



PACMAS

Pacific Media Assistance Scheme

Cook Islands

STATE OF MEDIA &
COMMUNICATION
REPORT
2013



International
Development

Australian Broadcasting Corporation





Flooding in the Muri, Ngatangia area. Photo by PACMAS

The study was undertaken by Jo Tacchi and Heather Horst at RMIT University, Australia; Evangelia Papoutsaki at UNITEC, New Zealand; and Verena Thomas and Joys Eggins at the University of Goroka, Papua New Guinea. The research data for this report were collected by a team of researchers who conducted both desk-based research and interviews in person, by telephone and/or email while in the Cook Islands. Researchers for the Cook Islands included Naomi Strickland, Sandra Kailahi and Jessica Noske-Turner; Naomi Strickland completed interviews in the Cook Islands in November 2012. This report also benefits from the verification and survey documents completed by members of the Panel of Expertise from the Cook Islands.

Any opinions represented in this report are those of the authors and research participants and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian Government or the Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

The findings are presented in three sections:

1. Country Context
2. State of Media and Communications
 - Media and Communications Platforms
 - Media and Communications Landscape
3. Summary of Findings

Contents

Cook Islands Country Context.....	2
Key Insights	
Western Media Values versus the 'Pacific Way' of Journalism.....	2
Geography, Communication Flows and Blockages.....	2
Relationship with New Zealand.....	3
State of Media & Communications	
Media & Communications Platforms.....	3
Television.....	4
Radio.....	4
Newspaper & Newsletters.....	4
Online & Mobile Media.....	5
Other Communication Platforms.....	5
Media & Communications Landscape.....	5
Policy & Legislation.....	6
Media Systems.....	6
PACMAS Strategic Activity: Technicians.....	6
PACMAS Strategic Activity: Emergency Broadcast System.....	7
Capacity Building.....	8
PACMAS Strategic Activity: Media Associations.....	9
PACMAS Strategic Activity: TVETS.....	9
Content.....	9
PACMAS Strategic Activity: Climate Change.....	10
PACMAS Strategic Activity: NCDs.....	10
Cross-Cutting Issues: Disability, Gender & Youth.....	11
Summary of Findings.....	12
Policy & Legislation.....	12
Media Systems.....	12
Capacity Building.....	12
Content.....	12

Cook Islands Country Context

The Cook Islands is self-governing in free association with New Zealand, thus, Cook Islanders have New Zealand citizenship. The Cook Islands are made up of 12 inhabited islands, with important cultural, linguistic and social differences between the low-lying coral atoll, Northern Cook Islands, and the volcanically formed Southern Cook Islands. The main island, Rarotonga, is located in the southern group and is the hub for the majority of the media and communications activity. With a GDP of USD \$248 million¹, tourism is a major industry. The tourism sector permeates many policy areas including media and communications and disaster risk reduction.

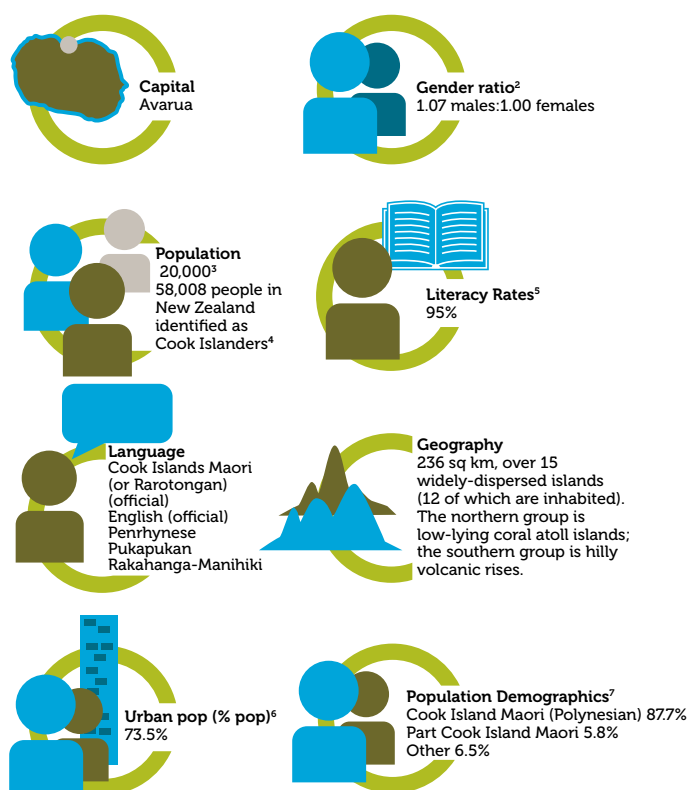
Key Insights

Western Media Values versus the 'Pacific Way' of Journalism

'I exercise freedom of expression. I don't need anyone's permission. As long as it's a right, [and] it's not made up.' (COOKS04)

