

The State of Community Media and Community Radio in Papua New Guinea

General Country Introduction

Papua New Guinea (PNG) occupies the eastern half of the island of New Guinea and is the largest country of the Pacific region (461,690 km²). PNG's population is estimated at 7.5 million and is one of the world's most ethnically diverse countries, with over 850 indigenous languages. PNG is demographically a young country; 76 per cent are under 35 years old and 40 per cent are under the age of 15. With an annual population growth rate of 2.3 per cent, the population is projected to reach 9 million by 2020 and could double by 2050.¹

Most people living in PNG are Melanesian, but some are Micronesian or Polynesian. English, Tok Pisin (Pidgin), and Hiri Motu (the lingua franca of the Papuan region) are the official languages.²

Papua New Guinea is a constitutional monarchy. The Head of State is HM Queen Elizabeth II, represented in Papua New Guinea by a Governor-General, currently His Excellency Sir Robert Dadae.³ The Governor-General is elected directly by Members of the National Parliament and performs mainly ceremonial functions. Papua New Guinea has three levels of government - national, provincial and local. The National Parliament is a 111-member unicameral legislature elected for five-year terms by universal suffrage. The Prime Minister is appointed and dismissed by the Governor-General on the proposal of Parliament. The Cabinet – known as the National Executive Council or NEC – is appointed by the Governor-General on the recommendation of the Prime Minister. The Supreme Court, National Court, and local and village courts form an independent justice system.

Papua New Guinea is a democracy in which elections are held regularly, but the polls have often been marred by irregularities and violence. Party allegiances are unstable, and only two governments have survived for a full term since independence in 1975. Since the turn of the century, a boom in mineral resources extraction has helped successive incumbent governments to consolidate control. The judiciary retains significant independence, and the media are mostly free to criticize the government. Corruption remains a serious problem.

Papua New Guinea (PNG) has a remarkable diversity of geographic and natural resources. The country occupies the eastern half of the West Pacific Island of New Guinea, together with the main islands of New Britain, New Ireland, and the Autonomous Region of Bougainville, as well as another 600 smaller islands and atolls.

In December 2019, the autonomous region of Bougainville voted overwhelmingly in favor of independence from PNG. The referendum is non-binding, but Prime Minister James Marape has acknowledged the wish of Bougainvilleans to separate.

The spectrum of PNG society now ranges from traditional village-based life, dependent on subsistence and small cash-crop agriculture, to modern urban life in the main cities of Port

¹ https://www.pg.undp.org/content/papua_new_guinea/en/home/countryinfo.html

² <https://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/papua-new-guinea/papua-new-guinea-country-brief>

³ <https://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/papua-new-guinea/papua-new-guinea-country-brief>

Moresby (capital), Lae, Madang, Wewak, Goroka, Mt Hagen, and Rabaul. Some 80-85 per cent of the population directly derive their livelihood from farming, and 15-20 per cent of the population live in urban areas.

The country's economy remains dominated by two broad sectors: the agricultural, forestry, and fishing sector that engages most of PNG's labor force (the majority informally); and the minerals and energy extraction sector that accounts for most export earnings and GDP. PNG is ranked as a lower to middle income country with a gross national per capita income of US\$2,386.⁴

Although a resource-rich country, almost 40 percent of Papua New Guinea's (PNG) population lives in poverty.⁵

PNG has complex cultural dynamics deeply rooted in tribal and ethnic identity, traditional social institutions, and relationships to the land. These contribute both to the country's unique challenges as well as its considerable resilience.

There are limited formal job opportunities for the growing, relatively young population, and other risks include environmental management, urbanization, political fragmentation, social exclusion, and inequalities in PNG's resource dominated economy.

As a result of pandemic-related restrictions and weaker demand, it is estimated that PNG's real GDP contracted by 3.8% in 2020. In March 2021, the World Bank forecast that economic growth is expected to rebound to about 3.5% in 2021–22, but the economy will be nine percentage points smaller in 2023 compared to the World Bank's pre-pandemic forecast.

