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Pacific Islands News Association
Working For The Pacific Islands

Nina Ratulele
Pacific Islands News Association

• In Suva, Fiji Islands, trainers from around the region work on ways of improving coverage of women in the news.
  • In Apia, Samoa, budding newspaper publishers discuss how to cut costs and improve efficiency.
  • In Honiara, Solomon Islands, business reporters study how to explain the impact of globalisation on local economies.
  • In Noumea, New Caledonia, television teams develop their skills in magazine-program production.
• Five days a week, news from the French Pacific is translated into English and emailed out for newspapers and broadcast stations in the English-speaking Pacific Islands to use. News from the English-speaking Pacific goes back the other way.
• Audio and video tapes are made promoting media freedom as the people's freedom. They are broadcast by radio and TV stations as part of World Press Freedom Day celebrations throughout the region.
• In Tonga, two journalists are gaoledd. Alerts are quickly sent out mobilising a global network of freedom of expression organisations to support them.
  • In Yap, Federated States of Micronesia, journalists from Japan's outer islands participate in an exchange program.
  • In Papeete, French Polynesia, news executives and journalists gather for the biggest annual conference of the Pacific Islands news media.

The common link for these different events is the Pacific Islands News Association (PINA), the main professional organisation of the Pacific Islands news media. PINA's members are newspapers, magazines, radio and TV stations and national organisations of news media practitioners from 21 Pacific Islands countries and territories. PINA's many and continuing activities are in keeping with its three main objectives:
* To promote and defend freedom of information and expression in the Pacific Islands.
* To promote and develop Pacific Islands news media...
The late afternoon sun shines on Port Vila, the capital of Vanuatu. Small groups gather at tables around a hotel swimming pool. These aren’t tourists escaping the winter cold of Australia and New Zealand. They’re 10 top news executives and journalism trainers from six Pacific Islands countries who are attending a UNESCO/PINA PACTRAINER training-the-trainers workshop and who are finalising closing presentations that end 10 days of intense activity. The workshop leader is Adlai Amor, a former executive director of the Philippine Press Institute and training director of the Press Foundation of Asia, Manila. His co-trainer is Johnson Honimae of the Solomon Islands who is a graduate of the Kuala Lumpur based Asia-Pacific Institute for Broadcasting Development’s 10-month broadcast trainers’ program. Another resource person is Mike Marasigan, who specialises in on-line training for the Philippine Press Institute.

The workshop continues the training-the-trainers programs of the PINA Pacific Journalism Development Centre set up under the UNESCO/PINA PACTRAINER project. By all accounts, it is a big success; the evaluations from the participants suggest this: “I have discovered training skills which I did not realise I have,” writes one. “It is only through training such as this that the media in the region will be better strengthened,” says another.

The UNESCO/PINA PACTRAINER project was set up following resolutions made by PINA members in 1994 calling for more journalism training and education to be conducted by Pacific Islanders. PINA’s members said they valued the generous help and expertise they received from trainers and educators from developed countries. They wanted to continue to receive this help in specialist areas, but they also believed that there was an urgent need for more Pacific Islanders to be involved if day-to-day training and education was to be sustainable, and if the Pacific Islands were to develop training and education from a Pacific Islands viewpoint. UNESCO had already started work in this area through a project called PACJOURN. It answered willingly PINA’s request for help with a follow-up project that emphasised the development of journalism training and education within the region. PACTRAINER was designed to run programs to help develop Pacific Islands training and education expertise: programs appropriate for the Pacific Islands that meet the needs of its news media.
The Port Vila workshop also underscored the growing inter-regional cooperation between PINA and Asian journalism training and education organisations. PINA believes it can learn from the experiences of Asia, especially those within the Philippines. Johnson Honimaeis key role in the Port Vila workshop along with that of Amor and Marasigan was a good example of such cooperation, which began when PINA's training coordinator Peter Lomas went to a meeting in Nepal of Asian press institutes organised by UNESCO. Lomas sought help to build expertise within the region. As a result, PINA and the Philippine Press Institute set up a "twinning" arrangement under which the Filipinos willingly share their own experiences with PINA and its members.

Amor, Honimae and Lomas developed an intensive program for the Port Vila workshop. It took participants through the four stages of training: needs analysis, planning and design, implementation, and evaluation. Participants were required to develop and present training programs appropriate for their own countries. They then took them home to implement. Participants appreciated the opportunity to tailor the program to their own needs. As one Solomon Islander commented: "This was good because it's asking us -- the people who know the region; who know the needs from the heart out ... and building confidence in those of us who may have wanted to do training." A colleague from the Fiji Islands added: "Before I thought: 'how can I stand in front of 30 people and talk for half an hour?' Now it seems possible."

PINA's history: From a network to annual conferences

PINA grew out of the first Pacific Islands editors' conference held in Suva, Fiji Islands, in 1972. It came into being as a network at a follow-up meeting in 1974. PINA met only occasionally, when funding permitted, until a meeting in Suva in 1985 resolved to begin annual conferences. An executive was elected with Fata Pito Fa'alogo (Editor, Samoa Times) as President and Tavake Fusimalohi (General Manager, Radio Tonga) as executive director. They were given the task of spearheading the development of PINA. A constitution was adopted the following year when PINA met in Apia, Samoa. The PINA convention is now the major annual meeting of the Pacific Islands news media and rotates amongst member countries. In 1999 it will once again be held in Suva (October 8 - 11).