The Cook Islands news culture stands out from other Pacific Island countries. The editor of the Cook Islands News argues publicly that the media culture in the Cook Islands is different from most descriptions of the 'Pacific Way' of journalism, and describes his newspaper's approach as ' [...] fiercely independent. We like to think of our journalism as robust and aggressive⁸'. Also unlike other media contexts in the Pacific, the media industry in the Cook Islands is almost exclusively commercial, with a total absence of government and church media. The media industry as a whole is proficient in lobbying on media and communications policy and legislation issues; for example, several strong rebuttals of a proposed media bill were published in newspapers, and Cook Islands journalists are proud to be the home of the first, and so far only, Pacific country with Freedom of Information legislation. Cook Islands journalists interviewed as part of this study expressed an awareness of their rights, a willingness to report on contentious issues and competitive zeal in pursuing their work.

Table a.1 Basic Country Data



Geography, Communication Flows and Blockages

There are some particular patterns of communication flows within the Cook Islands. The geography of the country has traditionally created a divide between the northern and southern groups of islands. Language can also be a barrier to inter-island communication. Rarotongan (Cook Islands Maori) and English are the official languages. All mainstream media, and most government communication, are in one or both of these languages.

- 2010 figures, World Statistics Pocket Book. Cook Islands. UN Data <http://data.un.org/CountryProfile.aspx?crName=Cook%20Islands> Assessed April 2013
- CIA World Factbook. Cook Islands. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2103.html> Accessed April 2013
- Figures for 2010, according to World Statistics Pocket Book. Cook Islands. UN Data <http://data.un.org/CountryProfile.aspx?crName=Cook%20Islands> Assessed April 2013
- Statistics New Zealand 2006. Pacific Profiles 2006. Cook Islander Maori People in New Zealand. <http://www.stats.govt.nz/Census/about-2006-census/pacific-profiles-2006/cook-island-maori-people-in-new-zealand.aspx>. Accessed April 2013
- CIA World Factbook. Cook Islands. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2103.html> Accessed April 2013
- World Statistics Pocket Book. Cook Islands. UN Data <http://data.un.org/CountryProfile.aspx?crName=Cook%20Islands> Assessed April 2013
- 2001 census, from CIA World Factbook. Cook Islands. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2103.html> Accessed April 2013
- Woods, J., 2010. Cook Islands: The Cook Islands News and the genesis of FOI. Pacific Journalism Review, 16(2), p. 15

The three other spoken languages, Penrhynese, Pukapukan and Rakahanga-Manihiki, are rarely used in official communication. Some interviewees also alluded to differences in opportunities for young people based on centre-periphery divides: *'Over the years we've tried to establish more formal linkages with outer islands but it's never really, you tend to start out something and it tends to fall down afterwards after a while. It does largely because of the people involved tend to disappear.'* (COOKS03)

Relationship with New Zealand

The Cook Islands' self-governing free association with New Zealand, which grants Cook Islanders New Zealand citizenship and access to government services such as health, has contributed to a strong migration movement towards New Zealand, with many people transiting between the two countries. At the last census (2006), there were 58,011 Cook Island Maori living in New Zealand. This has interesting consequences for the Cook Islands media industry. One of the key challenges is attracting and retaining staff, given that many seek education and employment opportunities further afield. Some radio stations are seeing opportunities as new technologies, such as satellite and radio streaming, make it possible to reach Cook Islanders in New Zealand: *'We want to send our signal out to the likes of New Zealand or Australia and appeal to all the Cook Islanders that live in these countries, and we haven't cracked that one yet but we are very close to how we can deliver there.'* (COOKS06) Cook Islands TV is hoping to broadcast online, depending on future infrastructure developments.



Figure 1: Documentary maker, camera person and editor, Julie Tariipo Shedden. Photo by Cook Islands Herald, 2013.

State of Media and Communications

Media and Communications Platforms

A striking aspect of the media and communications environment in the Cook Islands as compared to other Pacific Island countries is the overwhelming dominance of commercial media and the absence of government or church media. Elijah Communications, a subsidiary of the Pitt Media Group (PMG), a family-owned company, dominates much of the local media industry in the Cook Islands, owning the former public broadcasters Cook Islands TV (CITV), Radio Cook Islands and the Cook Islands Herald newspaper.