According to the 2011 census, 98 percent of citizens identified as Christian. Approximately 26 percent of the population is Roman Catholic; 18 percent Evangelical Lutheran; 13 percent Seventh-day Adventist; 10 percent Pentecostal; 10 percent United Church (an offspring of the London Missionary Society, Australian Methodist Church, and the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand); 6 percent Evangelical Alliance; 3 percent Anglican; and 3 percent Baptist. Other Christian groups, including The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Church of Jesus Christ), Jehovah's Witnesses, Kwato Church, and the Salvation Army, together constitute 9 percent. There are approximately 60,000 Baha'is, making up less than 1 percent of the population, and 2 percent hold indigenous or other beliefs.⁶

Status of Human Rights and Freedom of Speech

The PNG Constitution guarantees 19 distinct and individual rights to its citizens that includes Right to Freedom, Right to Life, Freedom from Inhuman Treatment, Right to Personal Liberty, Freedom of Expression, Freedom of Information and Right to Equality.⁷

Despite the individual rights bestowed to all, PNG remains one of the most dangerous places to be a woman or girl, where violence against women and children is rampant. More than two-thirds of the women in PNG are victims of domestic violence. In June, 2020 alone, there were 647 cases of domestic violence reported in Port Moresby. A 2020 academic study found that over a 19-month period, a specialist police unit set up to receive complaints of sexual

⁴ https://www.pg.undp.org/content/papua_new_guinea/en/home/countryinfo.html

⁵ <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/papua-new-guinea>

⁶ <https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-report-on-international-religious-freedom/papua-new-guinea/>

⁷ <https://www.higginschambers.com.au/png-human-rights/>

violence in Boroko, Port Moresby, averaged 27 complainants per month, 90 percent of whom were female, and 74 percent of whom were under age 18.⁸

PNG has laws in place to protect women and children, including the Lukautim Pikinini (Child Welfare) Act 2015 and the Family Protection Act 2013, but they are rarely enforced. Initiatives such as Family Sexual and Violence Units within the police force remain limited, with police themselves targeting children and adults for sexual violence. Lack of services for victims requiring assistance compounds the problem.

In the 45 years since independence, the country has gone through human rights challenges beyond measure. Aside from corruption, this includes economic mismanagement, gender-based violence, police brutality, sorcery accusations and related violence, environmental degradation from the extractive industries, inequality and more. PNG urgently needs to establish an institution that can address the problems.

PNG first proposed the setting up of “National Human Rights Commission” at the Vienna World Conference on Human Rights in 1993. The idea was twice formally endorsed by the National Executive Council (PNG’s cabinet), in 1997 and 2007, and legislation was drafted in 2008. In 2011, PNG recommended in its first cycle of Universal Periodic Review reporting to the UN Human Rights Council that a NHRC would be established, but there has been no clear indication since from the government as to when this would actually happen.⁹

Freedom of the press is generally respected. Local media provide independent coverage of the political opposition, as well as controversial issues such as alleged police abuse and official corruption. However, politicians have been known to harass media professionals over negative stories, and journalists can face physical attacks in the course of their work.

In late 2018, a journalist was suspended from state-owned television outlet EMTV over his coverage of government spending during the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in Port Moresby, but was reinstated under public pressure.¹⁰

“Journalists in PNG are further disadvantaged by the lack of Right to Information (RTI) legislation to enable them to obtain public documents from the state,” mentioned a statement released by Transparency International Papua New Guinea (TIPNG) in 2020.

“In the absence of a RTI law in PNG the media outlets are further beholden to political interests as sources of information – which further erodes public trust in news outlets.”

Transparency International also said: “While PNG has enjoyed a relatively free media, this has been under threat in recent years. For instance, the 2020 Reporters Without Borders (RSF) World Press Freedom Index assessed PNG to have a press whose independence is ‘endangered’, with a corresponding drop of eight places in rank since last year.”

