



Case study: 2011 MDI Social Journalism Awards

From PNG to Australia and back: attachment experiences of NBC journalists at the ABC

Augustine Kinna and Kevin Ruman believe in the power of media to promote dialogue and debate and to affect positive changes to the communities. As radio journalists of the National Broadcasting Corporation of Papua New Guinea (NBC), they aspire to report more effectively on various issues faced by the people of Papua New Guinea (PNG). Such issues range from combating HIV and AIDS and malaria, alleviating gender-based violence to addressing poor infrastructure and services, propelling the incorporation of development agenda in journalism training (AusAID, 2009; McManus and Papoutsaki, 2004).

From October to December 2011, Augustine and Kevin participated in the Media for Development Initiatives (MDI) Social Journalism Awards, a six-week attachment program at the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC). The program contributes to building the capacity of the NBC by strengthening the knowledge and skills of the journalists to produce quality media content on development issues. During the placement, the attachés work with ABC journalists to ABC editorial standards and engage in researching, reporting and producing programs, news and current affairs.

The attachés participated in a range of activities including orientation and software training to familiarise themselves with the ABC facilities and work practices. They also produced media content for Radio Australia programs such as Pacific Beat and Pacific Morning as well as vox pop content, developing their flow programming skills. In addition, they observed and participated in two outside broadcasts (OB). Aside from radio, they also received special training on how to use television (TV) camera and create visual news. The topics they covered ranged from maternal health, mental health, HIV and AIDS, domestic violence, women in politics, education for children, scholarships, foreign aid and urban youth. They also covered events such as the visit of Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip to Melbourne, Australia, and World AIDS Day, as well as local news in the Pacific. In total, Augustine produced 516 minutes (8.6 hrs) and Kevin produced 608 minutes (10.1 hrs) worth of media outputs.

This case study traces the changes in the attachés' knowledge and skills of media content production. It looks at the activities they participated in, the lessons learnt, the challenges faced and the opportunities and limitations encountered in applying the lessons upon their return to PNG.



NOTE: The MDI Social Journalism Awards is part of the Media for Development Initiative (MDI), a tripartite arrangement between the NBC, the ABC and the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID). It provides assistance for capacity building within NBC through ABC International Development and is supported financially by AusAID.

Augustine Kinna

Augustine was born and raised in the Autonomous Region of Bougainville. He left his hometown when he went to Madang to complete a Diploma in Journalism at Divine Word University. Shortly after graduating, he returned to Bougainville to work for the Post Courier before moving on to work for The National for two years. During this time, he turned his sights to radio broadcast and secured a position at the NBC Bougainville office. Augustine first heard about the attachment opportunity when he saw a memo pinned on the noticeboard in the office.

"When I got the news that I was accepted for the attachment training, I was so happy and nervous at the same time. I wondered what it will be like. I was really excited."

During the placement, Augustine produced media content for Radio Australia programs such as Pacific Beat and Pacific Morning as well as vox pop content, and he observed and participated in two outside broadcasts (OBs). Through these activities, he developed a range of skills from script writing, editing and presentation to technical skills such as sound control techniques.

For Augustine, one of the most significant lessons from the attachment was gaining more knowledge and skills in flow programming. In 2008, the NBC introduced flow programming to provide greater diversity in content for the listeners. Compared to the previous block programming, flow programming is continuous and allows listeners to participate in discussions and debates on radio programs. He sees the potential of flow programming in increasing community engagement by encouraging the audiences to take an interest in social issues and have their voices heard.

"There are music, flows, and talents coming to talk about different issues covering gender, education, health, politics and business. We hear stories from ordinary people in the village. Everyone has a story to tell."

However, due to its recent introduction, there is limited expertise in PNG on flow programming. For Augustine, there is an opportunity to impart the skills he gained to his colleagues in NBC such as how to write the script and how to incorporate talents in a way that better engages the audience.

"Flow programming is still quite new (in NBC). Some of the staff do not really understand how it should go. There were trainings delivered but they do not fully utilise what they learned in implementing that flow programming. The training here that I gained opened my eyes and mind and how I can help the other staff in improving flow programming, how to set up script, and linking it with talents, and audio that we have to make it interesting for our listeners."

Aside from flow programming skills, Augustine found it

useful to participate in the technical process of setting up and facilitating the OBs. In PNG, there is special focus on OBs because of its ability to bridge the gap between urban and rural populations. It can serve as an effective means of providing information to PNG's predominantly rural populations on topics related to gender, health, education and other development issues. According to Augustine, there is a need for presenters to be multi-skilled.

"Sometimes we don't have technical people to be with us, so we as presenters, having a bit of knowledge about the technical side (is crucial). We can do the technical (side) and present at the same time. Just to be multi-skilled. In media, you have to be multi-skilled."



Setting up an OB requires a range of technical knowledge and skills. Augustine found the sound control techniques to be particularly instructive.

"I was really impressed by the sound and the quality of audio. It was a learning process for me because not much of this I see back at home."

It was also the basic set up skills, such as connecting audio and transmission equipment and ensuring sound quality, which he perceived as valuable and useful to learn.

"It would be handy (to have these) technical skills. Just the basic skills of how to set up outside, how to connect wires, how to mix the sounds to get a good sound and audio. Back in PNG, anything can happen."

Six months after returning to Bougainville, Augustine and his team are reaping the benefits of the new knowledge and skills gained despite the unstable environment and limited infrastructure.

