Having overseen the development (and a good deal of the implementation) of BRIDGE from its inception in 2000, it feels like the right time to write a profile of myself for the newsletter. BRIDGE has been such an important part of my life for the last 13 years that it is incredibly difficult for me to put in words what the program has meant to me. For those of you who know me, I am rarely without words, so here is my attempt at describing my journey with BRIDGE.

BRIDGE has allowed me the opportunity to be part of a team developing a curriculum and methodology that have been of enormous use to thousands of stakeholders in electoral processes around the globe. BRIDGE has enabled me to work with some of the most dedicated and inspiring people I have ever met and, as with all meaningful educational experiences, it has taught the teacher as much, if not more, than the students.

Some History

If people go to the BRIDGE facilitator database, they will see I am registered as an “Expert” facilitator, but if they look a little deeper, they will not see which TTF I attended or who accredited me. The reason for that is quite simply that at the time of the very first TTF, I was the lead facilitator running a program that had just been written by yours truly and my colleagues Gabriel Tuan and Jorge Guzman. And before that, I was conducting the first BRIDGE modules ever run for the staff of the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) in Timor-Leste with my friend and colleague, Paul Guerin. In short, there was no one to accredit me because Paul and I were it!

As with most great journeys, my work with BRIDGE came about because I found myself in the right place at the right time. I began my career as a sec-
ondary school teacher. In 1995, after 14 years in the classroom, I saw an advertisement for the manager at the Australian Electoral Commission’s (AEC) Electoral Education Centre (EEC) in Melbourne. The EEC was a wonderful experience for me. It allowed me to learn a great deal about elections both in Australia and elsewhere and to develop curriculum with an electoral focus. It also allowed me to be involved in the electoral education of about 150,000 Victorian school children. My five year secondment was just coming to an end when I was approached by Michael Maley (then Director of the AEC’s International Services Section) and asked if I might be interested in developing the framework for a course for electoral administrators in emerging and post conflict contexts. My life with BRIDGE had begun.

My colleague, Ben Murray, and I were given the lunchroom in the AEC’s Melbourne office as our workspace. This didn’t please those who had to find somewhere else to eat, but it gave us a base and work began in earnest. Soon after, BRIDGE (then called the Electoral Administrator’s Course) was rolled out in Timor-Leste, where it was an integral part of UNEAD’s capacity development strategy for the IEC. By the time of independence in 2002, Timor-Leste had allowed the testing of seven modules. From there, BRIDGE was conducted in Indonesia and Papua New Guinea and soon there were 10 modules. Demand for BRIDGE grew rapidly and soon we had a larger team and got to move out of the lunchroom. Since then BRIDGE has been run in more than 80 countries and has been translated into dozens of languages – something none of us would have believed possible in 2000.

**Highlights**

In 13 years, BRIDGE has taken me to about 40 countries and has introduced me to hundreds of people I now have the privilege to call friends. The highlights are too many to number, but here are just a few:

- On the night of the final graduation ceremony for Timorese BRIDGE participants in 2002 (an event which was made all the more special because the late Sergio Vieira de Mello presented the certificates), my colleague and friend, Paul Guerin and I were deeply touched, when – one by one – our Timorese colleagues came to us with their certificates, placed their hands on their hearts then onto ours. It
made us realise the importance of BRIDGE to them and how close we had all become.

- While conducting the debriefing session of a regional TTF in the Pacific, it came the turn of a participant from the Cook Islands to describe what the TTF had meant to her. With tears in her eyes she said, “BRIDGE makes me feel like I can achieve anything.” This is, for me, perhaps the greatest compliment paid to BRIDGE in my 13 years of involvement and is testament to the power of BRIDGE.

- When BRIDGE was first introduced to the South Caucasus region, a group of very young, very enthusiastic semi-accredited facilitators took it upon themselves to select and translate into Russian a large part of Version 1 of the BRIDGE curriculum. This they did in their own time and for no money. It was inspiring and it led to BRIDGE being used extensively in that region. It also led to many of this group becoming some of BRIDGE’s best facilitators who have been deployed all over the world. I am always humbled by the commitment of groups such as this. Without it, BRIDGE would never have had the broad impact it has achieved.