⁸ <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/papua-new-guinea>

⁹ <https://netral.news/en/when-will-png-form-a-national-human-rights-commission.html>

¹⁰ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/papua-new-guinea/freedom-world/2020>

Communications Landscape

PNG's mainstream mass media, including radio, television and print, is the most vibrant and diverse in the region. Media penetration is highest in urban areas where the English-speaking populations live. While the establishment of new broadcasters and publishers in the past decade introduced changes, the rapidly increasing mobile telecommunications sector and emergence of online media, represent the most influential shifts in the media landscape. Mobile telecommunication has increased rapidly over the past six years and has opened up opportunities for the way people communicate. These modes of communication have generated public dialogue and information exchange between journalists, media practitioners and their audiences. In addition, the introduction of mobile telecommunications company Digicel to PNG in 2007 had a recognizable impact on the country's GDP.

The nature of media coverage in Papua New Guinea is strongly linked to the isolation of many of its peoples. Some 85 percent live in remote villages, retaining ancient cultures and tongues, with little contact with the modern world. Few publications or televisions signals reach its rugged interior, where a multiplicity of tribal languages fragments communication.

PNG has one of the Pacific region's largest media industries.

Television

The penetration of TV is reportedly on the rise, with most growth concentrated in urban areas due to affordability, infrastructure and signal restrictions in rural areas.¹¹ There are three television networks: the public broadcaster National Broadcasting Corporation's (NBC) domestic service; EMTV, owned by Telikom PNG (a leading telecommunications company) but operates commercially; and the mobile provider Digicel, which offers free-to-view channel TVWan on its subscription access platform. EM-TV is a national free-to-air television station that was sold to Fiji Television Limited in 2004 (it was formerly a subsidiary of Australia's Channel 9 Network).

In 2008, NBC introduced a new TV station, Kundu 2 TV, in an effort to promote more local content.

Radio

PNG has a large number of radio stations, including public, commercial, church and mining radio services. Radio has a wide reach and is available to most of the population. The NBC, established and funded by the Government of PNG, provides a national radio service, under the provisions of the Broadcasting Corporation Act. It has two main services: Karai National Radio, operating nationally on shortwave (SW), and on AM and FM in the National Capital District, and Kundu Radio Services, operating in the 19 provincial centres.

Commercial radio stations like FM 100, YumiFM (which broadcasts in Tok Pisin) and NauFM are popular and have a young audience focus. Church-run stations, often community or province based, are increasing in popularity. A number of radio stations are also operated by mining companies.

¹¹ Citizen Access to Information in Papua New Guinea (ABC 2012)



© Radio Maria

The National Information and Communications Technology Authority divide radio stations into **commercial** and **non-commercial**, which means there is no category for “Community Radio” stations. This included the church run stations. Below is a list of non-commercial:

1. Radio Maria Radio Maria Nation
2. Seventh Day Adventist- 3ABN NCD
3. Blessed Peter Torot - Voice of Torot ENBP, Central, Gulf, Manus
4. Baptist Union – 99 FM Enga, Sandaun
5. PNG Bible Church – Wantok Radio Light AM & FM Nationwide.
6. Pacific Adventist University – 2G FM NCD
7. OK Tedi Mining Limited – Radio Fly Western
8. Karai Bilong Baibel Network FM KBBN Western Highlands
9. Archdiocese Of Mt Hagen Trinity FM Western Highlands
10. Archdiocese Of Lae CDL Morobe
11. United Christian Broadcasting Laif FM Sandaun
12. Evangelical Church of PNG ECPNG FM Southern Highlands
13. CDI Foundation CDI FM Southern Highlands, Gulf
14. New Britain Palm Oil NBPOL FM West New Britain

Newspapers and Magazines

Newspapers are popular, but access is restricted, particularly in rural areas, due to cost, distribution and low literacy levels (63.4 percent in 2015¹².) There are two main English language newspapers; The Papua New Guinea Post-Courier is majority owned by News Corp with about 30 per cent local ownership; the second newspaper, The National, is owned by the Malaysian logging company, Rimbunan Hijau. The Wantok Niuspepa of Word Publishing Ltd is a national weekly Tok Pisin paper owned and operated by mainland Christian churches. The Sunday Chronicles, which focuses on politics and development issues, is owned by PNG businessman Wesley Raminai and published by PNG Magazines.

