The state of investigative journalism and the growing impact of new media in PNG

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• Journalists in the main stream media newsrooms in PNG have been involved in I.J. in the last 30 years
• At Independence (1975) PNG had NBC radio network, one newspaper.
• 1980 – National Newspaper Committee report was concerned about one foreign-owned paper

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• Niugini Nius & the Times were established.
• The Times was a paper that would champion investigative journalism
• 1st editorial read: The Times will not always be popular. But we will always strive to tell as much of the truth as we can get hold of.

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• The Times was set up in response to corruption - political leaders & public servants
• Covered the ‘Diaries Affair’ (’82)
• Ombudsman report reveals the extent to which corruption had become tolerated and common place in government.
• Describes corruption as an ‘iceberg’ – the tip above reveals the mass below.

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• Competition amongst daily & weekly newspapers. Lively environment for in-depth, investigative stories.
• Media provided comprehensive coverage
• Post-Courier (1969) aims - to contribute to a better development of P-NG, welfare of citizens, democracy & welcomed controversy on matters of public interest.
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- Sometimes media were accused of practicing ‘tabloid’ or ‘gutter journalism’

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- Times had to invest in top journalists for a big story each week.

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- Getting an exclusive story each week was not easy.
- Times could not pay competitive salaries, offer better conditions – did not make money
- Still journalists were loyal to this unique locally-owned paper. Times gave them a purpose to fight graft & corruption in an emerging nation.

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- The *Times* of PNG was a unique newspaper. Owned by 4 mainline churches in PNG.
- Mandate was investigative journalism
- Employed some of PNG’s top journalists
- Investigated ongoing issues and exposed them progressively

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- Some of the *Times* aims were:
  - To seek the truth
  - To oppose injustice, inequality, violence and the destruction of the environment.
  - To hold a mirror to society and all institutions.
  - To encourage in-depth reporting on a wide range of institutions, including the churches.

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- Forestry issues led to Forestry Inquiry & subsequent coverage of the inquiry.
- Placer Pacific share issue was one major story that the *Times* was involved in uncovering.
- However, *Times* was hardly making any money.
- 1994 report described the newspaper as a ‘dog’ product line – “characterized by low or no growth rates and low or no financial profitability”.
- Depended on profits of sister publications
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• Journalists struggled with cost of living in POM, tempted by high salaries and better conditions from daily papers, other media.
• Journalists eventually left.

Issues of Governance
• Investigative journalism is effective & rewarding when it results in actions;
• - to correct wrongs
• - punish guilty
• - amend/create/strengthen laws.
• Important that action is taken for safety & credibility of reporter.

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• Crucial also to affirm public confidence in government/state functions.
• Fragmented society often a protection
• Threats by phone, verbal, visit by mobs to newsrooms, or homes.
• Since independence PNG has been seeking an appropriate governance system.

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• Decentralised power to provinces to administer nation of 1000 tribes, 800 languages (prov govts)
• Created many problems, powers decentralised – not enough money & resources
• 1995 – abolish prov govt, new structure
• Still trying to make new system work

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• Break down in govt systems, lack of resources/capacity. Delays in operations, abuse of processes
• All contribute to corruption
• Eg: Way land or property is acquired.
• Governance issue critical with growth of major resource development projects.
• Media are reporting on the symptoms of the country’s governance problems.

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• Functions of Independent state organs
• Executive has become powerful, dominating the legislative, legislative unable to hold executive accountable.
• Integrity law on Political Parties made executive strong, stable for 8 years
• Challenging executive through judiciary - third arm. Eg: Amendment to Environ Act
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- PNG Media affects public opinion in different ways because of high illiteracy rates, limited media access, etc.
- Media targets elites, decision makers (activists, NGOs, students, etc). De facto representatives of silent majority.
- News stories, talk back shows – protests, petitions, etc.

Advocacy/citizen journalism
- I think the newspapers, *Post-Courier* for instance, must stand up and be counted, taking the lead to get these issues out into the public arena for debate and force the government to take action (Philemon interview, 2007).
- NASFund, Illegal guns, violence against women, Kapris recapture, etc.

New Media – mobile phones, internet.
- Campaign against destructive exploitation of natural resources.
- Examples of Bougainville & Ok Tedi.
- Chinese Ramu Nickel Mine at ramumine.wordpress.com
- Helping mainstream media coverage.

Conclusion
- Investigative Journalism is vital in PNG media today.
- Media need support to be able to perform effectively. Need editors, managers and newsroom cultures that support IJ.
- New Media & advocacy/citizen journalism is helping greatly with instant information.

- Laws are being ignored, abused,
- Government ministers and departments are not performing mandated roles but are colluding to promote foreign interests,
- Legislations have been amended to legalise actions that would otherwise be deemed illegal.
- Government not responding to media revelations, chose to ignore media.
Conclusion.

- Organizations, people and leaders who are working to change the situation in PNG. Media need to give them voice.
- PNG’s diversity remains its best guarantee against dictatorship, while leaders generally behave because they have to face their voters every five years.