Concluding Thoughts

BRIDGE is based in the belief that the best educational outcomes are born in environments that are inclusive, that value the learner, which have as their primary focus meeting the needs of every participant and which acknowledge that everyone can know more than they already do. When utilised by creative and service-minded facilitators, BRIDGE can be a powerful tool for anybody working in Elections – from the newest to the most mature EMB. Indeed, one of the things I am very proud of is how BRIDGE has been embraced and utilised by my colleagues at the AEC.

To those few who may still doubt the educative and transformative power of BRIDGE, I would say come and spend a week in a BRIDGE module workshop, spend time perusing the more than 5000 pages of resource material.
sourced from the greatest minds in election theory and practice and from what are acknowledged as the premier sources of electoral knowledge globally – sources such as ACE and the IDEA Electoral Handbooks. Most importantly, speak to the now thousands of people who have participated in BRIDGE, to hear from them how it has affected them.

There are just too many people who have made powerful contributions to BRIDGE (and to my growth as a person) to mention them all, but there are some I must thank here.

- Michael Maley and Paul Dacey for trusting in an approach which was new to them both.
- Paul Guerin and Jacques Carrio, the first electoral experts to give BRIDGE the benefit of their experience and skill
- Ben Murray for being with me from the beginning and with whom I’ve never had a cross word.
- Yvonne Goudie for providing wise counsel and world class curriculum development for most of the first 10 years of BRIDGE.
- The BRIDGE partners for their support and advocacy of the program
- The BRIDGE Office team, in all its iterations, across thirteen years, for the wonderful support and advice they offer to our partners, our end users and to me.
- To the AEC’s International Services Section for accepting me into one of the world’s best EMB-based assistance providers
- And to all the facilitators, curriculum writers and BRIDGE participants around the world who have helped BRIDGE to become the world’s preeminent electoral curriculum. Thank you for your friendship and your hard work. Remember that by keeping an open and creative mind, we are capable of anything, for

“It is what we think we already know that often prevents us from learning”
(Claude Barnard)

Ross Attrill
May 2013
The New BRIDGE Website

Thanks to funding from UNDP we are pleased to announce that the BRIDGE website has recently undergone a refresh on the inside and out. We have redesigned the site and updated the Content Management System so that it uses to the most recent supported version.

This redesign aligns the site with other BRIDGE promotional materials. The news articles and events have been given more prominence, so please keep sending your website articles with some spectacular photos.

In this update we have also upgraded the Content Management System (CMS) that the site uses to ensure that the site continues to be secure. This upgrade also means that the site has a better search functionality, improved SEO and more languages are supported.

In the redesign we have tried to make facilitator functions easier to find. We have updated the calendar to make it easier for you to add events to the website. We have even loaded a new guide outlining the steps you need to go through to add an event to the calendar.

The Facilitator accreditation and workshop evaluation forms are also now easier to find under the facilitator menu and we have added longitudinal participant evaluation forms.

As the site is only newly launched, there may be some things that we have missed. Please feel free to contact us about anything about the site that you think could be changed. Thanks.

BRIDGE Office
The Facilitator Database

Access to the facilitator database is now open to all registered users of the website. This will allow BRIDGE implementers to easily confirm the accreditation status of potential facilitators and to identify BRIDGE facilitators in their region.

We have implemented this change due to the volume of requests we were receiving to either confirm accreditation status or identify local facilitators for workshops.

Facilitators should rest assured that contact details remain private, although you can send (and receive) messages through the website to another facilitator or registered user.

Users will be able to see a facilitator’s name, nationality & country of residence, position/organisation, gender and accreditation status. They will also be able to see any forum activity that the facilitator may have contributed.

Forums and Facebook

Access to the facilitator forum on the BRIDGE website has now changed!

Previously, only BRIDGE facilitators were able to access and post to the forums. Now the forums are publicly viewable (so you don’t need to be logged in to read them) and all registered users can post, including those who are not facilitators. You do need to be logged in to post and we encourage everyone to join in the discussion!