Television

Cook Islands TV (CITV) is the former public broadcaster, now owned by the Pitt Media Group, Elijah Communications. A second TV station is Aitutaki Television Ltd. Both TV stations broadcast a lot of international content, especially from the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. One of the few live locally produced programs is an MTV inspired show, which incorporates audience participation via SMS: *'[...] basically, it's a Cook Island version of MTV ... So we do music video requests, we take requests via texting and we do them live. And it's quite a lot of fun with quite a lot of prizes and that kind of thing. And it's really a gap over here on the island there's nothing of the sort, there's nothing produced live... and so we're able to deliver that, and it's just refreshing to know that there are some people out there who are willing to produce some live media.'* (COOKS06) The outer islands are home to seven community TV stations, locally funded and run, with some local content.

Table a.2 Media and Communications Platforms: Television

Platform	Organisation	Ownership/Funding	Language/Content	Sector
Television	Cook Islands TV (CITV) (former public broadcaster)	Owned by Elijah Communications Ltd	Religious programs, local news, international news, international drama, documentaries, broadcasts ABC content 11pm-5pm	Commercial
	Aitutaki Television Ltd	Owned by Mike Henry and Junior Maoate who have tourism interests	Some local news and videos, mostly ABC content	Commercial
	There are seven community television stations on the outer islands of Mangaia, Mauke, Mitiaro, Atiu, Manihiki, Pukapuka and Tongareva.	Owned by the Island Council on each island, and operated by public servants and volunteers. They are locally funded by a household broadcasting fee, and community notice fees	Local news, videos, pirated content from NZ and Australia	Community

Radio

There are five commercial radio stations. The only radio station with close to national coverage, including all outer islands, is Radio Cook Islands, the former public broadcaster now owned by Elijah Communications (a subsidiary of the Pitt Media Group).

Mervin Communications Ltd (Three Cook Islanders and one Tahitian) own Matariki FM. The only live show (on Matariki FM station) is the breakfast show. They have three transmitters around the island as well as broadcasting via the internet using VSAT (satellite). They are currently working towards a new IPTV system.

88 FM targets the youth market (20-35 year olds). It employs an average of 13 staff. 88 FM has plans to start digital streaming to access overseas listeners as well.

Table a. 3 Media and Communication Platforms: Radio

Platform	Organisation	Ownership/Funding	Language/Content	Sector
Radio	Radio Cook Islands - (former public broadcaster) (630AM)	Owned by Elijah Communications Ltd	80% Cook Islands Maori 20% English	Commercial
	KC FM		Plays music. Its license prohibits it from broadcasting political content. Broadcast range limited to the capital	Commercial
	Radio Enea Manu-community FM.	Owned by Mervin Communications Ltd.	Broadcasts talk-back, community affairs, music and school news	Community
	Matariki FM	Owned by Mervin Communications Ltd.	Polynesian music content	Commercial
	88FM	Owned by Radio Networks Ltd.	Modern music content, targets 20-35 age range	Commercial

Newspapers and Newsletters

Two companies compete in the newspaper market, Elijah Communications/Pitt Media Group's *Cook Islands Herald* newspaper, and the Cook Islands News. Over the past 30 years there have been significant changes in the languages used in newspapers, from being primarily in Rarotongan to increasingly being published in English.

Table a. 4 Media and Communication Platforms: Newspaper and Newsletters

Platform	Organisation	Ownership/Funding	Language/Content	Sector
Newspaper	Cook Islands News	The three shareholders are Wendy and Phil Evans, and Lawrence Bailey; privatised in 1989	English language daily (except Sundays). 2000 copies, readership mainly in Rarotonga	Commercial
	Cook Islands Herald	Owned by the Pitt Media Group	English Language Weekly. Up to 1600 copies.	Commercial
	Various tourism publications			Commercial

Online and Mobile Media

The internet is perceived to be expensive and slow in the Cook Islands, which limits the media companies' ability to integrate online communication platforms. For example, Elijah Communications indicated their internet bill almost doubled when they tried to upload a video to their Facebook page. That said, Cook Islands journalists rely heavily on the internet for reporting and background information. Research participants reported plans to upgrade Telecom's services to broadband through O3B (Other Three Billion), a new satellite-based broadband service that is expected to launch in late 2013. *'We have high hopes for broadband access in all of our 15 islands and that's nearly upon us. Next year [2013] we're looking forward to the O3B satellite service which is going to give us faster speed.'* (COOKS12)

Access and use of mobile phones has increased rapidly in recent years to approximately a 66 per cent penetration rate in 2011⁹. A recent Lowy Institute report suggests that use of social media and internet via mobile phones is set to increase since Telecom made changes to enable its pre-paid customers the option of data plans as of October 2012¹⁰.

