

This *In Brief* reports on the fourth annual Media Workshop (8–9 May 2014) sponsored by the Papua New Guinea (PNG) Chamber of Mines and Petroleum for journalists working in PNG's mainstream media. The chamber is the peak representative body of the mining and petroleum industry, considered by many to be the backbone of the PNG economy. The chamber initiated the Media Workshop four years ago. The stated aim of the workshop was to enhance journalists' understanding of the different facets of the mining and petroleum industry and its contributions to the PNG economy in order to better inform their reporting.

While the extractive industry is not generally expected to sponsor training programs for mainstream media professionals, PNG's mining and petroleum sector felt there was a need to train and collaborate with journalists. According to Brian Gomez, the chamber's communication consultant, the workshop allows the mining and petroleum industry 'to explain itself better'. This stems from the view that PNG journalists are not trained to report on multifaceted sectors such as mining and petroleum. By initiating this industry-paid workshop, the mining and petroleum industry has acknowledged the paucity of specialised training of media professionals. The industry sees a need for improved training of journalists within PNG universities and newsrooms of media companies operating in PNG.

This year, the Media Workshop was convened in Madang. This is the first time the event has been held outside Port Moresby. The workshop brought together technical specialists and managers from various sections of mining and petroleum operations, including: industry public relations (PR) officers, representatives of government agencies, journalists from the mainstream media and several senior journalism students from Madang-based Divine Word University as observers. The workshop was timely in that it was held one week before the official announcement of the first shipment of the liquefied natural gas (LNG) cargo from the US\$19 billion PNG LNG project to Japan.

Peter Graham, Managing Director of ExxonMobil PNG Ltd (the PNG LNG operator), presented an overview of the project to the participants.

Although the workshop is an industry initiative for working journalists by the mining and petroleum industry, few of the key government entities that deal with the industry were present. Therefore, government perspectives on mining and petroleum did not form a significant part of the content of, or debate within, the workshop. Journalists need to hear from a range of entities to form a well-rounded perspective and understanding of the extractive industry. However, as with other areas of service delivery, the government appears to have devolved its responsibility to an industry. This is problematic as the industry has its own agenda to push through the mainstream media.

The representatives of the mining and petroleum companies presented updates of their operations, exploration work, contributions to the national economy and corporate social responsibility (CSR) endeavours. The 'training' aspect of the workshop took the form of a 'questions and answers' session at the end of each set of presentations. Journalists were given the opportunity to ask questions to inform their reporting. However, disappointingly, questions from journalists were few and far between.

Those journalists who did speak raised the following issues: the lack of specific training on resource industry reporting; the lack of specialisation in mining and petroleum reporting in the media; and the high turnover of journalists working in the mainstream media, many of whom leave for better paying PR jobs within the mining and petroleum sector. These issues have hampered journalists' daily requirements to meet newsroom deadlines and also raise questions regarding the quality of reporting.

From a development policy perspective, the initiative of the industry to provide on-the-job training for journalists in resource reporting is, as Imbun (2008) has noted, a case of companies providing social services where the government is unable or unwilling. It has been the norm in PNG that the government devolves its responsibility for the provi-

sion of social services to the mining and petroleum companies. Kepas Wali, a prominent PNG petroleum engineer who works as a corporate affairs manager for Harmony Gold in Morobe Province, based his workshop presentation on this particular problem. He highlighted the expectation among mining and petroleum companies that they will perform the government's role, particularly in rural areas.

In their presentations however, industry players did not identify potential contributions that mining and petroleum companies may play in supporting existing journalism training programs within PNG universities and how they might aid the work of the media in the future. The intentions of the industry may be in keeping with its well-documented CSR activities in PNG and providing services where the state cannot. However, its direct involvement in aspects of training of journalists may be viewed by some as undermining the independence of the media, raising issues of transparency and accountability.

In democratic societies such as PNG, the media is held in high esteem as the 'watchdog' or the 'fourth estate' of society. Its main objective is to provide an independent forum for open dialogue by all members of a society. However, when one particular member of a society — in this case, the mining and petroleum industry — assumes a dominant role in shaping media coverage of issues relating to it, then there may be negative or controversial effects, not least in relation to the impact of the industry on people and the environment.

Nonetheless, the Media Workshop initiative provided an opportunity for further policy discussion and research on what can be done to enhance the critical role of mass media in strengthening PNG society through 'public private partnership' (PPPTF 2009). This is something which the mining and petroleum industry has already done through niche programs in fields directly related to its operations, such as geology and earth sciences studies at a number of PNG universities.

Through the Media Workshop, the mining and petroleum industry have recognised that journalists in PNG need to develop their knowledge of highly technical, capital intensive and controversial sectors such as the extractive industry. Beyond the

economic contribution of the mining and petroleum sector to PNG, which is often heralded by government and the industry players, are the less known and varied issues impacting on the lives of ordinary Papua New Guineans. It is crucial that the media has the capacity to investigate and distil information from various stakeholders and to make sense of it for the average consumer of news. However, investigative capacity is not simply a technical matter that can be developed solely by industry-provided training. It is a fundamental element of the education of journalists in universities and in their professional development within media organisations. Appropriate skills training for journalists is something that the government, the universities and the media organisations have to collectively address given their 'watchdog' role in a changing PNG and not devolve it to an industry that has a vested interest.

Author Notes

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