¹² <https://borgenproject.org/technology-to-promote-literacy/>

Each of the major media outlets also publishes online and on social media as an adjunct to their primary platforms. Social media is an increasingly influential part of the media landscape, with the number of social media users in PNG equivalent to 10.3% of the total population in January 2021¹³.

Online and Mobile Media

The availability of mobile telecommunications and online media has transformed the communication landscape in PNG. Facebook has become a forum for discussing topics such as media ethics and journalism in the country and wider regions. The creation of media organisation pages or ad hoc groups (e.g. 'Media Monitor') enables journalists and media practitioners to engage in dialogue and exchange stories and pictures across the country.

Mobile phones have become an important device for communication, radio listening and internet access. There are up to 1 million unique mobile internet subscribers in PNG, primarily in cities where mobile internet penetration grew by 20 per cent in 2018. Yet, mobile penetration is still low compared to other countries in the Pacific, with less than a third of the population being unique mobile subscribers.¹⁴ With a rural population of 87 per cent, there are widespread disparities in mobile phone access and use between PNG's urban centres and rural areas, but also men and women.

Media Law and Regulation

The Papua New Guinean Constitution provides for free speech, including freedom of the media, and the government generally respects this freedom in practice. Freedoms of speech, the press, and information are guaranteed under Section 46 of the constitution. This has been there since the PNG National Constitution came into force on 16 September 1975—the date when Papua New Guinea became an independent nation-state.¹⁵

The Media Council of Papua New Guinea (MCPNG) has served as a buffer against government pressure by lobbying for media freedom, managing a complaints process, and undertaking media research. The council also has a well-developed code of ethics, which member journalists follow.

News media in Papua New Guinea (PNG) have traditionally been among the strongest and most independent in the South Pacific, but press freedom has eroded somewhat in recent years.

Relevant media and communication policy and legislation in PNG includes the Postal Services Act 1996; the Stamp Duties (2008 Budget Amendment) Act 2007; the Telecommunications Act 1996; the Broadcast Corporation Act 1973; the Telecommunications Industry Act 2002; the Telecommunications (Cable Television Service License Fees) Regulation 2005; the Radio Spectrum Regulation 1997; the Classification of Publication (Censorship) Act 1989; the Printers and Newspapers Act 1956; the Printers and Newspapers Regulation 1958; the Television (Prohibition and Control) Act 1986; the Defamation Act 1962; the National Policy on Information and Communication (NPIC); the 1989 Censorship Act; and the National Information and Communications Technology Act 2009.

¹³ <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2021-papua-new-guinea>

¹⁴ Digital Transformation: The Role of Mobile Technology in Papua New Guinea, March 2019

¹⁵ State Of Media & Communication Report 2013- Papua New Guinea, PACMAS

PNG has experienced recent changes in telecommunication regulation. Up until 2007, there was a dual regulatory system led by the Independent Consumer and Competition Commission (ICCC) and the Papua New Guinea Telecommunications Authority (PANGTEL). The ICCC had a multi-sectorial economic and social regulatory function; PANGTEL had a sector-specific mandate that included spectrum and technical regulatory function as well as broadcast licensing. The high costs of Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) and telecommunications and the overlap in the functions of the two separate bodies was regarded as hindering the growth of a converging media and ICT industry. In 2008, the National ICT Policy (NICTP) was established with amendments made to the Telecom Act of 1996. A reform of ICT regulation also paved the way for the entry of two new mobile companies. Phase 2 of the NICT Policy introduced a competitive approach to policy development, and concluded with the formation of the National Information Communication and Technology Act (NICTA) in 2009. NICTA became the regulator responsible for ICT and broadcast regulation. The ICCC retains powers of general competition to the ICT industry, but does not regulate it.