There are boards about upcoming events, regional activities, the BRIDGE curriculum, facilitation tips and BRIDGE in general. We also have a ‘suggestion box’ board for you to tell us how you think BRIDGE could be improved.

The BRIDGE Office moderates the forum and we will be making an effort to start some conversations. It’s also a great place to communicate with us as well as the wider BRIDGE community.

Of course the BRIDGE Office Facebook page is still active! We post up regular updates on accreditation, facilitation and job opportunities and other BRIDGE messages we want to share with everyone.

And you can still contact us via email at projectoffice@bridge-project.org—we’re always happy to hear from you.
Facilitator Progressions!

Congratulations to the following BRIDGE facilitators who have progressed in their accreditations in the past months.

We apologise to those who were missed in the last newsletter—you should find your name below!

Workshop

Aisha A. Orulebaja (Nigeria)
Musa Shalangwa (Nigeria)
Rabiu Sabo (Nigeria)
Amina Santuraki (Nigeria)
Dorathy Inyang (Nigeria)
Sunny Ezuma (Nigeria)
Lourdes Gonzalez (Mexico)
Ndye Marieme Ly Diagne (Senegal)
Chukwuemeka Ugboaja (Nigeria)
Patrick Ochana (Uganda)
Thandokuhle Mathenjwa (South Africa)
Ibrahim Kakembo (Uganda)
Hakeem Shittu (Nigeria)
Nasiru Umaru (Nigeria)
Mary Nkem (Nigeria)
Chuta Chijindu (Nigeria)
Margaret-Ejeh Ikwnuja (Nigeria)
Ifeanyichukwu Agoha (Nigeria)
Maryam M. Mandara (Nigeria)
Kelechi Maduneme (Nigeria)
Chika Osuji (Nigeria)
Oyetola Oyelami (Nigeria)
Dorothy Bello (Nigeria)
Anis Zahras (Tunisia)
Aloui Nejmeddine (Tunisia)
Maria Dulcelina Alves (Cape Verde)
Leonel Andrade Tavares (Cape Verde)
Justino Gomes Miranda (Cape Verde)
Agnelo Jose Ramos (Cape Verde)
Maria Margarete Tavares (Cape Verde)
Cleyton Soares (Cape Verde)
Zage Filipovski (Macedonia)
Dobre Jancev (Macedonia)
Mogamat Rafick Charles (South Africa)
Rinkie Magagula (South Africa)
Rose Ramorasui Masetlantse (South Africa)
Ayanda Elizabeth Mhlauli (South Africa)
Firas Sabri Kareem (Iraq)
Nidham Swadi (Iraq)
Sandrine Inakabondo (Burundi)
Tshering Peldon (Bhutan)
Ibrahim Abduljaar (Iraq)
Nibras Ahmed Ibrahim (Iraq)
Islam Demolli (Kosovo)
Visar Sutaj (Kosovo)
Shqipe Pantina (Kosovo)
Dardan Berisha (Kosovo)
Arbereshe Zogjani (Kosovo)
Bhakta Joshi (Nepal)

Accrediting

Eliane Torres (Portugal)
Doudou Dia (Senegal)
Harris Potani (Malawi)

Expert

Skye Christensen (USA)
The topic of discussion here is double headed; (1) the role of the media in elections and (2) regulating the media in an election. These are clearly two distinct issues. They are also very loaded topics. It can indeed be said that the two issues in focus are open ended. There is no definite borderline to them, as our discussion will soon show.

The basic functions of the media in the society as commonly accepted from the earlier works of communication scholars are; to inform, to educate and to entertain. Embedded in these primary responsibilities are series of allied functions and implied responsibilities that have continued to expand over time, more so with the expansion and sophistication of media forms.

The evolution of the modern state and the demands of representative democracy have brought the media to a more central role in the affairs of the society. Today, the media have become at once, the prime disseminator of information, an educator; the provider of entertainment in its various forms; a moulder of opinion; an alert agent; a squealer and in many instances even an enforcer of some sort.

