

# National broadcasting commission of Papua New Guinea

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**National Broadcasting Commission Of Papua New Guinea**

**By**

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NATIONAL BROADCASTING COMMISSION  
OF  
PAPUA NEW GUINEA

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SUBJECT : AUDIENCE RESEARCH

INTRODUCTION

I wonder how many broadcasting organisation, especially in Third World Countries, had studied their audience first before getting down to the work of producing programmes and actually broadcasting these programmes ? On the other hand, how many broadcasting organisations had gone into producing programmes and broadcasting these on the assumption that the audience would like the programmes and that they would benefit from them?

Papua New Guinea is one country where broadcasting developed "upside down" or one can say, where the "cart" came before the horse".

Broadcasting in Papua New Guinea grew out of necessity, and has continued to develop without really seriously stopping to examine its audience to find out what programme they would like to listen to. The majority of programming and programme production has been based largely on certain assumptions and on some basic conclusions that have been reached over the years.

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### ASSUMPTIONS

The basic assumptions, as far as Papua New Guinea audience is concerned are these:

1. Most people are illiterate
2. Most people live in rural areas (villages)
3. During the day, most villagers are out in the bush, hunting, fishing, gardening etc.
4. Villagers are home in the early part of the morning, and from 4 to 5 o'clock in the afternoon
5. Most villages are asleep by 9 o'clock at night
6. The majority of people like listening to musical programmes
7. Because they are illiterate, the people need programmes to give them basic knowledge of how to improve their lives and so on.

Whether these assumptions and others not mentioned here are in fact true, is open to question until a thorough audience survey is carried out. Also at this point, no one can really say how many radio sets are there in the country and how many people really listen to each programme.

One might be prompted to ask the question, "If we know that audience research is important, why have we not gone into it?" I believe the answer is simple - no money and no trained staff to undertake extensive audience research.

These I believe are the basic reasons. Added to them, of course we have the nature of the country which makes it difficult to move from place to place and the actual difficulty of getting the required information from the people.

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#### GEOGRAPHY OF THE COUNTRY

Papua New Guinea is a mountainous country with very few roads. Because of the nature of the country, some areas have never been explored by an outside world. An notable example is a tribe who were discovered by a Government patrol in 1984, although Papua New Guinea has been in contact with western civilization since 1884. So you can see how rugged the country is by the example that I have mentioned.

To visit villages, one has to walk, and to transport equipment and supplies needed <sup>for</sup> surveys, human carriers are needed. In some areas, for example Western, Gulf and Sepik provinces, water transport is required - i.e. either canoe or outboard motor canoe.

#### PUBLIC RELATIONS

When a research gets to talking to the villager, it is very doubtful whether the villager will really know what the visitor is talking about. In many cases, the interviewee will give an answer just to avoid a lengthy conversation or give an answer that he believes will please the interviewer. To have a chance of getting a true picture therefore, one has to take the trouble of explaining first what he is doing and rather than go on the answers given, should really spend some time in the village observing the people. Then there is the language difficulty in which case one must either have an interpreter or be able to speak the language. For your information, Papua New Guinea, with a population of 3.5 million people, has well over 700 languages. The official languages are English, Pidgin and Motu.

#### AUDIENCE RESEARCH SURVEYS

Some attempts have been made at carrying out audience research surveys in Papua New Guinea, mostly through the help of the Media Department in Australia.

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In 1974, the then Acting Assistant Secretary of the Department, Mr R T Newell was sent to PNG where he carried a limited audience research on Buka Island in the North Solomons Province. The same officer was later seconded to the NBC as an audience research consultant during 1976-77.

During this secondment period, other limited surveys were carried out in the Central Province and in the Eastern and Western Highlands. The surveys in the Highlands were done mainly to determine the impact of Commercial Broadcasting in rural areas.

The plan was for the consultant to build up an audience research unit, but unfortunately this did not eventuate. One national officer was recruited to understudy Mr Newell but due to certain factors including the limited period of training, the officer was hardly in a position to take over by the time Mr Newell returned to Australia.

Despite of this shortfall in manpower expertise, the NBC has conducted a number of audience surveys with the help from the staff of the National Statistics Office in Port Moresby. Most of the surveys are baseline studies of the listening habits, radio ownership and so on.

Coupled with these approaches, the regular village recording patrols where personal contacts with listeners is still one of the most rewarding means of ascertaining listeners likes and dislikes of the programmes provided by the NBC both on the National and Provincial levels.

#### CONCLUSION

As I have indicated in the paper, Audience Research surveys are not conducted so often because of lack of trained manpower resources. The two that are currently in secretariat (Policy and Research Unit) concentrate or spend most of their times on the policy aspects of NBC.



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This does not mean to suggest the NBC management does not appreciate the role played by audience research. It is just that the existing circumstances such as manpower resources and finance makes it hard for the Commission to conduct surveys.