NICTA is anticipated to promote healthy competition among industry participants, who are being challenged to conform to NICTA's regulations. There are currently three mobile phone operators, B-Mobile, Citifone and Digicel, while Telikom PNG has a monopoly on fixed line provision. Digicel has already taken advantage of the new trends in ICT policies by recently receiving the first content license for a potential IPTV (internet protocol television) set-up. NICTA has also been progressive in supporting the increase of mobile phone and internet access.

Community Broadcasting

For a country as diverse and dispersed as Papua New Guinea, radio remains the obvious platform for reliable and effective communication with a majority of the country's citizens.

Radio is cheap to produce, free to access, and flexible enough to deliver everything from news and weather to agricultural extension and entertainment. Such a mass communication platform is essential in a developing country of more than 8.9 million people where around a third of adults cannot read; mains electricity is available to only 13 per cent of the population; and rural subsistence agriculture remains the dominant way of life.

Apart from playing a critical role in disseminating information, radio is a lifeline. PNG is one of the world's most disaster-prone countries, where tropical rainfall, rugged geography, and active geological activity can result in environmental hazards from cyclones, floods, landslides, earthquakes, and volcanoes. The recent experience of COVID-19 has further highlighted these challenges as PNG's health system has come under considerable strain.

Papua New Guinea's public broadcaster, the National Broadcasting Corporation (NBC), plays a critical role in connecting and informing the nation, especially those citizens without access to other forms of communication.

The radio industry operates under a mixed model with commercial, public (government), and community ownership of stations. There are two main commercial radio networks: PNGFM and FM100/Kalang Advertising. Each network operates stations from centralised studios in Port Moresby with programming distributed via satellite and landline to FM transmitters across the country, mostly in major urban centres. FM100 is owned by the government

through the state telecommunications company Telikom PNG but operates on a commercial basis. With regard to development and characteristics of community broadcasting, experiences with CDI FM would give a general view about Community Broadcasting in PNG.

CDI FM is more community oriented, and transmits in Tok Pisin and Motu and English and provides news, entertainment and importantly a broad range of development programs and awareness messages for the community. The programs help locals initiate projects, seek skills and sustain themselves.

Public broadcaster NBC operates provincial ('Kundu') and national ('Karai') radio services as well as a youth-focused service, Tribe FM, and a national television service. It has radio studios and local transmitters in most provincial centres, and its national headquarters in Port Moresby. NBC's funding comes from a mix of direct government grants, advertising and sponsorships, and some additional funding from provincial governments and MPs' district support funds. Total budgeted funding for NBC from PNG's government in 2020 was K26 million (approximately AU\$10 million).

In addition to the commercial and public broadcasters are community and church-based services.



© Laif FM

Religious Television Association (RTA), Catholic Radio Network (CRN), Krai Bilong Baibel Network (KBBN), Radio Light and Trinita FM are church-based media currently operating in

PNG.¹⁶ The idea of church-based broadcasting in Papua New Guinea is relatively new. Some of these stations broadcast for local audiences, some stations aim towards East Asia and the third group cover the region from abroad.

A 2019 survey of media access in PNG found that radio remained popular, but that audience are declining, driven by poor access to services.¹⁷ Radio listeners in larger centres have access to a number of stations mostly on FM, including the domestic commercial, public, and community stations, with international broadcasters such as Radio Australia and BBC World Service also carried on local frequencies in some centres. Outside major centres and in rural areas, services tend to be limited to NBC services, where they exist.

