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How journalism gave a voice to indigenous communities

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Ivo Burum brought us the story behind an inspirational citizen journalism project called NT Mojo - a media project created to give a voice to the indigenous people of Australia.

After 20 years working in TV, he wanted to teach people how to create their own content.

"About a year ago, when the Arab Spring was happening, we decided to start a workshop with indigenous folk in Australia," explained Burum, "to teach them how to tell their own stories. They have terrible wifi, but they have great 3G out there," he added, referring to the dusty outback of the Northern Territory, far from the bustling cities down under.

The aim of the project was to help indigenous communities to become less marginalised, by giving them cameras and training in how to use them to tell stories.

"You get a unique view from communities," said Burum. "We focus a lot on editorial, to focus on what you want to say. Some people have really quite hard stories, about petrol sniffing, but they've gone about [the journalism] in really interesting ways. One of the values of teaching storytelling is that you do teach editorial values."

Burum said that mainstream media has marginalised indigenous people by always looking for the headline.

One of the successes of the project has been the career path of those connected with the project. All nine who participated have since found work. Five of them are full-time journalists and the other four are journalists within their own community.

The wider benefit to the whole community is that they now have a voice and they use that voice, added Burum. "The community is becoming more vocal, more proactive - certainly where we've done the work. That's the ultimate goal."

The NT Mojo project bears the hallmarks of other similar set-ups around the world. The Map Kibera project in Kenya is one that springs to mind. This multimedia mapping project from Africa's second-largest slum with a population of nearly 200,000 allows the marginalised people who live there to have a voice.

Like the Kenyan project, the emphasis is on storytelling, not technology. A half-decent cameraphone is good enough to make a film, said Burum, adding that they have already run training sessions in Ningbo in China in an effort to spread the idea of the project.

Burum was speaking at the College of Journalism's Connecting Communities conference.

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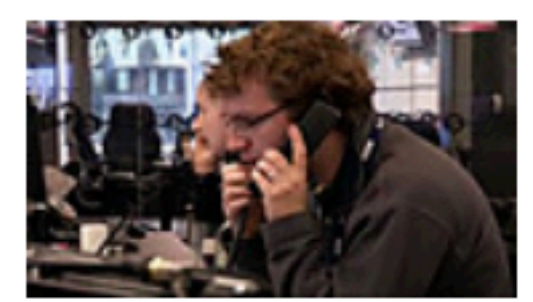
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