It is a fact that the media have evolved over the years into a major player in the scheme of governance of the state and such crucial acts as the choice of those who govern. It is true also that elections are very crucial, indeed, central to the meaningful existence of government and representative democracy in the contemporary world. What is not clearly defined within anywhere is its actual role or for that matter the limits of its involvement in such critical matters as elections.

The question can actually be asked; where does the mandate of the media come from? The media, perhaps, more than any other group, have evolved to personify what the author Frank Vibert succinctly called ‘the rise of the unelected’.¹ It may be necessary to explain however, that the rise of the media as a key factor in the scheme of governance and the process of choosing leaders and policies in the modern state derived its greatest impetus from the lack of trust in government and the elected by the people. In its very wholesome face, the media represent a third force, a mechanism for ensuring order, fairness and accountability in the public domain. It is important that this background is presented so that the issue of what the role of the media is, and the difficulty attendant to establishing the border of its roles – assigned or assumed – can be understood.

At its 154th session in Paris in March 1994, the Inter-Parliamentary Council made a definite declaration thus;

“In any state the authority of the government can only derive from the will of the people as expressed in genuine, free and fair elections held at regular intervals on the basis of universal, equal and secret suffrage”.²

This declaration captured the primary place of elections in the establishment of legitimacy of a government, especially in a democratic setting. By the way, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (Council) is the international organization of parliaments Bearing in mind that election is key to establishing the legitimacy of a government, the reality that in the contestation for power by political parties and groups there is so much intensity of desire and little or no trust among the contenders, the place of the media in the scheme of things becomes clear. Indeed it is now very difficult to think of the existence of a free and fair election or indeed a modern democratic process without a viable media.

But first, let's look at the role assigned by law to the election management body, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). Part 1 of the Third Schedule of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (As Amended) duly provides the powers and functions of the Commission. These functions essentially entail responsibility for administering the electoral process in Nigeria.

The Electoral Act 2010 (as Amended) proceeded in its very first part to further provide that “In addition to the functions conferred on it by the Constitution, the Commission shall have powers to;

(a) conduct voter and civic education
(b) promote knowledge of sound democratic election processes
(c) conduct any referendum required to be conducted pursuant to the provision of the 1999 Constitution or any other law or Act of the National assembly”.³

In the broad range of its functions, the election management body obviously cannot but work with the media. Indeed, along the challenging path of its duties and responsibility in managing the electoral
process, INEC needs the cooperation of the media to succeed. It bears noting, really, that it is not just the EMB that needs the cooperation of the media to succeed. The entire foundation and structure of democracy needs the media to thrive. Scholars have pointed out therefore, that Media pluralism is critical to the survival and sustenance of democracy as a whole.

“Media pluralism refers to the free and unencumbered ownership, existence and functioning of mass media houses; unrestricted multiplicity of mass media organizations and the growth of mass communication agencies which represent diverse groups, interests and views in a political system”.

The role of the media in election is quite broad. It includes the provision of the vehicle necessary for the election management body and the political parties to undertake voter and civic education. The media also serve to facilitate the electorate having a fair and good knowledge of the candidates seeking for their votes. It also falls under the role of the media to bring to the public view and knowledge any such acts either of individuals, groups or institution as may be in breach of the laws and regulations guiding the electoral process.

In performing these functions, the media have the duty to ensure a level playing field for the contending candidates and political parties. Unlike in societies where government own preponderance of media organs, both broadcast and print organs, ownership of the media in Nigeria is overwhelmingly in the hands of private entrepreneurs. The issue of the party in government squeezing out opposition parties in the media space is therefore, not such a problem here. Even at that, the need for public media organs, especially the broadcast media, to accord fair representation and space to all political parties, remains an issue. For all this declared importance of the media in elections and in fostering and enhancing democracy generally, it is interesting that there is no definite role given by law to the media in elections, not in Nigeria. Neither the Constitution nor the Electoral Act provides a distinct role for the media in an election. So while the EMB has its functions and roles clearly defined, the media plays a key role and is expected to play role in elections, but it has no legally assigned role. Its roles and responsibilities have evolved over time and they are largely assumed. Here lies the source of difficulty in regulating the role of the media in elections.