Table a.5 Media and Communication Platforms: Online and Mobile Media

Platform	Organisation	Ownership/Funding	Language/Content	Sector
Online	Cook Islands News	Three shareholders: Wendy and Phil Evans, Lawrence Bailey	updated weekly www.cinews.co.ck	Commercial
	Cook Islands Herald	Owned by the Pitt Media Group	www.ciherald.co.ck	Commercial

Other Communication Platforms

Churches, like elsewhere in the Pacific, are an important communication network in the Cook Islands. One research participant suggested churches are the most effective way to communicate strategically and widely at grassroots levels: *'not many people ... read newspaper, only some afford 2 dollars and also the TV ...'* (COOKS05).

Village consultations are also considered by research participants to be an effective way to communicate messages, and are used by civil society.

Table a. 6 Media and Communication Platforms: Other Communication Platforms

Platform	Organisation	Language/Content	Sector
Other	Churches	Local language; church gatherings and events	Community
	Village Consultations	Local language; group meetings	Community

Media and Communications Landscape

This section of the report focuses on the Cook Islands' media and communication sector across four key areas: policy and legislation, media systems, capacity building and content. It provides an overview of the state of media across these four Pacific Media Assistance Scheme (PACMAS) program components, as explored through the six PACMAS strategic activities: Technicians, Pacific Emergency Broadcast Systems, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVETs, Media Associations), Climate Change and Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs).

9 Cave, D., 2012. Digital Islands; How the Pacific's ICT Revolution is transforming the region, Available at: <http://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/digital-islands-how-pacifics-ict-revolution-transforming-region>.

10 Cave, D., 2012. Digital Islands. p. 7

Media Systems includes a focus on Technicians and Pacific Emergency Broadcast Systems (PEBS); Capacity Building includes TVETs and Media Associations; and Content looks at Climate Change and NCDs. It provides an overview of media and communication across these areas and aligns them with PACMAS program components.

Policy and Legislation

The legislation relevant to communications in the Cook Islands includes the Broadcasting Act of 1989 and the amendments in 1997, the Official Information Act 2009, the Telecommunications Act of 1989 and the amendments of 1991, 1992, and 1997, and the Cable and Wireless plc (External Telecommunications Agreement) Termination and Compulsory Acquisition Act 1991.

The Prime Minister is responsible for broadcasting, telecommunications and information technology portfolios. The Broadcasting Act 1989 covers the provision of community and commercial broadcasting licenses.

Section 64 of the Constitution guarantees freedom of speech but there is no specific guarantee of freedom of the press. The Cook Islands was the first country in the Pacific region to introduce freedom of information (FOI) legislation (Official Information Act 2009), however, there are reported problems with its legal implementation¹¹. There were some reports of threats against a Cook Islands News journalist in 2010¹². The highly contentious Cook Island Media Bill was drafted in 2004, which intended to reintroduce a Public Service Broadcaster, establish the Media Commission to advise on policy, manage licensing through a Broadcasting Licensing Authority, and regulate standards via a Media Standards Council. Local media were vocal in their opposition and saw the draft bill as an attempt at media control.

The Cook Islands News (newspaper) has its own Code of Ethics (pinned on the wall) while the Pitt Media Group/Elijah Communications (which owns Cook Islands Radio, CITV and the Cook Islands Herald) does not have a written code of ethics.

There are no local content quotas specified in law. The Broadcasting Act of 1989 included statements that a government appointed Program Advisory Committee would produce guidelines relating to offensive material, cultural and educational content, local content and classifications. The Media Bill proposed in 2004 included content guidelines (not quotas) relating to public morality, decency, privacy, the right to correction, and the need for accuracy and balance.

The Telecommunications Act of 1989 (amended in 1992) is tailored for Telecom Cook Islands Limited (TCI) as the sole provider of telecoms services. The government planned reforms in 2010 including opening the market up to competition. No new acts or amendments have been passed yet.

Media Systems

Media systems as used in this study take into consideration technical skills, support and infrastructure. It also incorporates emergency broadcast systems and experience from past disasters and crises in the Cook Islands.