"A few months ago, a lightning struck and the studio facilities have been down. Thanks to the technicians or the 'bush mechanics', we are still able to broadcast the programs. Today, despite this difficulty, the skills I gained and passed on to my juniors are being applied. They include the script writing, editing and presenting skills, and the basic technical skills to assist our 'bush mechanics'."

Other transferable skills he was able to share with his colleagues at NBC included the flow programming skills including how to set appropriate time frames and link the flows.

"The kind of skills I'm passing on are little tips like how it goes for 5-10 minutes, how to link up the flows. I had to give them some of the tips to help them through on the program flow."

Moreover, Augustine expressed a desire to establish a new current affairs program in PNG. It would include a capacity-building component that enables journalists to take the Executive Producer roles on rotation and provide and receive peer-to-peer feedback on presentation techniques.

"Having come back I thought of introducing a local current affairs program, having a local focus. I would like that there be a (different) Executive Producer for each day. We could share the experience and share with them, the technical side of it, the presentation. I (would) keep working on it with them until they are confident."

Kevin Ruman

When Kevin was a child, his dream was to become a doctor, prime minister or radio journalist. After finishing high school, he entered the media industry as a radio presenter on the FM 100 Sunday evening program. He worked there for two years, and then moved on to FM Morro Bay. In 2008, his dream came true when he secured a position as a radio journalist at the NBC Port Moresby office.

Kevin is interested in a range of social issues faced by the PNG society including employment, crime, governance, HIV and AIDS and domestic violence. In his view, journalists and the media can play a crucial role in tackling them.

"As a journalist, I can make the cries of the people known. Under the convention on human rights, every boy and girl must have access to education; access to clean water. If their rights are abused, I can report on what is happening so that the government can be held responsible for the actions."

One of the highlights of the attachment for Kevin was being exposed to technologies and technical expertise at the ABC and observing its potential impact on improving the overall productivity and quality of content at the NBC.

For example, in the first two weeks of placement, Kevin familiarised himself with the ABC's editing software, namely Netia and iNews. Netia is the digital audio automation software that enables recording and editing of audio clips. iNews is the visual storytelling software that enables journalistic script writing and editing. He found the software easy to use and observed its capacity to connect and synchronise the programs between the main stations and the provincial stations.

"The ABC uses Netia software to record, edit and package its stories. It is the most user-friendly software compared to the Adobe edition currently been used by the NBC. The beauty

about Netia is, it can be programmed and networked, connecting other provincial stations to the headquarters."

Aside from the editing software skills, Kevin received a one-day TV camera training. He learnt how to create news stories in audiovisual format including framing and taking shots. He recognised the potential television programs can have in educating and promoting debate about issues of national importance in PNG, such as domestic violence.

"We have been very much into television. It was a mind opener for me in terms of trying to understand how the camera works and some of its functions and how you can make a documentary or purpose out of the camera. It would be very useful if I am given the opportunity to come up with a TV documentary and educate people about domestic violence."

During his participation in OBs and flow programming, he learnt the positive impact that effective scheduling and time keeping could have on content quality. When reflecting on the OB in Bendigo, Kevin associated a successful OB with the one where items are going on air as scheduled. He highlighted a problem in PNG where set up delays due to technical difficulties can even lead to OBs going off-air.

"Back in PNG when there is an outside broadcast obviously there is going to be a technical problem. When I was in Bendigo I realised that everything just came on time. In PNG the lateness in setting up an outside broadcast is a factor contributing to sometimes going off air."

Time keeping is equally important when interacting with the listeners while on air. Through observing how the presenters at the ABC interact with the listeners, Kevin picked up some facilitation techniques to ensure the story flows.

"One skill I realised which has really improved is how to interact with the listeners. We tend to allow the listeners to (dominate the flow) even though we are the facilitators of the story. [Now] when I go on air, I ensure the stories flow."

While Kevin acquired valuable knowledge and skills, the attachment was not without challenges. He noted the challenge he faced in balancing the list of deliverables assigned by the MDI with other assigned tasks at the ABC. Often the workload caused stress, hindering the attachés' ability to learn.

"If we were given less deliverables that could be very, very good. For example, we were going around trying to learn how television works but at the back of my mind we are worried about our stories, our deliverables. We realised that it is causing a lot of stress on us."

Completing the deliverables was difficult, not only because of the workload but also because they had limited access to basic equipment such as computers and telephones.

"There were no computers for us to use and no workstation. But we still made it through. All this time we were using someone else's computer. If people come back to it, we need to look for another computer that is available."

Upon return to PNG, Kevin found that the skills he gained were not directly applicable at the NBC.

"I learnt how to use Netia and iNews but I cannot utilise the skills since we don't have those technologies at the NBC. Here, we work with limited resources and manpower."

However, he has been able to apply and pass on

some transferrable skills such as techniques to engage with audiences and time management skills. Moreover, he recognised that it takes time to instil new work practices.

"I have been trying to pass on some skills such as facilitation techniques and practices such as punctual editorial meetings and time management. Of course, it won't be overnight. It takes time."

The attachment experiences have led Kevin to support more training and attachment opportunities, particularly for young, entry-level journalists.

"I want to see more young journalists who are early in their careers to get the opportunity to do attachment and build on their journalistic knowledge and skills, as well as structured work ethic and positive work attitude. We need to build new leaders."



References

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