The much that the Constitution provided for the media are contained in Chapter 2 section 22, where it is provided that;

“The press, radio, television and other agencies of the mass media shall at all times be free to uphold the fundamental objectives contained in this Chapter and uphold the responsibility and accountability of the Government to the people”.

The fundamental objectives in reference which the media is expected to be free to uphold are substantially those of good governance. Chapter Four Section 39, the Constitution provides as well that “Every person shall be entitled to freedom of expression, including freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart ideas and information without reference”.

As can be seen from the provisions of the law, therefore, the media is left on its own as it were, to play a crucial role in elections and in good governance, but without a defined, focused and limiting responsibility. This free agent role, which can be argued is good because it does not restrict the media, has its dangerous implications.

While media pluralism which thrives in Nigeria is seen as being crucial to the survival of democracy, the view is canvassed with no less vigour by some other scholars that media pluralism has its own threats to democracy. In the book, Social Meaning of News, J. Hubert Altschull contended that “The content of the news media inevitably reflects the interests of those who pay the bills”. He expatiated thus, “The paymasters or the group they represent will not allow their media to publish materials that frustrates their vital interests”.

This is a situation the Nigerian environment can easily identify with, especially during elections. The nagging question that arises from the contention that those who pay the media piper always insist on dictating the tune of media focus and thrust within the otherwise desirable setting of media pluralism is: What happens when and where the interest of the paymasters conflicts with the larger public interest? If in a conflict of interest such as is often the case in elections, the interest of the media owners are at variance with, or are not well served by the rules and regulations of the game, where will a media organ stand? Here lies the problem that the election management body contends with during elections?

It is necessary in many instances that the election management body regulate the media, at least to the best of its ability. The need for regulating the media can be informed by the necessity to; (1) ensure level playing field for all contending parties and candidates (2) protect the secrecy in balloting (3) maintain needed security, such as that of the ballot papers (4) ensure that only the official and authentic result of polls are released and announced.

¹ Vibert Frank (2007), The Rise of the Unelected. Cambridge University Press
² Goodwin-Gill Guy S, (2006), Free and Fair Elections Inter-Parliamentary Union, Geneva
³ Electoral Act 2010 (As Amended)
⁵ Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (As Amended)
To the best of its ability, the election management body also tries to ensure compliance by candidates and political parties to such critical regulations as campaign finance. It takes effective cooperation with the media, however, to successfully enforce compliance to such regulations as campaign finance ceiling. The Commission therefore always seeks the cooperation of such regulating agencies as the Nigerian Press Council and the Broadcasting Organization of Nigeria as well individual media organs in the effort to regulate necessary aspects of the media during elections. Indeed, the relationship between the EMB and the media in elections and through the electoral process is that of collaboration and cooperation, of partnership for the sustenance and propagation of the best practices in electoral democracy. It does not always work out well, but in various instances there are evidences of fruitful cooperation. The Commission agrees with the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) document “that no legal or administrative obstacle should stand in the way of unimpeded access to the media on a non-discriminatory basis for all political groupings and individuals wishing to participate in the electoral process”

What it asks for always is that the media should manifest utmost responsibility and sensitivity during elections in carrying out its varied roles in the scheme of democratic progress.

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**Welcome back Melanie**

We welcome Melanie back to the BRIDGE Office after a year away on parental leave. Little Annick is now one year old and thriving with big brother Luca.

**Farewell Ben P**

Sadly, Ben Patterson, who was replacing Melanie while she was on parental leave, will be leaving the BRIDGE Office to another position.

We’d like to thank Ben for his fantastic work. He has been a great addition to the office and we will all miss him very much.

**New statistics available!**


These give useful information about BRIDGE workshops, facilitators and modules up to April 2013.

**A reminder about email**

To make sure your emails come through to everyone in the office, please email projectoffice@bridge-project.org rather than individual staff.