacific coordinates IFJ activities in the Asia-Pacific region. The IFJ works closely with the United Nations, particularly UNESCO, the United Nations OHCHR, WIPO, IPDC and the ILO, the International Committee of the Red Cross, the European Union, the Council for Europe and with a range of international trade union and freedom of expression organisations. The IFJ mandate covers both professional and industrial interests of journalists.

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