

My encounter with ABC radio (Review Submission) by Maureen Mopio

My first encounter with a ‘box with the dial’ was when I was a young girl. My father would sit us around this magic box with my brothers, sisters, mum, “house boi” babysitter, security guards and their families every night at 6pm to listen to what’s happening in Australia.

Dad was interested in talks of self-government coming up in PNG in 1973, and we, the family, were “encouraged” or “forced” to listen to ABC Radio (“Letio 9pa) or Radio Australia (“Letio Australea”) picked up on the short wave in Kikori in the remote Gulf province.

During one of my school holidays, I sat in the middle of my village (Aivea) on my mat, with about 200 or so cheering children, women, and men, listening to Martin Beni, a boxer, and son of Waima, fight “Andy” of Australia. One couldn’t describe the feelings when Martin lost. This was one of many broadcasts. The villages of Waima and Aivea are in the Kairuku Electorate, Central Province, PNG.

So, Radio ABC was not an outsider in our household, it was a family institution.

My Experience with *the box with the dial*

Politics and sports were our main conversations. Dad eventually went on to become a politician, but I wanted to *be* the voice coming out of the magical box. Eventually, I became one of the first two women to study Communication Arts in Divine Word Institute (DWI) Madang, which I proudly achieved in 1982.

My journey with the magical box and its dial continued when I was trained on BBC modules by the director of Kamaliki’s Catholic Radio Communication Institute in Goroka Eastern Highlands Province, who was from Eastbourne England, and who worked in collaboration with DWI in Madang.

After a school excursion in 1978 to ABC Radio in down town Port Moresby, during year ten at OLSH High School, I realised that ABC had misreported, or maybe under reported religious content and that religious coverage at ABC was minimal. I wondered why however, at that time, I believed that it was through lack of awareness.

I am now aware of issues of sensitivity, presenting cultural practices in positive ways and the principles of intellectual property rights. I consider that if these attitudes were applied to reporting in Pacific cultures it would bring understanding and authenticity to the programs.

I subsequently decided to pursue a career with NBC (National Broadcasting Commission) to impart knowledge, news and views, and to raise awareness.

Being the *voice in the box*

Being the *voice in the box* took me to villages to interview leaders, elders and chiefs, leaders in local, state and national governments, Prime Ministers; I even covered Nuncio Pope John Paul’s visit to PNG in 1984. But most of all I enjoyed working with women.

Education is vital.

It is not sufficient to make Australian media staff aware of our cultures. It is also necessary to train competent Pacific presenters. ABC should do this as part of their presence in the Pacific. ABC could use the Pacific labour scheme under the current government’s initiative of Pacific Partnerships to educate, train and upskill media workers from the Pacific. For example, a broadcaster trained by

ABC might be less likely to be banned from reporting in their own country. Such a person would have inside knowledge that gives them better access to covering news, events and happenings on their home island. Education exchanges should be established in collaboration with universities and technical institutions in PNG and the Pacific region.

Share programs for better cross-cultural understanding

Radio programmes could be shared with the Community Broadcasting Association of Australia because there is a large Pacific listening audience in Australia. Also, the children of the many Pacific islander listeners and programme presenters who volunteer or work at community radio stations may one day identify with or wish to work for ABC. This will help sustain the international recognition and listening audience of the ABC, removing racial bias and sensationalised reporting. Consistent training and collaboration with stakeholders would ensure that copyright would be properly acknowledged at all levels of the media.

I believe there should be a cross pollination of workers based in Australia and elsewhere in the Pacific, regardless of their heritage, as long as they are culturally sensitive and ethically in tune with local knowledge or topics. If stories are presented in a fair, clear, balanced, and ethical manner, censorship of media in the Pacific should be minimised.

I suggest a manual for reporting in the Pacific be produced by an Independent body made up of Pacific community leaders together with universities and educational organisations to teach how to report in the Pacific in a culturally sensitive way. For example, presenting taboo subjects to Pacific listenership can lead to alienation. Subtly produced programmes can raise awareness without alienating.

The role of social media

Although it may be generally considered urbanised, Facebook plays a major role in spreading information and news. good or bad, and it can cause problems if people don't fully understand the implications of what they see or read.

At a grassroots level, social media currently plays a pivotal role in dissemination of information. It is used by candidates in election campaigns, by councils wishing to advise of road closures, meetings, etc. and to discuss public accountability or safety issues. Political discussions such as the uncertainties surrounding the referendum in Bougainville next year (2019), are regular features of Facebook discussions. Inaccurate information can actually become life-threatening in a society where intermarriage between cultural groups has occurred. It can increase fears and concerns. To a point where they become out of control. ABC shortwave information programs should be available through Facebook pages to ensure that balanced information is available to citizens.

I see a role for ABC shortwave in this significant political development in the Pacific, taking into consideration the points I have mentioned above. It must be remembered that Bougainville is a matrilineal society and that when information is shared, women fill the roles as leaders, elders and chiefs.

Bougainvilleans, at home, or overseas, need information on the referendum, the implications of voting, and need to be involved in dialogue to increase awareness. The Brisbane Bougainville community has been appointed as the body to raise awareness amongst PNG and Bougainvillian citizens living in Brisbane. I believe ABC shortwave radio could be used to transmit information during this period of political, economic and social change, and could also link with New Dawn Radio on Bougainville as part of the exchange policy mentioned above.

