

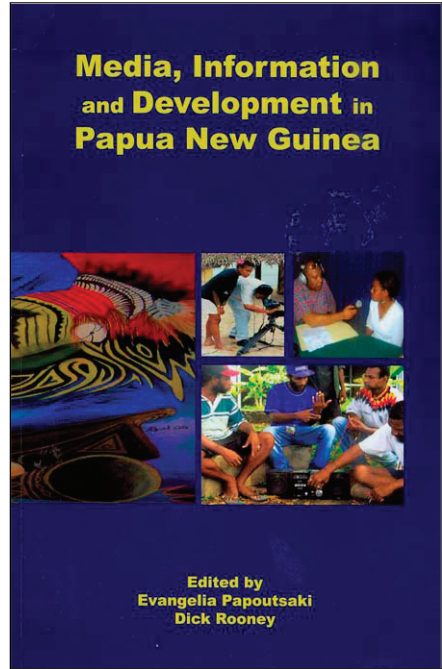
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Good news media book in regional bad news year

Media, Information and Development in Papua New Guinea, edited by Evangelia Papoutsaki and Dick Rooney. Madang, PNG: Divine Word University, 2006. 227 pp. ISBN 9980995610.

FOR THE journalistic aficionado, Papua New Guinea, has long appeared to have a strong inquiring media that frequently takes a look at itself and its actions. This book reinforces this viewpoint.

Media, Information and Development in Papua New Guinea is one of the most interesting books I have read on Pacific media. It is a collection of articles from a dozen different writers, some of whom are current or former journalists. Several of the authors have direct media links as staff working with the Divine Word



University in Madang, a private Christian institution.

For the uninitiated, the opening chapter gives an outline of the media landscape in PNG. Other chapters explore media ownership, journalism education and the role of media national development.

Writer Lawrencia Pirpir is a graduate from the DVU and a research assistant with the Melanesia Institute at Goroka. She has conducted research into the role of journalists, with a number of surveys both within and outside the media to find out if journalists have contributed professionally in reporting

government news to the people. Her findings were mixed with 68 percent of public servants saying journalists reported government news in a professional manner, while the survey showed people were more informed on crime reporting than on news emanating from government sources. Radio was still seen as the most effective way of reaching people.

Joe Weber fleshes out the difficulties of being a radio journalist. He bluntly says:

The National Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) is the most vulnerable to government pressure of all media outlets in PNG and has faced restrictions to its freedom of expression (p. 145).

He notes the financial problems of local radio stations that were off-air for months due to unpaid bills. Suddenly money was available to reopen the stations so they could cover the elections. One newspaper (*National*, 3 May 2002) remarked at the time: ‘What a farce it is.’

Warring tribesmen chased some radio staff out of their homes. Other journalists hitched lifts in vehicles to cover news events. Another chapter, by Alphonse Aime reflects on media ethics, including a case study of community radio with its potential impact law and order in the Southern

Highlands province (pp. 123-126). The reader will also find information on the role of the Media Council of PNG and how it has forged alliances with other civil society groups in the country. The chapter by council president Peter J. Aitsi outlines the ‘Objectives of the war on corruption campaign’, which has been promoted by the council through its members since 2001 (see this edition of *Pacific Journalism Review*, pp. 73-90).

These articles seem most timely—2006 was a bad year for law and order in the South Pacific with riots, in Tonga, Solomon Islands unrest and a fourth military coup in Fiji. It is tempting to use a cliché and say the book is ‘good news’ coming from DVU.

On the negative side, however, the index is thin, almost bleak, and this book deserves something better. I was recently reading the story about former long-standing ABC correspondent Sean Dorney being expelled from PNG in 1984, so I thought I would look through the index to find out if his name came up again. Astonishingly, he didn’t even rate a mention?

Nevertheless, this book ought to go into an essential reading category for budding journalists and the region’s media researchers.