PACMAS Strategic Activities: Technicians

'Well, my guys said to me, why would we need a procurement manager because we've got a very good relationship with this supplier and that supplier, and I know them well and I've been working with them for 20 years? They told us that they're giving us the best price! Well, we get this procurement manager on and within about a month, they suddenly find the prices have come down about 20 per cent or 10 per cent, in one case 50 per cent, you know, that was exceptional. And so my technicians shake their heads saying, well, I think we may have been ripped-off over the years. And I think that's what the Pacific puts up with.'
(COOKS01)

Although technicians reported that they are not involved in formal technical support networks, they are part of a number of informal networks. The National ICT Policy¹³ called for the formation of an ICT committee. Meetings

11 Woods, J., 2010. Cook Islands: The Cook Islands News and the genesis of FOI. Pacific Journalism Review, 16(2), p18

12 Perrottet, A. & Robie, D., 2011. Pacific Media Freedom 2011 : A status report. Pacific Journalism Review, 17(2), pp.148–186. http://www.pjreview.info/sites/default/files/articles/pdfs/PJR17_2_pacific_media_freedom2011.pdf Accessed April 2013

13 Cook Islands Government. 2010. National ICT Policy 2010. http://www.pmooffice.gov.ck/images/opm/ict_policy2010.pdf Accessed April 2013

have included representatives from the communications sector, but meetings are said to only be held on an ad hoc basis. Some technicians are involved in the Internet Society that has a Pacific Islands Chapter, and previously technicians belonged to the Pacific Islands Telecommunications Association (PITA). Elijah Communications also has an arrangement locally through Telecom to help with technical issues, as they hire their transmission network through Telecom. There is also a strong emphasis on problem solving among colleagues, using personal networks to seek help and advice: *'We'll be reliant on friends from other institutions, say such as Fiji, New Zealand. ... If we know a good contact in New Zealand for TVNZ or Fiji TV or, you know, Radio Fiji or something like that, or if just through the Pacific news network... if we can access somebody, that's about it.'* (COOKS03). At this stage, the support offered by the Cook Islands Media Association is reported to not be relevant for technicians.

One interviewee describes some successes they have had by hiring a procurement management company in the US that substantially reduced the cost of supplies, indicating that using individual suppliers in the Pacific is an ineffective mechanism. PITA previously attempted to organise a Pacific collective with a similar vision of bulk buying, but found that coordinating all the groups proved too difficult to organise.

There are some upgrades to infrastructure expected in the coming years. In particular, Telecom plans to upgrade its networks. Elijah Communications is also planning to purchase some of the equipment sold by Telecom as it upgrades. As they note, *'over recent years, Telecom Cook Islands has been shedding those transmitters to us so we've been buying them so we would end up owning most of the infrastructure ... that has taken up a lot of money. So, in terms of progressing and developing into another level like fibre optics, cable, microwave broadcasting it is way, way down, many years down the track.'* (COOKS03). Elijah Communications also have a comprehensive maintenance strategy involving replacing equipment every six months and purchasing a spare: *'So what we do is our purchasing strategy, we buy two of everything ... If one breaks down we keep it as a spare.'* (COOKS07)

A private station is planning to build a new tower, another plans to go digital, indicating the importance of digital technology for expanding a business regionally: *'Digital is the way forward so that's different ... a platform that we want, streaming globally ... streaming locally ... we can manage our cost that way. But streaming globally is something that we still need to, at least, understand a little bit better, and that will allow us to be in regional business ...'* (COOKS06)

PACMAS Strategic Activities: Emergency Broadcast System

Traditionally, cyclones are the primary risk in the Cook Islands, and much of the disaster preparedness promotion and communication is timed around cyclone season. However, since the tsunami hit Samoa in 2009, the Cook Islands has integrated tsunami preparedness into their discussions and planning.

The Cook Island's National Disaster Management Act was drafted in 2007. Although this draft act replaces the Hurricane Safety Act 1973, some interviewees expressed concern that this Act has not yet been formally passed: *'I mean a lot of these things need to be formalised because the current system doesn't work, and you know, you get some people [saying] this is the way that it was always done ... you see we are trying to change this...'* (COOKS12). There was a major process of reviewing disaster plans following the tsunami in Samoa, but there are still some concerns about whether the information and plans are up-to-date. Most recently, in 2012, it was made mandatory for all government departments to have an emergency disaster plan.

The Emergency Management Agency runs training workshops twice a year for government officials, but finds progress difficult and attendance inconsistent.

The key stakeholders for the national response in a disaster include the Police Commissioner, the Media Office, the Minister of Works, and the Red Cross. This group makes decisions about the dissemination of information.