Volunteering

I volunteer at Ethnic Community Radio 4EB, which has language broadcasts from over 50 language groups including Pacific communities of the Cook Islands, Samoa, Tonga, Kiribati, Niue, Tuvalu, Tokelau, PNG (in English) Multicultural (in English), Fiji, Maori and others, broadcasting over the FM band and digital. These programmes are possible because of an excellent volunteer service but are underfunded and underutilised. They produce quality programmes that are usually used once only.

Funding for community broadcast comes from the Community Broadcasting Foundation (CBF) but is insufficient forcing volunteer members to raise funds for critical supplies and conduct membership drives to remain on air. Collaboration with ABC shortwave could be financially beneficial for both parties.

I produce and present a weekly Women's programme with specialised documentaries on health, for example, "How do I cope?" looking at mental health issues amongst non-English-speaking background women, and climate change topics, but must depend on applying for funding from the state government outside of 4EB, or CBF by myself.

I also bear the cost of producing a PNG programme - in English because PNG has over 800 different languages. The three official languages are Tok Pisin, Motu and English, but not everyone understands those three languages. There are vast areas of PNG where the people speak localised languages and dialects. People in these areas cannot access or present services in their own languages. This illustrates the need for focussed localised product.

There are language resources and potential presenters in local areas as a result of language research and documentation being carried out by universities, not only from PNG and Australia, but overseas countries such as France. In my own area of Kairuku, one community is conducting its own language documentation project with no external financial support. The *Maeaka Tohana Language Project* is an attempt to create a baseline reference for speakers by starting with the first contact records of the early French missionaries to the area. Language consultants are often involved in learning to use technical recording equipment, have good English literacy and develop a high level of literacy in their own languages because of the nature of the work.

Lack of funding for these crucial issues locks out the people of PNG, and across areas of the Pacific, from accessing the information they desperately need to take their place in a modern Pacific that protects their rights to self-determination and equal partnership with the world. A more embracing attitude from ABC could have far-reaching positive effects for the whole community.

My English-speaking programmes for 4EB link Australians who have an interest in PNG, PNG communities living in Queensland, and through live streaming and programmes on demand, audiences living in PNG and across the world. (I receive a lot of feedback from my relatives in Liverpool England and Port Moresby, PNG). This contact helps to reduce homesickness through playing familiar topics and music.

The PNG community living here in Brisbane is much larger than may be thought and hasn't been fully counted, but more than 7,000 attended last year's PNG Independence Day at Bill Norris Oval Beenleigh, hosted by the umbrella organisation of Papua New Guineans in Qld, the PNG Federation Qld Inc. (PNGFQI). The 15 PNG community groups represent a strong and vibrant PNG community in South East QLD. There are also several PNG community groups in Cairns, Sydney, Perth, Canberra and Melbourne who would benefit from better coverage from ABC.

Pacific Islanders are also well represented in Australia and there is a big population of people of Pacific Islander heritage on the south side of Brisbane and Queensland.

Two major events happening on the Pacific calendar are the independence celebrations of PNG by Papua New Guinea Federation Queensland Inc. on September 16 and the Pacific Islands Rugby Tournament in Beenleigh, also at Bill Norris Oval, in October. For the past 5 years I have played a major role in the Federation and I cover both of these events through my role as broadcaster and programme producer at Ethnic Community Radio 4EB. Covering these events would be a good start for ABC's revised presence in the Pacific.

Some questions

From my experience, there are several questions I would like addressed.

- Is there a place for volunteers in ABC? There is a wealth of knowledge and experience in the various communities that could assist ABC to provide a service to isolated groups. It should be acknowledged that volunteers' time is valuable and they should not be expected to bear production costs from their personal resources.
- If service resumes what percentage of product will be produced by the ABC and what percentage will be outsourced?
- Is there a commercial basis for reinstating Asia Pacific broadcasting and what is the commercial value of goodwill generated by reinstating the Short-Wave service? Because Australia provided a shortwave service to PNG and the Pacific, listeners developed an attachment and a reliance on Australia as an authority and Australian products as being desirable.
- Considering that the shortwave antennae are located in Australia, and there is no expenditure for equipment outside Australia, why did ABC stop broadcasting? The only cost is for product. For broadcasting to be fully effective, shortwave radio needs to reach deep valleys, but how do we broadcast to those living in the valleys?
- Is it known what programmes people in PNG and the Pacific want to hear from ABC shortwave? How will this be established?

Recommendations

From the above thoughts, several recommendations can be identified. They are:

1. Take steps to increase broadcasters' understanding of Pacific cultural practices and underpinnings and bring this awareness to reporting events.
2. Access education and training of reporters from the Pacific through the Pacific partnerships initiative
3. Share programs and exchange personnel with networks around the Pacific. An example is the PAKAM network in Australia.
4. Acknowledge copyright appropriately.
5. Develop a manual – Guidelines for Reporting in the Pacific.
6. Have a Facebook presence – not just an ABC page, but links on community and official pages.
7. Collaborate with community broadcasting for programme sharing.
8. There is need for focused localized product in countries such as PNG. Can ABC play a role there?
9. PNG community in Australia is significant – they would appreciate better news service from their home.
10. Consider including volunteers in community outreach endeavours.

My qualifications for making the above comments

My view of broadcasting and the media in Australia, PNG and the Pacific is based on 39 years of experience in the industry. Please see attached CV.

I have continued to be active in radio journalism.

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this review. I look forward to learning the outcome and sincerely hope it includes the reinstatement of an ABC presence in the Pacific.

Maureen Mopio-Jane.

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