Working with international and regional agencies, PINA has helped train hundreds of journalists and news executives in the region. PINA holds regular regional workshops to develop
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journalism, production, management and advertising and marketing skills throughout the Pacific Islands broadcasting and print media. The association also has special projects to help develop the indigenous language media, women in the media, investigative and environmental journalism, and media freedom. The international recognition of PINA's work is also continuing to grow. PINA currently chairs the council of IFEX (the global network of media freedom and freedom of expression organisations), is on the advisory board of the World Press Freedom Committee, on the executive board of the Council of Asia-Pacific Press Institutes (CAPPI), of which it is a founding member, is Vice-Chair of the Asia-Pacific Forum of Environmental Journalists, and is a founder and Pacific coordinator for JOURNET, UNESCO's global journalism education network.

PINA in action: A Master's via the Internet

Asian and Pacific journalists and news executives could soon be studying for a Master of Journalism degree via the Internet. It is one of the development projects now being considered by CAPPI and the Asian Media Project of Germany's Konrad Adenauer Foundation (KAF). The two year part-time program would be offered through a leading Philippine university working with a German journalism school experienced in online learning. The mainly online study would be augmented with time on campus and would be designed for busy news executives and journalists who want to do a masters course but cannot take time off work for full-time study.

This is one of the development project plans to come out of the CAPPI organisational meeting held in Manila and hosted by the Philippine Press Institute. CAPPI will place training emphasis on using the Internet to develop a "Virtual Journalism School", using the data bases, websites and technological resources of its members. "This so-called virtual journalists' school could also be accessible for participants from diverse countries which, based on political or other grounds, have so far prohibited press institutes or similar institutions," the Director of KAF's Asian Media Project, Thomas Bernd Stehling, said. Stehling has played a big role in supporting the efforts of the institutes to set up CAPPI. He is also a strong believer in developing the use of the Internet to provide training and education. Other CAPPI development activities are now being considered in the areas of training of trainers, media laws and regulations and media management.

The founding of CAPPI with KAF support followed a series of meetings and conferences of the Asia-Pacific institutes. These began with the 1992 UNESCO meeting in Kathmandu, hosted by
the Nepal Press Institute. KAF helped organise more meetings in Manila (in conjunction with the Press Foundation of Asia, the Ramon Magsaysay Foundation, and the Philippine Press Institute) and in Ulaanbaatar (with the Press Institute of Mongolia). The latest Manila meeting was also attended by UNESCO representative, Jeanine van Dijk from the Kuala Lumpur office, and another possible development partner, the USA based Freedom Forum, represented by the director of its Asia Centre Arnold Zeitlin. CAPPI founding members are: the Press Institute of Bangladesh, the Press Institute of India, the Korean Press Institute, the Press Institute of Mongolia, the Nepal Press Institute, PINA, the Pakistan Press Foundation, and the Philippine Press Institute.

Training for the total radio station

Training for the increasing number of commercial radio stations in the Pacific Islands is developing, thanks to cooperation between PINA and the AusAID Pacific Media Initiative Project. Private sector commercial radio is now one of the fastest growing areas of the Pacific Islands news media. These stations play an important role in keeping communities informed through their news services and by promoting community debate and discussion through talkback radio.

In May 1999 commercial radio executives gathered in Suva for an intensive six-day regional PINA Training-the-Trainers in Commercial Radio Financial and Administration Management workshop, made possible through support obtained from the AusAID Pacific Media Initiative. Stations taking part were NauFM, Yumi FM, and Radio Kalang (Papua New Guinea), ZFM100 (Solomon Islands), Viti FM, FM96, Navtarang, and Bula Network (Fiji Islands), Radio Polynesia 98FM (Samoa) and Radio Cook Islands. PINA believes that, for these stations to be able to deliver strong news services and promote public service and talkback programs, they must be efficiently managed and financially strong.

Commercial stations are also helping promote the broadcasting and development of local music and languages. For example, Yumi FM operates exclusively in Tok Pisin, Viti FM in Fijian, Navtarang in Hindi, and Bula Network has stations operating exclusively in Fijian and Hindi. Peter Lomas, coordinator of the PINA Pacific Journalism Development Centre, says: The non-government commercial radio stations are in many ways playing the same role in the 1990s as the emerging independent newspapers did in the 1970s and 1980s. They are rapidly building the
amount of pluralism in our news media. As governments cut back funding for state and public broadcasting, the commercial stations have a growing public service responsibility. They’re also very active on issues where it is sometimes difficult for the government-run stations. Take Samoa. 98FM there has been setting the pace in HIV/AIDS education campaigns for young people, covering issues the more conservative government-run station finds harder to handle.

The commercial radio workshops are all based on training-the-trainers programs. What this means is that executives from the stations come to the workshops, and as part of the program they are given training as trainers so they can then go back to their own stations and provide continuing on-the-job training to the people who work for them.

"We are putting a lot of emphasis on continuing training back in the station," says Lomas. "The workshops look at adult learning techniques and how to effectively pass on what’s been learnt in the workshop. Participants have to develop their own training modules and present them."

Recent workshops have been on Managing Beyond 2000 -- a workshop for station chief executives, and a training-the-trainers workshop in commercial radio sales management. Both were supported by AusAID’s Pacific Media Initiative Project. The next workshop in the series is expected to focus on programming.

I will conclude with comments made by PINA’s president William Parkinson to the ASIA-PAC 21st Conference in Kuala Lumpur:

PINA has been particularly effective as a promoter and protector of media freedom. Because of the size of our member states, it is virtually impossible for media organisations to fight these issues alone and so they have turned to PINA and through PINA, world media organisations to fight these issues. PINA has also been active in promoting the issue of media freedom across the Pacific. The organisation feels strongly that it is vital that the person on the street understands that media freedom plays a key role in the democratic process and that it is an individual right. We see the need to continually stretch the social boundaries of acceptable debate in the Pacific. This ‘stretching’ process slowly brings more and more people into the political process, helping them realise their key role in a strong democracy.