There is currently no communication plan for disasters, although one is reported to be in progress. Radio is identified as the preferred and most reliable form of communication in a disaster, but there does appear to be significant confusion about the role of radio stations in emergencies. The Emergency Management Unit does not have any formal arrangement with Telecom or commercial media to provide extra services during a disaster, although one private radio station says it is one of its licence obligations to make the station available during emergencies. Another station claims they are the national station for emergency broadcasting and that they are required to broadcast 24 hours a day during emergencies. Since the Cook Islands do not have a public service or government broadcaster, it is not clear which station would take on the role as an emergency broadcaster.

There are also concerns about the speed and reach of information dissemination via the radio. One interviewee is worried about the time it takes for information to be passed on to the broadcasters: *'[...] only frustrating thing in times of emergency is the lack of information or on-time information coming from Prime Minister or the Police Commissioner. Really, the Police Commissioner. But he needs to get a sign-off from the Prime (Minister).'*' (COOKS04)

Limited hours of transmission are noted as being a potential problem, given that the radio station with most reach throughout all islands does not broadcast 24 hours a day. Although the radio station would likely switch to 24 hour broadcasting in the event of a potential disaster, if an early warning needed to go out during the night it could lead to delays.

There are 13 early warning sirens around Rarotonga but no mention of early warning systems on the outer islands. Every island has a satellite phone for emergencies.

Telecom Cook Islands has an emergency plan but it is geared towards cyclones more than other types of disaster. Telecom can send out texts during an emergency but not all at once because that will crash the system.

For communications within Telecom the company has HF radios and satellite phone connections to outer islands, as well as a new system enabling emergency teams to dial a certain code and be connected to the rest of the team. *'The pre-coded 2550 numbers pick up the phone, dial the numbers and immediately you got a conference going on, and say "ok guys, time to start work, the cyclone bearing down on us will be here in 10 hours". This is what we got to do and you know we can assist with that technology further. The new switch actually makes it a lot simpler.'* (COOKS01)

The Hyogo National Progress Report for the Cook Islands finds that the early warning systems are heavily dependent on internet and telephone communications, which are vulnerable in disasters as Telecom's main office is close to the shoreline¹⁴. Telecom says it has an arrangement with PITA for back-up communications.

Interviewees report that radio is used occasionally for community awareness of disaster preparedness. The Red Cross runs an awareness campaign during the 'white' phase, which is April to October, using radio, TV and newspapers. For outer islands, face-to-face meetings are preferred.

Capacity Building

'We've sent the odd journo off to workshops but otherwise it's each to his own. Sadly, there's no organised source or on-tap source but we're close enough to where, you know, we're slightly better off than most other Pacific countries in that ... we have this New Zealand citizenship opportunity through the passport arrangement. Cook Islanders have strong family ties in New Zealand and we can always get on the plane.' (COOKS12)

Capacity building includes an understanding of the level of qualifications among existing media and communication practitioners, training and capacity building support and organisations providing such support. It also takes into consideration media associations and TVETs in the Cook Islands.

Capacity building was a major issue for most of the media representatives interviewed for this study. Specifically, many organisations struggle with staff retention. Funding is a barrier for all types of media staff to access training (including technicians), and media companies do not receive any assistance from the government for training.

One area of some success has been the media program in Form Six at Tereora Collage. Three of the 18 students who took the media program in 2012 are now working in the media in some capacity. Cook Island News is working with Tereora College to recruit a new cadet in 2013, and both the Cook Islands News and the Pitt Media Group newspaper offer cadetships (similar to work experience) during holidays and after school for students. One former Tereora College student went on to do a media course at AUT in Auckland. A challenge for the college is access to equipment: *'The fact is ... we have two video cameras and a TV and that was us.'* (COOKS10)

14 Prevention Web. 2009. Cook Islands: National progress report on the implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action (2009-2011) http://www.preventionweb.net/files/20594_cok_NationalHFAprogress_2009-11.pdf Accessed April 2013

The Pitt Media Group has conducted training in radio news and TV production. There was an effort made towards setting up the Cook Islands Film and Television School but the school closed after one training course. The Pitt Media Group/Elijah Communications offer holiday internships in their newspapers. They also report trying to foster media experience among students from outer islands: *'We've taken outer islands students from Atiu and also Mangaia. The Atiu islands media is very limited. I think they try to do their best with what they've got ... over the years we've tried to establish more formal linkages with outer islands but ... it tends to fall down ... after a while.'* (COOKS3)

For current staff, there are limited opportunities for overseas training although it seems that the special connection with New Zealand partly addresses this issue. Despite some innovative in-country training approaches, the number of journalists with formal qualifications remains low, estimated by research participants as 10 to 30 per cent. Similarly, there are very few qualified technicians in the Cook Islands. One person interviewed says: *'I think it will be difficult to find anyone here in Rarotonga that has any kind of paper that says I'm qualified and doing transmitters, for example.'* (COOKS06)

Most technical support and capacity building occurs in-house through mentoring by senior staff. Self-teaching and researching solutions online is identified as an important source of information, while other technicians cited the equipment manufacturer as a source of training and advice. One private radio station is able to access training through the ABC's Radio Australia.

