Promoting Science Awareness in the Pacific: Some challenges in the creation of the Pacific Science Communication Network

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Menu for Today

• Who was involved?
• What were (and are) the goals & project aims?
• 2 international meetings – an overview
• Common themes in the Pacific
• Challenges confronting a Pacific Science Communication Network
• What is the PSCN up to now?
• Summary and discussion
Participating Contributors

Major contributors

• United Nations Education, Science, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO)
• National Centre for the Public Awareness of Science (CPAS) – The Australian National University

Other

• The Committee on Science & Technology in Developing Countries (COSTED)
The aim of this project was, and continues to be:

• To promote science awareness in the Pacific,
• Build science communication skill sets,
• Encourage skills transfer and network building based on effective science communication with general audiences and,
• Ultimately, to assess needs and establish an appropriate Pacific Science Communication Network (PSCN)
Two Meetings

1. The Workshop
   – Training Workshop for Science Communication in Small States (February 2001)

2. The Forum
   – The Pacific Regional Science Communication Forum (August 2001)
Training Workshop for Science Communication in Small States

The Workshop

– Held in February 2001 at CPAS, Canberra
– Basic program outline
– Aim(s):
  • Enhance science reporting skills
  • Advise and model methods for mentoring junior colleagues
  • Network and share experiences with other Pacific media people
– Participant responses:
  • Gained a better understanding of Sci Comm issues
  • Increased confidence in Science reporting
  • Felt capable of making changes to their Sci Comm practice (including mentoring others)
Common themes within the Workshop

Common to many participants was

– Disparity in access to information and communication technologies
– Presence of some kind of censorship
– Accessibility - air time and page space is a major restriction to the presentation of relevant and clearly explained science in the popular media
– Low confidence in personal knowledge of science
The Pacific Regional Science Communication Forum

The Forum

• Held in February 2001 in Apia, Samoa
• Basic program outline
• Focus was on:
  – practical communication issues
  – networking
  – generic, shared science communication aspects of delegates’ specific sciences
• Provided a context in which delegates could begin to discuss the similarities of the overtly different region-specific issues.
Basic similarities regardless of background:

- Prevalence of multiple language groups
- Multiple power structures
- Geographic dispersion
- Differential access to mass communication
- Lack of suitable replacement of income based on poor environmental practices
- Lack of money
Challenges Confronting a formal PSCN

- **Funding** still the biggest single barrier
- A successful PSCN needs to be hosted and maintained by those whom it most directly concerns: the Pacific Island States
- Annual forums such as that held in Samoa in August 2001 are a good idea, however;
  - Expensive
  - Complex logistics of moving groups of people
  - Time availability
Challenges Confronting a formal PSCN – continued

- Apathy and/or an expectation that someone else will do it
- History of outside agencies always coming in to “help” Pacific Nations
- Perception of science communication initiatives and training as a “luxury”
The Pacific Science Communication Network Today

- On hold formally
- Still many unofficial/informal communications and activities
- E-board stalled
- Spin-offs
Summary and Discussion