Local communities in the rugged terrains of the Gulf Province like Omo in the Folopa area are farming orchids, preserving sacred sites for tourist visits and are now being introduced to rice farming because of information transmitted over the radio. They have also become aware on healthy living.

Media Development Initiative (MDI) which is within AUSAID may be the only organization supporting community broadcasting in terms of capacity building, updating facilities and funding.

Most agencies that support the development of community broadcasting are churches, international organization, mainly NGOs and major companies based in the communities.

Challenges Faced by Media

The Papua New Guinea news media sector dealt with some significant challenges in 2015, including the encroachment of social media, the threat of stronger government controls, and fallout from the coverage of some major political scandals. The increasing clout of social media and citizen journalism, a major theme in 2015, was evident during the Manus Island Detention Centre controversy in January. With 734 detainees on hunger strike and the centre declared a no-go zone, both the national and international media faced major hurdles sourcing news from the location (Evershed and Doherty 13/1/2015; Tahana 21/1/2015).

Papua New Guinea has gained a reputation – at least, in international reporting on the country – for being corrupt, violent and poor, yet also a country that is resource-rich and an advocate for Pacific Island nations against climate change. These contrasting characteristics as portrayed in the media and the tendency in modern international news reporting to obsess over “viral” stories makes PNG difficult country to understand. But that difficulty is also explained by the under-resourced media industry in PNG itself, that could otherwise tell the rich number of varied stories about nation with a fast-growing population.

The Australian Broadcasting Cooperation (ABC) is the only foreign news broadcasting organisation to have a permanent base of operations in Port Moresby. The only other presence of foreign media is the part ownership of the Post Courier newspaper by Rupert Murdoch’s media empire, News Corp. The absence of foreign news media has been a growing concern for the Pacific and with the depleted resources and budget cuts by the Australian governments, the ABC has also curtailed its coverage of news from this region.

¹⁶ Media Asia, Vol. 34 No. 2, 2007

¹⁷ <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/bridging-papua-new-guinea-information-divide>

The “Big Man Mentality” as Jean Morea, a senior journalist at the Post-Courier newspaper, calls it, is a culture which restricts the ability of journalists to challenge or ask tough questions of people in power or respectable positions in society. The regular silence at the end of news conferences and the reliance on curated press releases in daily news broadcasts is seen as one of the biggest hurdles in the PNG news industry.¹⁸

Emily Matasororo, Head of Department for Journalism at University of Papua New Guinea (UPNG), says a lack of funding compounds the difficulty of teaching a journalism course without the basic resources of cameras, computers, recording equipment, and studios.

More recently, social media has emerged as a major challenge and potential game changer for the news media sector. Social media, including citizen journalism, support and strengthen traditional journalism, but also weaken it by diverting away revenue. In Papua New Guinea, the then Peter O’Neil-led government had warned of banning Facebook and other social media, claiming that ‘fake news’ was destroying the country.

However, civil society organisations called for measured government response given the country’s corruption problem and the fact that social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter had become an ‘essential check and balance’ on the abuse of power (Singh, 2017). During this controversy, O’Neill was dogged by allegations of corruption and faced a no-confidence motion, forcing his resignation in May 2019. Since then, the social media controversy has receded to the background, but it could well reemerge, with continued internet penetration, ongoing scrutiny and criticism of the government, and a fair share of online media abuse (Melanesia Media Freedom Forum, 2019).

In addition, internal weaknesses like the alleged dearth of in-depth journalism too hinder the media’s ability in public interest reporting. The PNG study described national media as an ‘unfiltered communications mouthpiece’ for government and corporate interests (Lasslett, 2015). The apparent reliance on media releases in PNG could be a result of deadline pressures and/or a manifestation of inexperienced and under-qualified journalist corps’ shying from complex reporting assignments. Whatever the reasons, the impact of internal threats on public interest reporting and the public right to know is undeniable.

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