Telecom Cook Islands reports that they have a substantial training budget but find that they do not always use it because they cannot find appropriate courses.

PACMAS Strategic Activities: Media Associations

Media associations in the Cook Islands have a complicated history, with several groups forming and being abandoned by different sections of the media over the past 20 years. There were attempts to resurrect the Cook Islands Media Association in 2011 but this group is currently not active: *'There's supposed to be one. They keep trying to resurrect it, it dies, they resurrect it, it dies - I just never bothered to go.'* (COOKS07)

Some interviewees suggest that competition in such a small media industry makes the co-operation required in a media association unviable. Others are concerned about issues of transparency, especially when media professionals also work for the government: *'I consider that to be a massive conflict. We struggle to get co-operation, we struggle to get transparency and disclosure from the cabinet of this country, and while, so long as a media practitioner has got a foot in both camps, he can't do justice to the cause of pushing for openness and transparency. So that little outfit, Cook Islands Media Association, is stalemated for now.'* (COOKS12)

There is currently no national code of ethics for the Cook Islands, despite a draft having been drawn up in the past: *'There is and there isn't kind of thing [...] I gather a draft was perhaps looked at but this is never formally adopted by the industry yet.'* (COOKS03)

Some local media organisations are part of PINA, which was held in the Cook Islands in 2011. The Editor of the Cook Islands News, John Woods, is one of the founding members of the Pacific media Association (PasiMA).

PACMAS Strategic Activities: TVETs

There is no TVET in the Cook Islands but, as mentioned above, Tereora College runs a media program as part of its curriculum. Most TVET training is done in New Zealand or elsewhere overseas.

Content

Media content focuses on communication platforms and programs and ways to address issues related to climate change and NCDs. Climate change and NCDs are two strategic activities in the PACMAS program.

PACMAS Strategic Activities: Climate Change

There are no national policies on climate change, however, a communication plan¹⁵ was identified which outlined strategies for both raising awareness and raising the profile of the Plan for Adaptation for Climate Change (PACC) pilot programs.

The Cook Islands has a dedicated climate change unit under the direction of the Prime Minister's Office, although there are conflicting reports about how effective this unit is.

The Environment Office has held media training in the past but no other climate change communication training opportunities were identified.

The Pitt Media Group/Elijah Communications have made various programs about climate change, and climate change is said to be one of their *'pet issues'* (COOKS03).

Civil society groups have worked with TV and radio to promote initiatives such as recycling among young people. For example, some groups work with the Cook Islands Sport and National Olympic Committee (CISNOC). As COOKS05 describes, *'So they come out on the TV and ads (advertisements) you know like maybe one of these boys is very good at rugby team or netball. So they use our young people to be the hero on the ad to be the champion.'*

The primary challenge identified with coverage of climate change issues was the difficulty in translating technical terminology into understandable Cook Islands language terms.

PACMAS Strategic Activities: NCDs

The Cook Islands has high rates of NCDs risk. Key issues include high rates of alcohol use (among men and, unusually for the Pacific, women), low fresh fruit and vegetable intake, low rates of physical activity, and obesity¹⁶. The diseases prevalent in the Cook Islands are diabetes, high cholesterol, and hypertension. The Ministry of Health estimates that half of all annual deaths in the country are due to NCDs. Of particular concern is the rise in obesity in children: *'We are seeing more and more of that. And the main cause for that is the junk food that they sell in the tuck shop at school.'* (COOKS02)

The Ministry of Health runs campaigns and regularly provides information on health issues and NCDs in different media outlets using a combination of paid and unpaid reporting: *'They are very expensive and we have a small budget for promotional work. But they have been very helpful.'* (COOKS02)

The media outlets also describe ongoing engagement with NCD issues and regular coverage. The Pitt Media Group/Elijah Communications say they regularly produce programs on NCDs and have even done the odd documentary; *'As far as community awareness of NCD is concerned, we do most of that. Not just one person. You know, it's the whole team. One goes to the radio, one goes with the group to see another group and talk about it.'* (COOKS07). Matariki FM sets aside an hour a week to delve into health issues, including NCDs.

The most recent opportunity research participants reported, for training on coverage of NCD issues, was a PACMAS funded workshop in Samoa in 2012.

15 Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme. 2011. Cook Islands Communication Plan for Adaptation for Climate Change. http://www.sprep.org/attachments/Climate_Change/Cook_Islands_Communications_Plan.pdf Accessed April 2013

16 Secretariat of the Pacific Community. 2010. NCD Statistics for the Pacific Islands Countries and Territories, Healthy Pacific Lifestyle Section, Public Health Division, Secretariat of the Pacific Community http://www.spc.int/hpl/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_download&gid=67 Accessed April 2013

Cross-Cutting Issues: Disability, Gender and Youth

The cross-cutting issues explore how gender, youth and disability engage with and are represented within the media and communication environment in the Cook Islands.

According to survey respondents, all development themes have been covered by the media in the past 12 months, including gender, health, environment, disability and youth issues. However, in our interviews disability was not mentioned as a prominent issue, or one covered by the media¹⁷.

One of the challenges in the Cook Islands is the dominance of men in national politics. As one interviewee describes: *'And it's why we have this situation in our parliament where there are only two women members ... It's why just about all the island councils and all the old school entities of power are dominated by men who have inherited or been inducted into these roles because of who they are and what they are, not because of their skills or qualification.'* (COOKS12).

Within the media industry, however, women outnumber men. As one interviewee noted, the higher representation of women in the media does not mean that gender issues are addressed: *'I think it's partly because when you actually look at the composition in the media, there's actually a lot of women in there, that tends to mask a lot of gender concerns about or why there are more women or there are more women already, so we don't need to talk about it and the women are in high level positions as well.'* (COOKS03) Yet, gender division and preferences feature in media learning and practice, are demonstrated through the media production course at Tereora College: *'The male students have come through ... very good in filming, in the technical bit but ... when it comes to analysing text, things like that, then the female students definitely seem to respond'* (COOKS10). As with other countries in the Pacific, broadcast and IT technicians were predominately male.

For youth there are opportunities for taking the media course at Tereora College; however, one of the main challenges identified was that of training young people and keeping them in the industry on the island.



Figure 2: Women representatives at the Cook Islands National Council of Women Conference at Takuvaine, Rarotonga. Photo by Cook Islands National Council of Women, 2012

17 This does not mean disability does not exist as a prominent issue, but does reflect the observations of those who took part in this research, who work in key media and other relevant organisations, as detailed in other parts of the report.

Summary of Findings

The media and communication environment in the Cook Islands is unique in the context of the Pacific Region. The main findings across the four areas of policy and legislation, media systems, capacity building and content are summarised below:

Policy and Legislation

- The Prime Minister is responsible for broadcasting and telecommunication portfolios.
- The Broadcasting Act of 1989 covers the provision of commercial and community broadcast licences.
- Freedom of expression is guaranteed in the constitution.
- The Cook Islands is the first country to pass FOI legislation in the Pacific.
- The Telecommunications Act of 1989 is tailored for Telecom Cook Islands.

Media Systems

- Technicians are not formally connected to any particular media association or support network, but often call on people in their own personal and professional networks.
- Several companies have plans to upgrade network infrastructure (Telecom, private radio station).
- There are reportedly plans to upgrade to broadband internet and to enable connections across all islands. This project is a major priority for most of the people interviewed.
- There is currently no formal emergency communication plan for broadcasters, but radio broadcasters have some basic awareness of the role of radio in an emergency.

Capacity Building

- There are some innovative programs in Cook Islands, including a media studies course for Form 6 students at the local Tereora College. Many media outlets offer internships/cadetships to graduates.
- All media and communications organisations in the Cook Islands find that access to funding limits training opportunities, with the exception of Telecom, which has a budget but no appropriate opportunities.
- The national media association, Cook Islands Media Association, is not fully functional despite numerous efforts to revive it.
- Very few media professionals have tertiary qualifications.

Content

- The largest media company, Elijah Communications, has a particular interest in climate change issues.
- The primary challenge in reporting on climate change is translating technical terms into local languages.
- The Ministry of Health makes strategic and regular use of media in its campaigns and health promotions.
- Media outlets report covering NCD issues.



Research Partners





Further information:
<http://www.pacmas.org/>
<http://www.abcinternationaldevelopment.net.au/>